

UNDEF's new proposal window opens 15 December



UNDEF's annual call for project proposals is open from 15 December 2018 to 18 January 2019, after receiving the green light from the UNDEF Advisory Board on 13 November 2018. Project proposals may be submitted on-line only in English or French, the two working languages of the UN, at www.un.org/democracyfund. Applicants can find guidelines, a sample form and lessons learned [here](#).

This is the Thirteenth Round to be launched by UNDEF, which provides grants of up to US\$300,000 per project. In the past 12 years, UNDEF has supported over 780 projects in over 120 countries at a total amount of almost US\$190 million. All projects are two years long. UNDEF invites project proposals covering one or more of eight main areas:

- Gender equality
- Community activism
- Rule of law and human rights
- Youth engagement
- Strengthening civil society interaction with Government
- Media and freedom of information
- Tools for knowledge
- Electoral processes

In 2017, UNDEF received over 2400 project proposals. Project proposals are subject to a highly rigorous and competitive selection process, quality vetting, due diligence and lessons learned from previous rounds, with fewer than two per cent of proposals chosen for funding. A team of international assessors score each proposal against 10 set criteria and produce a long list. To narrow down the list further, UN Resident Coordinators and Country Teams are invited to provide comments, quality vetting, and views on how proposed activities would fit in the overall context of existing UN work in the countries and fields proposed. The same comments are invited from the UNDEF Programme Consultative Group, making use of the specific expertise of each of its entities: the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Peacebuilding Support Office, the UN Development Programme, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and UN Women.

Based on this collective input, the UNDEF Secretariat produces a first short-list, expected to be confirmed mid-2019, after which the process moves into the next stage. Each short-listed applicant will be contacted with a request for a draft project document, which is in effect the contract between UNDEF and the grantee. The project document negotiation requires the applicant to provide a more elaborated project design, and involves detailed input from both UNDEF and the applicant, as well as scrutiny and due diligence enquiries by UNDEF. Only upon successful conclusion of the project document negotiation will the project proposal formally be approved for funds disbursement – usually after September every year.





Calling all future applicants: Useful tips

The following advice to applicants for UNDEF grants is based on the selection of proposals in previous UNDEF Rounds. It provides useful pointers for you to bear in mind as you prepare your proposal.

Presentation

The higher the quality of the presentation, the higher your application will score. You can get an idea of what is required by viewing [project proposal guidelines](#). Complete all relevant information, but do not exceed the character limits in the proposal form. Ensure that the information is accurate. Write in plain English or French, avoiding jargon where possible. Use correct acronyms and website addresses. Write succinct sentences and avoid repetition.

Clarity

Clarity is the key to a successful proposal. You should have a clear idea about what you want to achieve and a clear strategy for how to achieve it. You need to spell out the link between your overall objective and your expected outcomes -- how these will translate your vision into reality. Lack of clarity cannot be disguised by the use of “buzz” words or other formulaic constructions; a successful design requires a logic that can be followed step by step. Brainstorm the ideas thoroughly before writing them down, but equally, agree on what specific steps are needed to make them happen, and in what sequence. Play the “devil’s advocate” and criticise the initial ideas until you have achieved a logical design.

Scoring and criteria

In UNDEF’s initial assessment of proposals, each project proposal is scored against 10 criteria. Since an average two per cent of proposals make it to the short-list, you need to score well on all the criteria to advance to the next stage. Make sure you demonstrate that your proposal satisfies each one:

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 inclusiveness
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.

Innovation

How can your proposal stand out from the others? The answer is innovation. That means a new idea, a new method or an original proposal. If the outputs of the project are simply more workshops to raise awareness, then your proposal is unlikely to distinguish itself. When you think of innovative approaches, ensure that the proposal is action-oriented, with concrete outputs listed in the proposal.

Democratic processes

UNDEF was established not simply to fund good causes or good people. Arguing that your cause is just and your people are worthy is not sufficient. UNDEF focuses on supporting the voice of civil society to engage with government and policy makers and to make change, so the proposal must show how civil society actors will be strengthened, and how that, in turn, will strengthen democratic processes. The more direct the link, the stronger the proposal.

