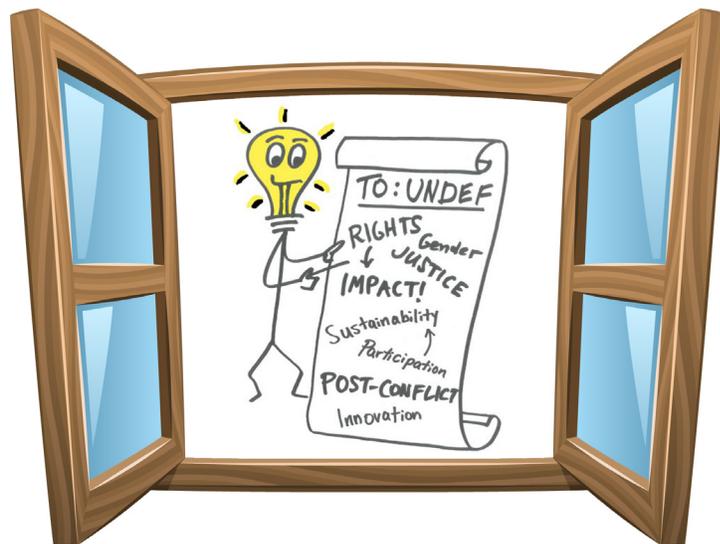


UNDEF's new proposal window opens 1 November

UNDEF's annual call for project proposals is open from 1 November 2020 to 1 December 2020 after receiving the green light from the UNDEF Advisory Board. 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, FAQs and lessons learned for applicants [here](#).

This is the Fifteenth Round to be launched by UNDEF, which provides grants of up to USD\$300,000 per project. Since 2006, UNDEF has supported more than 800 projects in over 100 countries at a total amount of almost US\$200 million. The vast majority of projects are two years long. UNDEF invites project proposals covering one or more of eight thematic 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 this Round, UNDEF particularly welcomes projects that address challenges to civic space and democracy as a result of the Covid-19 crisis.

In 2019, UNDEF received over 2,500 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 into the 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 and Peacebuilding Affairs, The Department of Peace Operations, The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 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-2021, 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 forms the foundations for a contract between UNDEF and the grantee. The project document negotiation requires the applicant to provide a more elaborate project structure and involves detailed input from both UNDEF and the applicant. Only upon successful conclusion of the project document negotiation will the project proposal formally be approved for funds disbursement – usually after September every year.



COVID-19
RESPONSE





Useful tips for future applicants

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.

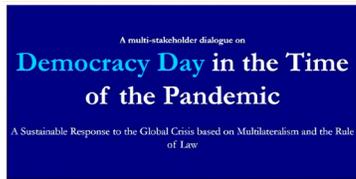
Value for money

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.

International Day of Democracy: Fighting back despite underlying conditions



pandemic as a pretext. UNDEF had worked closely with its hundreds of civil society partners in more than 120 countries to pivot in response to the crisis: providing services for communities and constituencies that are helping to fill in gaps left by Governments in developing media literacy and digital safety, more critical than ever as activism is forced online; training journalists remotely to report on the impact of the pandemic with in-depth, fact-checked coverage, while staying safe on the front line; empowering women against gender-based violence, which has surged amid COVID-19 lockdowns, quarantines, and social and economic pressures; helping to highlight the challenges of inequality and weak service delivery made worse by the crisis.



Also participating was Beirut-based UNDEF project implementer Diam Abou Diab of the [Arab NGO Network for Development](#). She spoke of the resilience of civil society in Beirut in carrying out their mission, despite multiple crises.

The Day was strongly celebrated in West Africa, a region of acute challenges to democracy, including by four UNDEF projects pictured here. In Cameroon, a high-profile editorial observation

was held by Un Monde Avenir, which is implementing an UNDEF project strengthening online and physical security for both professional and citizen journalists. The project works for legal reform to protect the right to information and freedom of speech, of high relevance in the Covid-19 world where the fight against disinformation and for online safety is crucial.

In the Central African Republic, the day was marked by Alliance pour la Renaissance Centrafricaine, leaders of an UNDEF project mobilizing youth ahead of elections scheduled for 2021. In Mali, observances were held by two UNDEF projects: Association Radiodiffuseurs de Kayes pour le Développement Rurale, which is carrying out an UNDEF project for participatory radio programmes engaging rural populations in civic debate around democracy and development, women, migrants and returnees; and by Journalists for Human Rights, implementing an UNDEF project to support media in reporting good governance and human rights issues, break financial dependency on political sponsorship through training on business skills and greater sector accountability, and help journalists and civil society actors to work together on data projects.

The International Day of Democracy, always an opportunity to focus and provoke, was a particularly relevant occasion this year. UNDEF took part in a virtual event *Democracy Day in the Time of the Pandemic: A Sustainable Response to the Global Crisis based on Multilateralism and the Rule of Law*, organized by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance and the International Development Law Organization. The event addressed ways to turn COVID-19 challenges into opportunities and address the systemic vulnerabilities that COVID-19 has exposed.

UNDEF Executive Head Annika Savill described how, since the start of the pandemic, a range of countries had used the crisis to restrict democratic processes and civic space. This was happening at a time democracy is already fragile, as it was weakened by underlying conditions: for the past decade or more, democracy already had to defend itself against increasing attacks and suppression. So it was already in defensive mode. Now, Covid-19 has opened up a toolbox for governments inclined to constrain democracy with the

