

United Nations Democracy Fund

Project Proposal Guidelines **19th Round of Funding**

01 to 28 February 2025

Summary

The present guidelines describe the application procedure for the 19th Round of the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF) grants. Their purpose is to provide guidance to prospective applicants in the preparation of their project proposals and therefore help UNDEF select and support the best proposals in conformity with the guidance of its Advisory Board.

These Guidelines therefore establish:

- The procedure to submit a project proposal to UNDEF
- Awards-making process, including indicative schedule
- Eligibility criteria for beneficiaries
- Examples of UNDEF projects
- Assessment criteria
- Different types of geographical coverage [global, regional and local (country) projects)
- Project management arrangements
- Budgetary considerations
- Monitoring and evaluation requirements
- The commitment to assistance and transparency of the UNDEF Office Secretariat to applicants in this process
- An outline of the Online Application Portal

Applicants are also encouraged to review UNDEF feedback to applicants and UNDEF Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on the UNDEF website before submitting a project proposal: <http://www.un.org/democracyfund/>

1. Background of UNDEF

At the 2005 World Summit held at the United Nations in New York, Heads of State and Government reaffirmed their commitment to promote democracy and human rights, by welcoming the establishment of a Democracy Fund at the United Nations¹, herein referred to as UNDEF.

UNDEF is a Trust Fund established through voluntary contributions from Member States, under the authority of the Secretary-General. UNDEF is guided by its Advisory Board, which includes representatives of Member States, eminent academics and global civil society leaders. Thus, participation in the activities of UNDEF bestows prestige to all its stakeholders and signifies for its beneficiaries a high level of political commitment to democratic values.

2. Mandate of UNDEF

UNDEF supports projects that strengthen the voice of civil society, promote human rights, and encourage the participation of all groups in democratic processes. The large majority of UNDEF funds go to local civil society organizations – both in the transition and consolidation phases of democratization. In this way, UNDEF plays a novel and unique role in complementing the UN's other, more traditional work – the work with Governments – to strengthen democratic governance around the world.

UNDEF-funded projects will be implemented over a period of **two years**, principally at country level and in least developed, low- or middle-income countries. UNDEF also provides discrete funding to regional and global projects promoting democracy (see § 5.1). Eligibility criteria are elaborated further in Section 5.

3. Scope of the Guidelines

These guidelines describe the two-stage approach of the application procedure for UNDEF grants: (1) submission of a project proposal during the call for project proposals; and (2) development of a full project document. The basic principle behind this approach, and in particular of the first stage (call for project proposals), is to allow interested parties to have their projects short-listed by providing the basic information needed by UNDEF to reach a decision in principle. Only if a project proposal has been short-listed do applicants have to invest the time and resources to produce a full project document (the second stage).

The Project Proposal Guidelines may be revised in subsequent rounds of UNDEF funding cycles to take account of best practices and lessons learned. For further information, please visit the UNDEF website at <https://www.un.org/democracyfund/apply-for-funding>.

¹ Paragraph 135 and 136, [2005 World Summit Outcome](#), A/RES/60/1, 24 October 2005

4. Application Procedure

4.1 Schedule (indicative)

2025

01 February	Call for Proposals Online Project Proposal System opened
28 February	Deadline for Project proposals submission Online Project Proposal System closed
March	Proposals assessment
April	UNDEF Secretariat to compile long-list UNDEF Programme Consultative Group (PCG) ² & UN Resident Coordinators (RCs) to provide comments
May/ June	UNDEF's Advisory Board ³ to recommend short-list UNDEF informs Permanent Missions of projects on short-list UNDEF submits recommended short list to Secretary-General for approval
August	Request to short-listed applicants to draft detailed project documents with a one-month deadline
September onwards	Project document negotiations begin between applicants and UNDEF Secretariat First project documents finalized, first disbursements and projects start

4.2 Call for Project Proposals

The 19th Round of UNDEF Funding will begin when the call for project proposals is launched on **01st February 2025**. The deadline to submit project proposals will be **28th February 2025**. Organizations wishing to submit a project proposal to receive UNDEF funding should visit the UNDEF website where they will be prompted to complete an online application form. An outline of the requirements of the Online Application Portal is provided in Annex 1 to this document.

