

Guideline for Application Civic Emergency Fund

Table of Contents

1. About the fund	2
2. What the fund offers	3
3. Scope and eligibility	3
4. Application procedure	6
5. How applications are reviewed	7
6. Annex I – Core Values.....	9
7. Annex II - Declaration on politically exposed persons.....	11

1. ABOUT THE FUND

The Civic Emergency Fund is a regional rapid-response mechanism created to support civic actors who face sudden or escalating pressure that threatens their safety, their work, or their ability to act in public interest. It is an emergency and protection-oriented grant mechanism, designed to respond to immediate risks rather than to support long-term programmatic activities.

Across Albania, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, civil society organizations, informal initiatives, independent non-profit media, and individual activists are increasingly exposed to legal harassment, intimidation, digital attacks, smear campaigns, and other forms of pressure aimed at silencing critical voices. These situations often unfold quickly, leaving little time to rely on standard funding procedures or institutional support. When a threat emerges, the ability to respond immediately can be decisive.

The Civic Emergency Fund exists to respond precisely these moments. It provides fast, flexible, and proportionate support to mitigate urgent risks, stabilize situations of acute pressure, and protect the ability of civic actors to continue their work safely and responsibly. Support may combine small, targeted financial assistance with expert support such as legal aid, digital or physical security measures, temporary relocation, or psychosocial care, depending on the nature and urgency of the situation.

The Fund is not intended to replace long-term funding or address structural sustainability challenges. Instead, it is designed to fill the critical gap between the moment a threat arises and the point at which longer-term support becomes available.

The Civic Emergency Fund is jointly implemented by Trag Foundation and the Kosovar Civil Society Foundation (KCSF) and is supported through a pooled funding mechanism by philanthropic foundations committed to protecting civic space in the region.

Each partner leads specific countries to ensure contextual accuracy and fast response:

Lead Organization	Countries Covered
Trag Foundation	Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia
KCSF	Kosovo, Albania, North Macedonia

2. WHAT THE FUND OFFERS

- a. Fast decisions and disbursement: within 72 hours to 7 days
- b. Flexible support: no fixed ceiling or duration

- c. Combined assistance: small emergency grants plus expert accompaniment (legal, digital security, relocation, psychosocial support)

3. SCOPE & ELIGIBILITY

3.1 Definition of an Emergency

The Fund defines an emergency as an urgent situation that creates an immediate or cumulative risk to the safety, security or functioning of a civil society actors in Albania, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. Cumulative risk refers to situations where pressure is rapidly escalating and may lead to acute harm if not addressed promptly.

This may include:

- a. Targeted threats and harassment
- b. Legal or administrative attacks (e.g., SLAPPs, punitive audits)
- c. Sudden investigations or regulatory pressure
- d. Digital or physical security threats
- e. Raids, arrests, detention
- f. Seizure of equipment
- g. Smear campaigns, disinformation attacks
- h. Restrictions on association, assembly, or expression

Circumstances such as the gradual reduction or withdrawal of donor funding, routine operational or financial difficulties, long-term sustainability challenges, staff turnover, strategic planning needs, or delays in project approval **are not treated as emergencies**. Likewise, internal organizational disputes, governance issues, planned relocations, or expected regulatory requirements that do not involve acute risk fall outside the Fund's scope.

3.2 WHO CAN APPLY?

The Fund is open to a range of civic actors operating within the countries covered by the program. Eligibility is structured into three categories:

A. Registered Civil Society Organizations

Civil society organizations legally registered in any of the eligible countries may apply for support.

This includes, but is not limited to:

- a. Watchdog and accountability organizations
- b. Human rights, feminist, minority-led, environmental, and other marginalized-group initiatives
- c. Independent, nonprofit media

B. Informal Groups and Movements

Informal, unregistered groups or movements active within the Fund's geographic scope are eligible for support. The Fund recognizes that many civic initiatives and forms of activism operate informally, particularly in contexts of heightened pressure or risk.

As a general and preferred approach, support to informal groups is provided through a fiscal sponsorship arrangement with a registered civil society organization. In such cases, the Fiscal Sponsor acts as the formal applicant and grant holder, administering the funds in line with the Fund's financial and legal standards, while the informal group implements the approved activities. Fiscal sponsorship is encouraged as it often allows for faster implementation, clearer accountability, and stronger organizational support for the group during and beyond the emergency.

