

TERMS OF REFERENCE

For external support to develop the MEL framework for BCSDN's Advocacy Strategy

1. BACKGROUND

➤ **Contracting Authority**

The Contracting Authority is the Balkan Civil Society Development Network (BCSDN) Executive Office.

➤ **Beneficiary**

The beneficiary is the Balkan Civil Society Development Network and in particular, its Executive Office in Skopje.

➤ **Relevant Background:**

The Balkan Civil Society Development Network is a network of 13 civil society organizations from the wider Balkan region. The journey of the network started back in 2001 as a pilot programme for capacity building, implemented by the Macedonian Center for International Cooperation aimed at promoting coordination and cooperation of ecumenical and civil society organizations in the region through the organization of meetings, trainings, exchange, and consultancy visits. It was established as an informal network in December 2003, and formally registered in 2009.

Since BCSDN's formal establishment, its mission has been to empower civil society and influence European and national policies towards a more enabling environment for civil society development to ensure sustainable and functioning democracies in the Balkans.

Through collaboration, developing its tool for monitoring the civil society environment, and conducting evidence-based advocacy, BCSDN has been able to set standards for enabling environment for civil society development to monitor how governments, the EU, and other donors' policies affect the civil society development in the Balkans.

BCSDN's work has been grounded on its mid-term strategies, adopted by BCSDN Council that have been centered around the broader objective: To facilitate a common understanding of the enabling environment for civil society development and a recognition of its role in the sustainable development of the region and its accession into the EU.

The success and evolution of the network have led to the need for developing more concrete and result-oriented goals, thus driving a more than two-year-long process of strategic review.

With the support of Peace Nexus the process has resulted in more concrete strategic goals that will be guiding the work of the network for the next four years:

Goal 1: BCSDN effectively advocates for the protection and expansion of the civic space;

Goal 2: BCSDN helps secure more favorable donor practices for civil society development.

To operationalize the Strategy and deliver more tangible results against the set Goals, BCSDN EO is currently developing a more detailed Advocacy Strategy, which is the subject of this assignment.

A more detailed explanation of Why we pursue these strategic objectives, The key expected results, and the Strategic Approaches are contained in the draft Strategic Document and serve as the basis for the development of the Advocacy Strategy.

DESCRIPTION OF THE ASSIGNMENT

1.1 Context

BCSDN monitoring shows that the environment in which CSOs in the Western Balkan region operate has generally worsened and the civic engagement spaces have continuously been contaminated and contested. The shrinking of civic space and the increasing threats to basic freedoms have been repeated findings from the past several years of our monitoring efforts. Our regional reports have noted that, despite the legal guarantees of basic freedoms, the exercise of the freedom of expression and freedom of assembly around the region has been suboptimal. In such a complex situation, the role of civil society in fighting back against these challenges has become even more prominent for keeping governments accountable, and for demanding more transparent and democratic governance and greater respect for human rights and the rule of law.

The comprehensive, result-oriented Regional Advocacy Strategy for joint advocacy actions in the Western Balkan region will aim to contribute towards a more enabling environment for civil society development and influence in policy and decision-making. The Strategy will outline the concrete objectives, intermediate and long-term outcomes, the indicators of success, and the means for verification in ensuring the environment is more enabling for the development and the contribution of civil society to the sustainable and democratic development of the region. The Strategy objectives are set against the Monitoring Matrix findings but will reflect the changes in the external environment: the (geo)political context and the dynamics of the EU accession process, as well as the attitude towards civil society and its development by key international stakeholders, guiding a renewed, more proactive, and effective advocacy approach.

1.2 Requested services regarding the assignment.

The purpose of this assignment is twofold:

- To review the Advocacy Strategy established by BCSDN and to provide reasonable assurance to BCSDN that the advocacy objectives and foreseen advocacy actions are well established, including the indicators of success and the means of verification, but also to propose suggestions on how these processes and arrangements can be improved.
- To prepare an Advocacy Monitoring Tool that will track the progress in implementing the Advocacy Strategy more systematically, will be used for recording, tracking, analyzing, and evaluating the results achieved, and will support capacity building for promoting learning and adaption.
- To provide support to BCSDN in using the Advocacy Monitoring Tool to monitor the implementation of the Advocacy Strategy.