Project proposals will be accepted by the online Application Portal only during the call for project proposals. UNDEF will not accept proposals submitted via e-mail, regular post, facsimile, diplomatic or UN pouch, hand or courier delivery or any other channel. **Project proposals can be submitted only in English or French**, the two working languages of the United Nations. A confirmation email will be generated by the Portal. The UNDEF Secretariat will communicate directly with the applicant should additional information be required.

² <https://www.un.org/democracyfund/programme-consultative-group>

³ <https://www.un.org/democracyfund/advisory-board>

4.3 Award Decisions and “Approval in Principle”

Proposed projects will be assessed by the UNDEF Secretariat and its external consultants, in consultation with the Fund’s Programme Consultative Group (PCG) and the United Nations Resident Coordinator System, reviewed and short-listed by UNDEF’s Advisory Board.

The Advisory Board will submit a recommendation of awards to the Secretary-General, who holds the ultimate authority for the funding decision. Prior to the Secretary-General’s decision, Permanent Missions of countries where projects are planned will be advised of the recommendations of the Advisory Board.

In this round of funding, UNDEF envisages to shortlist some 40 proposals.

Decisions on the selection of new projects to be funded will be considered “approvals in principle”.

In July of this year, **all successful short-listed applicants will be notified at the electronic address indicated in their project proposal**, unless otherwise advised on the UNDEF website.

4.4 Successful Proposals and Detailed Project Documents

Short-listed applicants should submit a completed project document based on the original project proposal within four weeks of the notification of the “approval in principle”. Failure of the applicant to comply with this deadline may result in UNDEF not going ahead with the grant. Extended deadlines may be granted by UNDEF on an exceptional basis, to especially complex projects.

Project documents should be based in general on the original project proposals submitted and should follow the UNDEF format as explained in the 19th Round Project Document Guidelines which will be available on the UNDEF website prior to notification of short-listing.

Project documents will undergo a detailed review and if necessary, negotiations will take place to ensure compliance with UNDEF’s requirements. Final approval of the project prior to the first disbursement will only be granted after clearance of the full project document.

4.5 Declined Project Proposals

Organizations whose project proposals were not approved for funding will not be notified individually. Such organizations may wish to revisit the UNDEF website periodically to be aware of future calls for project proposals. Applicants who have not received a positive response by the end of July should consider this silence as decisive, unless otherwise advised on the UNDEF website.

Because of the large number of project proposals submitted, UNDEF does not have the resources to individually advise unsuccessful applicants of the outcome.

5. Eligibility Criteria

5.1 Local and Global/Regional Projects

UNDEF will invite proposals for projects that either take place in one country only (local) or occur in several specified states of a region or sub-region (regional) or intend to operate at the global level (global). UNDEF will reserve at least 80% of its programmable resources in each funding round for projects taking place in one country and will allocate no more than 20% to global/regional projects.

5.2 Duration of Projects and Amounts Awarded

In principle, UNDEF grants will be allocated for projects with default duration of **two years**. However, it is acceptable to UNDEF if a successful applicant completes a project in less than two years. Grants will not necessarily match the full amounts applied for. Applicants must request an amount within a range of **100,000 USD** and **200,000 USD** for any given proposal.

Once the implementation period has elapsed, beneficiaries will be required to return unspent funds to UNDEF.

5.3 Types of applicants

UNDEF funds projects implemented by non-UN organizations, not individuals, profit-making or government entities. Eligible applicants must be duly constituted nationally or internationally and have legal status.

At the project proposal stage, you will be required to indicate the type of organization applying for funding:

- (1) **Civil Society Organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations** engaged in promoting democracy⁴
- (2) **Independent and Constitutional Bodies,**
- (3) **Global and Regional inter-government bodies, organizations and associations** other than the United Nations

UNDEF prioritizes Civil Society Organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations (see section 2 and item (1) above). The organization must be legally constituted. UN accreditation is not a prerequisite to apply for UNDEF funding.

⁴ UNDEF will not consider project proposals that reflect any type of support for any member, affiliate or representative of an organization that recommends or is apologetic of the use of violent means in political action in general and of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations in particular, as stated in the 2005 World Summit Outcome document (§81). Based on ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council) resolution 1996/31 on consultative relationship, as well as the UN Department for Public Information (DPI) criteria for associated NGOs, UNDEF will require that the aims and purposes of the applying CSO be in conformity with the spirit, purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations; the CSO must be duly constituted nationally or internationally; the CSO shall ideally have a satisfactory record of collaboration with UN field offices, UNDP, a United Nations Information Centre (UNIC) or other parts of the UN system or similar institutions; the CSO shall have statutes/by-laws providing for a transparent process of making decisions, elections of officers and members of the Board; it shall have an established headquarters, with an executive officer; the CSO shall finally have authority to speak for its members through its authorized representatives; evidence of meeting these requirements shall be the onus of the applying CSO.

