

Invest for Change (I4C) Financial Support to Third Parties

Guidelines for Applicants - Stage 1: Expression of Interest

1. About this Call

Community Impact Accelerator - Zid invites applications for the Expression of Interest (EoI) stage of the Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) scheme under the *Invest for Change* project, implemented in partnership with Impact Europe and funded by the European Union.

The aim of this Call is to strengthen the financial and organisational sustainability and the impact competences of social enterprises and impact-driven businesses in Montenegro. Supported organisations receive a combination of financial support and tailored non-financial support (training and mentoring). The Call is open to social enterprises and impact-driven businesses in Montenegro, whether operating as entrepreneurs, limited liability companies, NGOs or cooperatives, that already have a working business model and want to strengthen it, for example by developing new products or services, expanding production capacity, introducing green or digital solutions, or building the management, financial and impact measurement systems needed to grow and attract further investment.

The Call is part of a wider effort to build an impact investment ecosystem in Montenegro: supported entities are expected to become showcase examples that impact-driven businesses can grow, become financially sustainable and generate measurable social and environmental results.

Mobilising additional resources is a central objective of this Call. The grant is meant to be a lever, not a replacement for other funding: supported organisations are expected to use it to attract further resources, such as own sales revenue, investment, loans, other grants or partnerships, and to reduce their reliance on grants over time.

This is the first stage of a two-stage selection process. Shortlisted applicants will be invited to Stage 2, which starts with the Boot Camp and ends with the submission of a Full Proposal.

Key Call Information

Total Financial Support budget	EUR 75,000.00
Total budget for this Call	EUR 50,000.00
Indicative number of grants to be awarded	2
Range of grant amount per recipient	20,000.00 – 25,000.00
Implementation period per grant	12 months
Geographic area of implementation	Montenegro
Target group	Social enterprises and other impact-driven businesses registered in Montenegro, in any eligible legal form (entrepreneur, limited liability company, NGO,

	cooperative or other), that pursue a clear social and/or environmental purpose. Full eligibility criteria are set out in Section 2.1.
Call publication date	9 October 2026
EoI submission deadline	9 November 2026, 15:59 (CET)
Submission method	To email: fond@zid.org.me
Language	English

The selection process at a glance

- **Stage 1 – Expression of Interest (open call)** – any eligible applicant may submit EoI under this Call (Annex - Application Form (EoI)). EoIs are scored against the criteria in Section 5, and up to **6** applicants are shortlisted.
- **Boot Camp** – shortlisted applicants take part in an intensive Boot Camp, where they work with trainers and mentors on their business model, impact measurement, financial planning, investment readiness and resource mobilisation, and prepare their Full Proposal. Participation is free of charge. Full attendance of the Boot Camp sessions is a condition for submitting a Full Proposal. The Boot Camp ends with a pitch session, where each participant presents its activity to an evaluation panel using a short pitch deck. The pitch is scored, and this score counts towards the Stage 2 evaluation together with the Full Proposal.
- **Stage 2 – Full Proposal (restricted)** – only applicants that completed the Boot Camp may submit a Full Proposal. Each applicant's final score combines the pitch score and the score of the Full Proposal. The Stage 2 Guidelines, including the pitch format, the evaluation criteria and the weight of the pitch in the final score, will be shared with all Boot Camp participants at the same time, before the Boot Camp starts.
- **Award and implementation** – up to two applicants with the highest-scoring Full Proposals receive a grant of EUR 20,000–25,000 each, covering 100% of approved eligible costs, and are supported by a mentor throughout the 12-month implementation period. Their resource mobilisation targets become part of the grant agreement and are monitored and reported on during implementation.

Please note: Stage 2 is not an open call. Only applicants that were shortlisted at Stage 1 and completed the Boot Camp can apply for a grant under this Call.

2. Who can apply

2.1 Eligible applicants

To be eligible for support under this Call, an applicant must:

- be a legally registered entity in Montenegro, operating with a clear social and/or environmental impact purpose;
- be registered in one of the following legal forms: entrepreneur (preduzetnik), limited liability company (DOO), non-governmental organisation (association or foundation), cooperative, or another legal form eligible to receive grants under Montenegrin law;

- use its profits primarily to achieve its social and/or environmental objectives, and have rules or a defined plan for the distribution of profit that do not undermine these objectives;
- generate at least part of its income from the sale of products or services¹;
- apply as a single entity (consortia are not eligible);
- be registered for at least 1 year before the date of this Call;
- have no outstanding tax obligations to national or local authorities;
- be directly responsible for the preparation and implementation of the proposed activities.