The Advocacy Monitoring Tool should measure the incremental progress toward our final advocacy objectives, by assessing what has been achieved on the way, defining, tracking, and measuring the intermediate outcomes. It shall ensure that the progress in achieving the final advocacy objectives is well documented providing assurance to BCSDN that we are moving in the right direction. The Advocacy Monitoring Tool should also provide information and guidance on how to adjust to the emerging situation

if things are not going in the desired direction. It should be able to measure the BCSDN's contribution to policy changes and the extent to which we contributed to or influenced a policy change, clearly outlining the key lessons, including the challenges and how these were addressed.

The expert should establish a solid basis for a well-designed contribution analysis that will assess the input, an intervention made to achieve outcomes, and identify the specific role BCSDN played, and the influence it had.

The purpose of the Advocacy Monitoring Tool will be:

- Documenting what kind of advocacy work we are doing;
- Documenting the changes that the advocacy work led to (both intended and unintended);
- Reflecting on what we have achieved and what strategies have been effective and why;
- Providing information for adapting the Strategy, if necessary;
- Planning and reporting;
- Communicating BCSDN's work over time;
- Sharing lessons learned and best practices.

1.3 Required outputs

- Report with an opinion on the Advocacy Strategy prepared by BCSDN;
- Established an Advocacy Monitoring Tool for tracking and measuring the progress in the achievement of the Advocacy Strategy's objectives (including the process and methods for monitoring the progress).

2. EXPERTS' PROFILE

Professional experience

At least 3 similar assignments for NGOs and/or/ networks, coalitions, alliances, and consortia of CSOs:

- Documented experience in working with issues related to enabling environment for civil society development;
- Documented experience working with civil society advocacy on EU and international level, strategies and methodologies for advocacy, and monitoring advocacy strategies.

Documented experience in working with the Western Balkan region would be considered an asset.

Language skills

- Fluency in written and spoken English language.

3. AWARD CRITERIA

Best value for money.

The consultant's offer will be evaluated in the following manner:

- Max 80 points for the expertise;
- Max 20 points for the financial offer.

4. DURATION OF THE ASSIGNMENT

Duration

The anticipated duration of the assignment is a maximum of 20 working days, out of which a minimum of 5 working days are to be allocated for providing support to BCSDN in the implementation and utilization of the Monitoring Tool.

More concretely, the applicants are expected to dedicate a portion of their time to actively support BCSDN in the implementation and use of the Monitoring Tool. This allocation should not be less than 5 days and should be factored into the overall proposed schedule.

In their offers, applicants are requested to provide an indicative allocation of days for each task outlined in this Terms of Reference.

Starting period

The indicative timing for starting the assignment is February 2024. The specific start date of the assignment will be agreed upon with the most successful applicant during the contract signature.

The most successful applicant is expected to provide the outputs listed in section 1.3 of this document within 1 month of the start date of the assignment.

The support provided to BCSDN in using the Monitoring Tool is foreseen for the upcoming several years. The applicants are expected to commit to being available to provide the necessary assistance and advice to BCSDN when applying the foreseen methods for monitoring the success in achieving the objectives set with the Advocacy Strategy.

Implementation of the assignment

The details regarding the implementation of the assignment, the frequency and way of communication, payment terms, interim deadlines, etc. will be agreed upon with the most successful candidate and will be regulated in the respective agreement.

5. APPLICATION PROCESS

The deadline for submitting applications is 8 February, the end of the day.

Applications should be submitted by e-mail to the following address: regionalhub@balkancsd.net with the subject: **Application for development of the MEL framework for BCSDN's Advocacy Strategy.**

Application format and details to be provided:

The offer should contain:

- Expert's CV;
- Proposed methodology describing the method of work in details including indicative allocation of days per task;
- Financial offer.