5.4 Priority Countries and Regional Balance

Strong preference will be given to applicants from countries and regions where the challenges of democracy are more critical, such as countries emerging from conflict, new and restored democracies, the [Least Developed Countries](#) (as per the official classification of the UN-OHRLS), [Low Income Countries](#) ("Low Income Economies" as per the World Bank's official classification based on Gross National Income per capita) and [Middle Income Countries](#) ("Lower and Upper Middle-income Economies", idem).

UNDEF aspires to a satisfactory regional balance in the awarding of grants and will consider each individual proposal on its own merits.

5.5 UNDEF projects and priority areas

Remember that UNDEF funds projects, not organizations. Your project proposal should be reasonably innovative and distinct from the activity you already conduct.

We encourage proposals to foresee innovative methods, practical tools, and creative approaches rather than traditional capacity building measures.

Proposals are subject to a highly rigorous and competitive selection process, with fewer than two per cent chosen for funding.

To view summaries of existing UNDEF projects, go to:
<http://www.un.org/democracyfund/projects>

5.6 Themes and Constituencies

Projects fall under one or more of seven main themes:

- Civic engagement for climate action
- Rule of law and human rights
- Media and freedom of information
- Women Leadership
- Youth engagement
- Strengthening civil society interaction with Government
- Electoral processes (elections scheduled mid -2026 at the earliest)

And in one or more of the following constituencies at risk of being left behind:

- Women
- Youth
- Journalists and Media organizations
- Minorities: ethnic, religious and other groups at risk of being left behind
- People with disabilities
- Civil society actors & Community of practice

5.7 Assessment Criteria

During the assessment process, project proposals will be assessed based on the following ten assessment criteria:

1. The project promotes the objectives of UNDEF
2. The project draws on the United Nations' comparative advantage
3. The project will have a significant impact
4. The project will encourage inclusion of marginalized and vulnerable groups
5. The project will enhance gender equality
6. The project has strong prospects for successful implementation
7. The applicant organization has a strong track record
8. The project is technically sound in conception and presentation
9. The project represents good value for money
10. The project has strong prospects of sustainability beyond the project duration.

UNDEF **will not** prioritize project proposals that focus on the following activities:

- Projects that do not promote democracy
- Projects filling a funding gap in existing activities or programmes
- Projects focused primarily on research
- Projects co-financed with other donors

5.8 Project Management Arrangements

The vast majority of UNDEF projects are delivered directly by civil society organizations (CSO). In this type of project, the CSO is responsible for the overall management of the project and bears all substantive, financial, monitoring, and reporting and evaluation responsibilities.

In exceptional circumstances and where there is clear value added, the applicant might feel the need to partner with a United Nations Executing Agency. In this case, the UN agency will oversee and monitor the project and act as UNDEF's agent for project oversight.

Should an applicant decide to work with a UN Agency, the applicant **must seek the Agency's** prior consent before submitting their project proposal. The CSO must indicate in the project proposal the contact details of the person who has given this consent.

5.9 Budgetary considerations

UNDEF funds projects, not project implementers. **Please note therefore that salary, contractual services and miscellaneous costs should be modest.**

UNDEF will not give priority to project proposals in which:

- A substantial part (more than **20%**) of the budget relates to institutional recurrent costs (e.g. rent, utilities) and/or personnel costs. Salaries: **maximum 15%** of total project costs.
- Equipment and hardware purchases are too high in the context of total project costs (e.g. the purchase of vehicles)
- Audit and certification costs make **more than 3% of** the total project cost.

These costs will impact on the assessment of the project proposal under the “Value for Money” assessment criterion (see § 5.6). All such costs must be itemized clearly and included under each budget category (e.g. salaries, equipment/hardware, miscellaneous).

Please note that UNDEF will add 10% to any grant to cover its monitoring and evaluation costs. This added amount will not be disbursed to the grantee but retained by UNDEF from the outset. In cases where UNDEF would approve a grant higher than 200,000 USD, this amount will be capped at 25,000 USD.