Applicants are encouraged, where possible, to identify a suitable fiscal sponsor themselves, such as a trusted civil society organization with which they already collaborate or feel comfortable working. However, having a fiscal sponsor is not a condition for applying. Informal groups that do not yet have a fiscal sponsor are still encouraged to submit an application. Where an application is assessed as relevant and urgent, the Fund may support applicants in identifying an appropriate fiscal sponsor or exploring other suitable arrangements. In exceptional cases, where fiscal sponsorship cannot be arranged in a timely, safe, or appropriate manner due to the nature or urgency of the emergency, the Fund may provide support through direct payments to approved vendors or service providers, coordinated by the Fund, in order to ensure that urgent risks are addressed without delay. Where fiscal sponsorship is used, a Fiscal Sponsorship Agreement is concluded between the informal group and the Fiscal Sponsor, setting out roles, responsibilities, and accountability. A template Fiscal Sponsorship Agreement is made available by the Fund to support applicants and sponsors in setting up this arrangement quickly and consistently.

C. Individuals/Activists

Individuals and activists operating within the Fund's geographic scope are eligible for support. As a general approach, support to individuals and activists is provided through direct payments to approved vendors or service providers; no cash payments or direct transfers to individual applicants/grantees are permitted. This may include, for example, payments for legal assistance, digital or physical security support, temporary relocation, or psychosocial care. This approach allows the Fund to respond quickly while minimizing administrative and safety risks for individuals.

Individuals and activists do not need to have any service providers or arrangements in place at the time of applying. Where an application is assessed as relevant and urgent, the Fund may support applicants in identifying appropriate service providers and coordinating the necessary assistance.

In some cases, where appropriate, safe, and relevant to the nature of the support requested, support to individuals or activists may be administered through a fiscal sponsorship arrangement with a registered civil society organization acting as the formal grant holder. Fiscal sponsorship is not a requirement for applying and is considered on a case-by-case basis, depending on the context, risks, and type of intervention.

Where fiscal sponsorship is used, a Fiscal Sponsorship Agreement is concluded between the individual or activist and the Fiscal Sponsor, setting out roles, responsibilities, and accountability. A template Fiscal Sponsorship Agreement is made available by the Fund to support timely and consistent arrangements.

3.3 TYPES OF SUPPORT

There is no fixed **grant size or duration**. The Evaluation Committee will evaluate if the grant size and duration proposed in the applications is proportional to the situation and urgency in place. The size and duration of each intervention will be determined based on the urgency, risks and context described in the application, ensuring that support remains targeted, proportionate and strictly linked to the emergency.

Applicants are encouraged, where possible, to identify a suitable fiscal sponsor themselves, such as a trusted civil society organization with which they already collaborate or feel comfortable working. However, having a fiscal sponsor is not a condition for applying. Informal groups that do not yet have a fiscal sponsor are still encouraged to submit an application. Applicants may propose allocating up to 10% of the total grant budget for administrative costs payable to a fiscal sponsor responsible for administering the funds on their behalf. Where an application is assessed as relevant and urgent, the Fund may support applicants in identifying an appropriate fiscal sponsor or exploring other suitable arrangements. In exceptional cases, where fiscal sponsorship cannot be arranged in a timely, safe, or appropriate manner due to the nature or urgency of the emergency, the Fund may provide support through direct payments to approved vendors or service providers, coordinated by the Fund, in order to ensure that urgent risks are addressed without delay. Where fiscal sponsorship is used, a Fiscal Sponsorship Agreement is concluded between the informal group and the Fiscal Sponsor, setting out roles, responsibilities, and accountability. A template Fiscal Sponsorship Agreement is made available by the Fund to support applicants and sponsors in setting up this arrangement quickly and consistently.

3.4 ELIGIBILITY OF OPERATIONS AND COSTS

Any urgent, necessary, and proportionate costs that directly mitigate risk or ensure continuity, including:

- a. Legal services
- b. Security measures
- c. Psychological support
- d. Travel/relocation
- e. Temporary operational costs
- f. Communication safety measures
- g. Emergency digital protections
- h. Direct payments to service providers

INELIGIBLE COSTS

- a. Unjustified or excessive costs
- b. Non-urgent equipment or long-term project expenses
- c. Costs benefiting commercial or political interests
- d. Bridging funds that are primarily intended to cover general organizational deficits or long-term core funding.
- e. Costs that are not directly related to the specific emergency or to the agreed intervention.
- f. Expenses that are clearly above standard market prices without adequate justification.