Budget

Give considerable thought to the budget. Make sure the budget relates to the outputs listed in the narrative part of the proposal. We understand that the budget is an estimate, so use rounded figures (in the thousands or hundreds is sufficient). Do not ask for a high amount of salary in the budget, as UNDEF looks for an element of volunteering in proposals. Do not ask for a high amount in other items as a back door method to obtain more salary. Also be aware that UNDEF rarely funds the purchase of vehicles.

Value for money

Many proposals have scored badly on the criterion “value for money” by asking for far too much in their budget. The maximum grant UNDEF can make is \$300,000. The average grant is around \$220,000. A proposal requesting \$300,000, but delivering the same outputs as a similar proposal asking for \$200,000, will score low on value for money. That will probably be enough to knock that proposal out of the running. The more realistic the budget request, the better the score will be under the value for money criterion.

Timing

Please do not leave submission until the last few days. Given that the proposal window is open for four weeks, a well prepared applicant will submit well ahead of the deadline to ensure there is time left if something goes wrong. The later in the proposal process, the greater the risk that something may go wrong that cannot be remedied. And once the online proposal system is closed for the year, we cannot assist you. We have received dozens of “hard luck” stories about bad internet connections or electricity blackouts to explain why a proposal was late. The answer is to start in time.

NEWS FROM THE FIELD

Reintegrating young offenders in Kazakhstan; Gender justice through community media in

A new UNDEF project in Kazakhstan works to rehabilitate young ex-offenders through training, skills development and psychological support. The project directs them towards community volunteerism so as to become active citizens and leaders, and in turn advocate for social inclusion for other young offenders and make recommendations to the authorities for the development of an effective rehabilitation system in Kazakhstan. This project is implemented by Social and Sustainable Youth Development Public Fund.



In Kyrgyzstan, a new UNDEF initiative aims to strengthen the transformative role of community media to reduce gender-based violence and to promote positive role models for women in their respective communities. The project will work through community radio and community multimedia centres in all regions of Kyrgyzstan, engaging journalists, women activists, rural women and local government officials through capacity building, public awareness raising, and support for dialogue. This project is implemented by [Community Mass Media Association](#).

UNDEF Senior Programme Officer, Mikiko Sawanishi visited both projects in November 2018.

Working for a more accountable and transparent defence sector in Mali

An UNDEF-supported project in Mali works to fight corruption in the defence sector by building civil society's ability to advocate for accountability and transparency. A first milestone was held in October 2018 when a national dialogue fostered an exchange between civil society organizations, traditional authorities and high-level representatives from the security establishment. This unique initiative promoted consensus in Bamako around governance-related issues and produced recommendations for the defence sector. The project's next steps involve enhancing the capacities of Malian civil society to ensure that reforms in the security sector are responsive to civil society's priorities. The project is implemented by [Transparency International](#) and Cercle de Réflexion et d'Information pour la Consolidation de la Démocratie au Mali.



NEWS FROM THE FIELD

New beginnings in Honduras



The UNDEF-supported project Young People for Dialogue and Democracy in Honduras works to strengthen rights and participation of Honduran youth by strengthening legislative leadership skills of young parliamentarians. Against a background of endemic violence, poverty and exclusion at the economic, social and political levels, the project has developed capacity-building programmes that have had significant impact in shaping public policy.



As a key milestone of the project, a forum was held in July 2018 to ratify a Youth Legislative Agenda -- a key policy proposal developed through consultations with youth across Honduras, capturing diverse realities. It suggests measures for the National Congress to put in place in order to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of the Honduran youth.

Implemented by [Centro de Investigación y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos](#), the project was covered by Honduran media.



Youth to Youth: Building Peace and Democracy in Colombia

An UNDEF project in Colombia works to empower and engage young people in the peace and reconciliation process. It strengthens and encourages youth advocacy, reinforcing the role of young Colombians in the implementation of the peace agreement so that their voice reaches policymakers.

The project held a National Youth Summit in August 2018, bringing

together immersive online and offline spaces to train young people and connect them to broader Colombian peace-building civil society networks with thousands of members. The project has yielded concrete collective strategies and actions, 14 of which have been implemented at local or national levels. They have been covered in a range of media outlets, reaching wide audiences across Colombia. The project is implemented by [Fundación Mi Sangre](#).