2.2 Non-eligibility grounds

An applicant is NOT eligible if it:

- is bankrupt, has suspended its activities, has its affairs administered by the courts, or is the subject of proceedings of this kind;
- has been convicted of an offence concerning professional conduct by a judgment with the force of res judicata;
- is guilty of serious professional misconduct proven by any means;
- has been convicted by a final judgment for fraud, corruption, involvement in a criminal organisation, money laundering or any other illegal activity damaging the EU's or the national budget's financial interests;
- has failed to fulfil obligations relating to the payment of taxes, social-security contributions, or contractual obligations in connection with a previous public-funded or donor-funded scheme;
- is in a situation of conflict of interest that could affect its participation in this Call;
- has been guilty of misrepresentation in supplying information required by this Call;
- is on the EU restrictive-measures (sanctions) list, directly or through its representatives;
- represents a political party, or whose primary purpose is religious, discriminatory, or contrary to democratic values.

3. What the grant can support

3.1 Eligible activities (illustrative, not exhaustive)

- developing new products, services or business models with a positive social and/or environmental impact;
- improving existing operations, including digital and green transitions;
- scaling proven impact-driven activities;
- diversifying products, processes or services and developing production capacity, including the purchase or development of equipment and software;
- developing energy-efficient and circular economy solutions;
- strengthening financial and organisational sustainability, including fundraising or revenue diversification strategies, management and financial systems, and impact measurement;

¹ Regardless of legal form, applicants must carry out a business activity, i.e. sell products or services on the market. For NGOs, this means an economic activity carried out in line with Montenegrin law.

- team training, marketing and promotion activities.

3.2 Activities that cannot be funded

- activities that endanger the environment;
- activities linked to political parties;
- individual scholarships or sponsorships for studies, courses, conferences;
- purely humanitarian or charitable donations;
- activities falling within the regular responsibilities of state institutions;
- activities in the sectors of tobacco, gambling, or military equipment.

ADP-Zid reserves the right to exclude any application that, in its assessment, is inconsistent with EU values, applicable law, or the objectives of this Call.

3.3 Costs that cannot be funded

The following costs are never eligible under this Call, regardless of the activity they relate to:

- debts and debt-service charges (interest);
- provisions for losses, debts, or potential future liabilities;
- costs already funded by another EU grant or by another source (double funding);
- purchase of land or buildings (unless strictly necessary for the action, with ownership transferred at the end of the action);
- currency-exchange losses;
- credits (loans) to third parties, unless otherwise specified in the special conditions;
- in-kind contributions, except for volunteers' work;
- salary costs of personnel of national administrations, unless otherwise specified in the special conditions;
- bonuses included in staff costs;
- negative interest charged by banks or other financial institutions;
- costs incurred before the grant agreement is signed (retrospective financing);
- costs incurred outside the approved implementation period;
- customs duties and import taxes;
- bank guarantee costs and other financial charges;
- fines and penalties;
- leasing costs.

4. How to apply

Applicants must submit the application before the deadline stated in Section 1. Applications received after the deadline will not be considered. Incomplete applications will be rejected. Each applicant may submit only one EoI.

4.1 Documents to submit at EoI stage

- the completed **Application Form (EoI)**;

- a copy of the current registration certificate (extract from the Central Register of Business Entities (CRPS) or from the Register of NGOs or equivalent). The declaration on honour is part of the Application Form (Section F) and must be signed by the legal representative.

More detailed documentation (for example: financial statements, tax clearance, judicial records) will be required at Stage 2 from shortlisted applicants only.

4.2 How to submit

Applicants should complete all sections of the Application Form in English. The Declaration (Section F of the Application Form) must be signed by the legal representative. The signed form should be scanned and submitted as a single PDF file, or signed with a qualified electronic signature.

All supporting documents listed in Section 4.1 must also be submitted in PDF format. Files should be clearly named, for example "EoI_Form_[Name of applicant].pdf" and "Registration_[Name of applicant].pdf". The total size of attachments should not exceed 10 MB.

The complete EoI package must be sent in one email to **fond@zid.org.me**, with the subject line "I4C FSTP – EoI – [name of applicant]", no later than 9 November 2026 at 15:59 (CET).

4.3 Receipt and clarifications

Receipt of each application will be acknowledged. Where information provided is unclear, the evaluating team may seek written clarification before a decision is taken; clarifications cannot be used to add or change substantive content.

5. How applications will be evaluated

Applications are evaluated in two steps. The administrative check is completed first; only applications that pass proceed to technical evaluation. Evaluation criteria and weights are published in advance and cannot be changed after the call is launched.

- **Administrative check:** verification that the application is complete and that the applicant meets the eligibility criteria in Section 2.
- **Technical evaluation:** eligible EoIs are assessed by a three-member Evaluation committee against the evaluation criteria below. Each member scores independently; the final score is the average of the three scores. See the EoI Evaluation Grid for the detailed scoring matrix and guidance.