3.5 EXCLUSIONS

The Fund will NOT support:

- a. Political parties or actors advancing party interests
- b. Lobbying campaigns or legislative advocacy for partisan gain
- c. For-profit organizations
- d. Actors whose actions or public positions are contrary to the Fund's goals and values, including those who undermine human rights, democratic principles or equality. Entities involved in illegal activities, terrorism, or money laundering
- e. Groups posing significant reputational risk
- f. Proposals that fall outside the scope of the emergency, as defined by the program
- g. Entities that do not prove that their work is within the non – profit realm

4. APPLICATION PROCEDURE

Applications are submitted exclusively through the joint online form available on the Fund's website. The form is designed to be simple and user-friendly and does not require applicants to create an account or go through a separate registration process. It captures only the essential information needed to assess the emergency and plan an appropriate response.

The form is available in Albanian, Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin, Serbian, English and Macedonian. Applicants may complete and submit the form in any of these languages.

Once an applicant selects the country in which they operate, the completed application is automatically routed to the relevant implementing organization (Trag Foundation or KCSF) for assessment. This ensures that each application is reviewed by a team with contextual knowledge of the country while maintaining a single, unified entry point for all applicants.

4.1 Required information in the application

The online application form will ask applicants to:

- Provide key information about the organization, informal group or individual (including legal status, if applicable) and a short description of their work/activism and experience in the field;
- Describe the problem or threat they face, including context, responsible actors (if known) and why the situation is significant;
- Explain the urgency and potential impact, including what is likely to happen in the coming days or weeks if no support is provided;
- Outline 3–5 key activities they propose to undertake in response to the situation and the results they expect (e.g. reduced risk, continuation of work);
- Present a simple budget summary with main budget lines and total amount requested;
- Indicate whether they have requested or received similar support from other sources.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding procedure or grant application, please email us at **info@civcemergencyfund.com**.

All questions and answers regarding the application will be published in the Q&A (questions and answers) section of the Fund website. Applicants are advised to check this section which is published on the website.

As part of the submission, each applicant will be asked to confirm that:

- The information provided in the application is true and accurate to the best of their knowledge;
- They are not a Politically Exposed Person (PEP) or, where applicable, that no PEP occupies a leading position in their organization;
- They accept and commit to uphold the core values of the Fund, including respect for human rights, non-discrimination and democratic principles.

5. HOW APPLICATIONS ARE REVIEWED

5.1 Key Considerations

Applications are considered using a contextual and proportionate approach, guided by a set of core criteria and considerations. The considerations below explain the main aspects that shape how applications are reviewed in practice.

In general, the Fund considers whether the request falls within its purpose and values and whether it relates to a situation where urgent, protection-oriented support is needed.

The immediacy and seriousness of the risk are also taken into account, along with whether the proposed support is appropriate to the situation and likely to help mitigate harm or stabilize the situation in the short term.

Attention is given to the overall credibility and coherence of the application, taking into account the context in which the situation occurs and the information that can reasonably be provided under emergency conditions.

Where relevant, the Fund also considers whether the proposed actions can be implemented safely and responsibly, and whether the scale and cost of the request are proportionate to the emergency described.

5.2 REVIEW PROCESS

Applications are reviewed in line with the considerations outlined in Section 5.1, using a contextual and proportionate approach that reflects the emergency nature of the Fund. The review is designed to support timely and responsible decision-making, while ensuring that applications are considered fairly and consistently. Each implementing partner reviews applications related to the country or countries under its responsibility.

As part of the review, applications are examined to confirm that they fall within the scope of the Fund and relate to a situation that meets the definition of an emergency. Applications that clearly

fall outside the Fund's mandate or do not relate to an emergency are not taken forward for further review.

Applications that proceed are reviewed to determine whether and how the Fund can provide appropriate and timely support in response to the situation described. Where necessary to better understand the context, urgency, or proposed response, the Fund may request additional information or clarification from the applicant during the review process, taking into account the time-sensitive nature of emergency situations.

In parallel, proportionate checks may be carried out to ensure that support can be provided responsibly and in line with the Fund's principles. These checks are adapted to the type and scale of support requested and may include basic verification of eligibility, legal status or fiscal sponsorship arrangements, and other standard integrity considerations, without delaying urgent assistance.

Applicants are informed through e - mail of the outcome of their application in writing once a decision has been reached.

6. REPORTING

Reporting requirements under the Civic Emergency Fund are designed to be simple, proportionate, and appropriate to emergency situations.