5.10 Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

All project applicants must monitor their own activities. Proposals need to describe how project results/outcomes will be measured, what measurements will be used (outcome indicators, baseline, targets and monitoring tools) and who will be responsible for measuring them. All project proposals must allow for a rigorous monitoring and evaluation strategy that will be further detailed in the project document. Further monitoring and reporting details will be provided to successful applicants through the Project Document Guidelines.

6. Assistance to Applicants and Transparency

UNDEF cannot provide direct support in the preparation of project proposals. In the case of technology-related difficulties with the Online Application Portal please contact: undefproposal@un.org

UNDEF will also apply a policy of transparency regarding the approved projects. During the assessment process, project proposal information will be shared with the UNDEF Secretariat, the UN Programme Consultative Group (PCG), the UN Resident Coordinators and the UNDEF Advisory Board.

Once short-listed by the Advisory Board, basic information about the proposal will be provided, as a matter of courtesy, to the Permanent Missions to the UN of the country in which the project is to take place. Once project documents have been approved, information on projects receiving UNDEF grants will be posted on the UNDEF web site.

Annex I - Outline of the Application Portal

The online Application Portal allows prospective grantees to submit their project proposals to UNDEF electronically. The Application Portal can be accessed at the UNDEF website at www.un.org/democracyfund.

The present outline describes the application procedure that any applicant needs to follow to submit a project proposal. All project proposals must be completed **online** in **English or French**.

Project proposals can be **submitted only through our online Portal**. Project proposals submitted by e-mail, regular post, facsimile, diplomatic or UN pouch, hand or courier delivery or any other channel will NOT be considered.

Please note:

- **Single-form**: Prospective applicants work on the online form to apply. The form can be saved and accessed at a later stage until the application is submitted.
- **Length**: The fields can accommodate only a **limited number of characters**. Therefore, please present your project information in a concise and clear manner and ensure that you do not go over the limit.
- All the fields with red asterisk are compulsory.
- **Budget**:
 - Please ensure that programme support costs (salary, rent, utilities, equipment etc.) are modest (see section 5.8 above for further details).
 - Please ensure the total requested in the budget by Output and the budget by Input match, and they correspond to the total requested grant amount on Page 8 of the form.
- **Timeline**: Please note that, if approved, your project will not commence until **October 2025** at the earliest. Therefore, projects with activities that need to commence earlier than this will not be considered.
- **Geographic scope**: Please be as specific as possible on the geographic location(s) of the project to give a clear idea of the project scale.
- The Portal has a **saving function** which allows drafting of a proposal to begin and the ability to save a project proposal to continue at a later point. When a project proposal is saved for the first time, an email will be sent to inform the applicant that the project proposal has yet to be submitted and will include instructions on how to log into the system to continue working on a project proposal prior to submission. **If log in credentials are lost, UNDEF is unable to retrieve this information.**

Be careful!

Saving your project proposal does not mean it has been submitted to UNDEF.

A project proposal is submitted to UNDEF once the applicant clicks the “Submit” button at the bottom of the form. A confirmation email will be sent by the system soon after submission of a project proposal with a link to download a PDF copy of the proposal. This email will contain the receipt number of the project proposal. Should this email not be received within 24 hours of submission, contact UNDEF at undefproposal@un.org.

Applicants will not be able to view a project proposal once it has been submitted.

UNDEF will not send copies of submitted project proposals to applicants.

Annex II - Commitments

All applicants will be requested to tick five boxes committing:

- ✓ If shortlisted, to develop a project by the established deadline following the “UNDEF Project Document Guidelines”.
- ✓ If short-listed, to create a complete profile in line with United Nations Partnerships Portal (UNPP) requirements; (<https://www.unpartnerportal.org>).
- ✓ Not to provide any type of support for any member, affiliate or representative of an organization that recommends or is apologetic of the use of violent means in political action in general and of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations in particular, as stated in the 2005 World Summit Outcome document (§81).
- ✓ To have statutes/by-laws providing for a transparent process of decision making, elections of officers and members of the Board; the Applicant Organisation has authority to speak for its members through its authorized representatives identified above.
- ✓ As per ECOSOC Resolution 1996/31 on consultative relationship, as well as the UNDPPI criteria for associated NGOs, the Applicant CSO/NGO’s aims, and purposes are in conformity with the spirit, purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.