5.1 Indicative EoI evaluation criteria

Criterion	Maximum points
1. Business overview	10
2. Business idea, proposed use of funding and growth potential	25
3. Social and/or environmental impact and inclusion (GATING – minimum 8/15)	15
4. Financial sustainability and additional funding mobilisation and investment	10
Maximum total score	60

Each criterion corresponds to one section of the Application Form (Sections B–E).

Co-financing is not required, but mobilising additional resources is. The grant covers 100% of the approved eligible costs, and applicants do not have to contribute their own funds to the project budget.

At Stage 2, applicants will present a resource mobilisation plan with concrete targets. For grant recipients, these targets become part of the grant agreement and are monitored as a key result of the support. Reaching them is not a condition for payment of the grant, but progress must be reported and may be taken into account in any future support from ADP-Zid.

Minimum threshold to pass to Stage 2: **35 points (out of 60)**. Additionally, any applicant scoring below 8 out of 15 on Criterion 3 (Social and/or environmental impact and inclusion) will not be shortlisted, regardless of their overall score. Where two or more applicants have the same total score, the applicant with the higher score on Criterion 3 is ranked higher.

5.2 Outcome of the EoI stage

Within 5 working days of the deadline, all applicants will be informed in writing of the outcome. Up to 6 applicants with the highest scores that pass the threshold will be shortlisted and invited to Stage 2, which starts with the Boot Camp, as described in Section 1. Applicants not advancing will receive brief feedback. Up to three further applicants that meet the threshold and the Criterion 3 minimum may be placed on a reserve list, ranked by total score. Applicants on the reserve list will be informed of this in their notification, together with their rank, so that they can keep the Boot Camp dates free. Shortlisted applicants must confirm their participation in the Boot Camp within 3 days of notification, by 19 November 2026. If a shortlisted applicant withdraws or does not confirm by this date, the highest-ranked applicant on the reserve list will be invited in its place by 20 November 2026.

6. Questions and answers

Applicants have the right to submit questions during the open call period (both EoI and Full Proposal stages). All questions should be submitted in writing to **fond@zid.org.me** by 10 working days before the call closes. To ensure equal treatment, answers will not be provided individually. Questions will be consolidated into a single Q&A document and published on www.zid.org.me website within 3 working days of receipt. No individual or off-the-record clarifications will be provided outside this process. Answers given at the information workshops will also be included in the published Q&A document, so that applicants who do not attend are not disadvantaged.

7. Complaints

Applicants may submit a written complaint within **5** calendar days of receiving the EoI decision, to **fond@zid.org.me**. The complaint will be answered in writing within **2** working days, and in any case before the Boot Camp starts. If a complaint is upheld and the applicant would have been shortlisted, it will be invited to the Boot Camp and will receive the Stage 2 Guidelines together with the invitation.

8. Data protection and confidentiality

Community Impact Accelerator – Zid processes personal and organisational data submitted under this Call solely for the purpose of evaluation and contract management, in accordance with applicable data-protection law. Commercially sensitive information is treated as confidential,

without prejudice to audit, reporting, anti-fraud, and transparency obligations applicable to EU-funded actions.

9. EU funding

This Call is funded by the European Union under the *Invest for Change* project (IPA III/2025/483-805), implemented by Impact Europe in partnership with **Community Impact Accelerator – Zid** and five other co-applicants in the Western Balkans. Successful applicants will be required to acknowledge EU funding in their communications and materials, in line with the EU's visibility requirements for external action.

10. Annexes

- Application Form (EoI)

11. Indicative timeline

Activity	Date
Publication of the Call	9 October 2026
Information workshops	Cetinje 14 October, Bijelo Polje 15 October, Nikšić 19 October, Podgorica 27 October 2026
Deadline for submitting questions	26 October 2026
Final Q&A document published	by 29 October 2026
EoI submission deadline	9 November 2026, 15:59 (CET)
Notification of EoI results	by 16 November 2026*
Confirmation of Boot Camp participation by shortlisted applicants	19 November 2026
Deadline for complaints	21 November 2026
Stage 2 Guidelines shared with shortlisted applicants	by 23 November 2026
Boot Camp (shortlisted applicants only)	27–30 November 2026, Podgorica
Stage 2 – Full Proposal submission deadline (restricted)	Tentative 23 December 2026*
Stage 2 results and selection of grant recipients	Tentative January 2027*
Signature of grant agreements and start of implementation	Tentative February 2027*
End of implementation	Tentative January 2028 – 12 months

* Dates are indicative. Any change to the timeline will be published on www.zid.org.me and communicated to all applicants at the same time.