Supported organizations, informal groups, or individuals will be asked to provide a short narrative overview of how the support was used and what immediate results were achieved, along with a basic financial overview of related expenses.

The scope and level of reporting will depend on the type and scale of support provided, with the aim of minimizing administrative burden while ensuring accountability and responsible use of funds.

Annex I

CORE VALUES OF THE FUND

This document lays out the core values that are fundamental to the work of all civil society initiatives supported by Civic Emergency Fund. It sets out general guidelines for the accountability to stakeholders and the public for civil society organizations and activists in all initiatives supported by the Civic Emergency Fund.

All those involved in the work of civil society initiatives supported by Civic Emergency Fund are expected to commit to and operate in accordance with these core values in all phases of their activities. The fund also commits to incorporating these values within all its contractual and non-contractual relations with its grantees and to ensuring that these values are always upheld.

Transparency and accountability

by being open, honest, and clear about structures, mission, policies, activities, intentions, and outcomes in relation to Civic Emergency Fund, target groups and beneficiaries, and the public, as well as taking responsibility for their actions and intended and unintended outcomes.

Integrity and trust

by upholding the highest standards of programmatic and financial integrity, and avoiding misrepresentation, deception, misuse of funds and/or conflict of interest, by taking all necessary and possible measures to ensure that there are no links with persons or organizations that are known to be involved in unethical or illegal practices, as well as by upholding confidentiality and respecting the right to privacy, especially when dealing with sensitive or private information of people and communities.

Commitment to human rights, non-discrimination, and social justice

by respecting the equal rights and dignity of all people, and valuing, respecting, and seeking to encourage diversity and non-discrimination and equal treatment for all, by promoting human rights, diversity, gender equality, impartiality, non-discrimination, both internally and externally, as well as abstaining from engaging in any activities, public statements and/or actions that undermine these values, as well as by striving to find environmentally conscious and sustainable solutions and considering potential environmental impact of all their activities as a responsibility to care for and protect the environment for current and future generations.

Democracy and Rule of Law

by upholding the fundamental values of democracy, including equality, respect for basic freedoms, democratic governance, media freedom and pluralism, and active civic participation, by acting in compliance with respective countries' applicable legislation.

Commitment to Non-Violence

by upholding non-violent principles in all supported activities and rejecting the use, promotion, or endorsement of violence or incitement to violence. The Fund supports civic engagement and activism carried out through peaceful and non-violent means, including in contexts marked by tension, repression, or heightened risks.

Citizen participation and community engagement

by fostering an environment that encourages robust participation from every individual, regardless of background, to actively engage in shaping an equitable society in the countries they inhabit, by involving communities they serve in planning and implementation of programs, as well as by respecting the different types of activism and viewpoints on issues of public interest and creating an environment where ideas can be debated freely.

Stewardship of Resources and Non-profit principle

by managing and maximizing the impact of entrusted financial and non-financial resources, ensuring proportionate standards for financial procedures and internal controls, in alignment with the non-profit mission and values of civil society

All applicants are required to declare during the application process in the online system if they adhere to these core values.

Annex II

DECLARATION ON POLITICALLY EXPOSED PERSONS (PEP)

Politically exposed person means any domestic or foreign natural persons who are or have been entrusted with prominent public functions, such as:

- President, Prime Minister, minister, deputy minister, political advisor, chief of staff;
- members of parliament;
- members of leading/governing bodies of political parties, at central or local level;
- members of the Constitutional Court and Supreme Court;
- ambassadors or chargés d'affaires or high-ranking military officials;
- mayors, deputy mayors, municipal directors, political advisors to mayors and deputy mayors, chief of staff to mayors and deputy mayors;
- members of political parties list running for local or national elections;
- members of Municipal Assemblies.
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Persons in one of the above listed positions are considered PEPs if they are currently holding such an office or have been doing so in a period of four (4) years before the date of submitting a funding application to the Civic Emergency Fund.

(Applies for NGOs) In order to be eligible for this fund, such persons shall not be in leading positions in the applying civil society organization, such as:

- Head of the Assembly of Members,
- Head or member of Board,
- Executive Director,
- Manager (program or finance) or any similar position of senior level.

(Applies for individuals/initiative) In order to be eligible for Civic Emergency funds, such persons or main members of the initiative shall not fall within one of the categories listed above.

All applicants are required to declare during the application process in the online system whether they fall into any of the situations that are considered unacceptable due to the involvement of PEPs in their organization/initiative.