



# Guidelines for Applicants for Community-based Competitive Fund

Deadline for application submission:

10.08.2024

July, 2024





## Contents

1. Background.....	3
2. Scope.....	4
3. Overall Goal and Priority Areas.....	4
4. Financial Allocation.....	6
5. Eligibility Criteria.....	6
5.1 Eligible Applicants .....	7
5.2 Eligible Activities.....	8
5.3 Duration.....	9
5.4 Eligibility of Costs (Budget Form).....	9
6. Application Process .....	10
6.1 Application Timeline .....	11
7. Supporting Documents.....	12
8. Evaluation Procedures .....	13
8.1 Administrative Selection Criteria.....	13
8.2 Evaluation of the Application .....	13

## 1. Background

Extreme weather events such as long-lasting droughts create conditions for devastating fires. Climate change, land-use change, and the rural exodus are increasing the ecosystem's vulnerability to landscape fires in the Western Balkans (WB) including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\* Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia, which represents one of the most affected regions in Europe by landscape fires (LFs).

To mitigate the negative impacts of LFs in the WB, the Landscape Fire Management in the Western Balkans (LFMWB) Programme aims to increase the resilience of WB forests and landscapes against fires. Moreover, the goal is to benefit the people who depend on these landscapes for their livelihoods and socioeconomic development. The Programme is financed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation – SDC and coordinated by Farmahem (Regional Executive Agency (REA)) from Skopje, North Macedonia, with backstopping support from Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation from Switzerland. The Regional Fire Monitoring Center (RFMC), as a partner of the LFMWB Programme, serves as the main competence center for LFM, acting as a regional hub and broker of cooperation in the Western Balkans.

The LFMWB Programme incorporates Landscape Fire Management (LFM), which is a holistic approach that integrates fire prevention, risk assessment, and landscape approach to protect nature, promote sustainability, and ensure landscape resilience. The goal of the LFMWB Programme is to increase the resilience of Western Balkan forests and landscapes against fires to benefit the people who depend on these landscapes for their livelihoods and socioeconomic development. The aim is not only to safeguard the landscapes but also the communities dependent on these landscapes. Moreover, the Programme enhances the cross-sectoral collaboration of LFM stakeholders, fostering the creation of the science-practice-policy interface.

The LFMWB Programme within the period of 2022-2026 focuses on the following outcomes:

- **Better Cooperation:** A lasting regional network is established and contributes to cross-border knowledge exchange and cooperation in LFM;
- **Better Capacities:** Strengthened capacities on broader LFM approaches allow for effective cross-sectoral collaboration at multiple levels;
- **Better Policies:** Revised policies and strategies on LFM are in place to support sustainable landscape management at local, national and regional levels. The strategic partners are supported in taking the driving seat to ensure the sustainability of the Programme interventions on a national, regional, and international level.

As part of the LFMWB Programme Community-based Competitive Fund is established and managed with a focus on the Western Balkans. The community-based LFM projects need to be in alignment with the Programme goals transferring the accumulated knowledge into

---

\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

practice and combining innovation and local stakeholder collaboration. Moreover, the projects need to empower communities and emphasize evidence-based practices to safeguard landscapes and livelihoods from the impact of fires.

## 2. Scope

The community-based projects should be implemented in the Western Balkans region including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia.

## 3. Overall Goal and Priority Areas

The overall goal of the call is to actively engage local communities in applying landscape fire management while safeguarding and maintaining landscapes and improving local livelihoods.

**Priority areas of the call are:**

### 1. Traditional LFM Knowledge

This priority area includes projects that recognize and incorporate traditional knowledge systems in LFM practices. Traditional knowledge often offers valuable insights into fire ecology, local environmental dynamics, and effective fire management techniques that have been passed down through generations.

The projects can document and revive traditional fire management practices used by local communities and can share the knowledge with other stakeholders. The communities can collaborate with other LFM stakeholders to integrate both scientific and traditional knowledge systems. Community-led bottom-up initiatives can showcase the efficacy of traditional fire management practices and their ecological, social, and economic benefits.

### 2. Innovative Approaches in LFM

This priority area includes projects that explore innovative technologies, methodologies, or approaches related to LFM by actively engaging the local communities. Moreover, these projects can replicate technologies, methodologies, or approaches from other regions that are innovative for the area where the project is being implemented.

The project's innovation should contribute to landscape fire prevention, mitigation, and preparedness while promoting sustainable landscapes, resilient communities, and ecosystem health. The project activities can promote fire-resilient landscape practices and design techniques that reduce the risk of property loss and landscape degradation. It is

---

\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

essential to establish collaboration with stakeholders to foster knowledge exchange and/or technology transfer in the field of LFM.

In this regard, satellite imagery, drones, and geographic information systems (GIS) can be used to monitor landscape conditions, identify fire-prone areas, and prioritize LFM interventions. In the process, the local communities can be engaged in participatory fire monitoring programs where residents collect and report fire-related data using mobile applications or citizen science platforms. Furthermore, through social media platforms, mobile applications, and web-based communication tools the communities can facilitate LFM, disseminate fire information, and raise awareness.

### 3. Capacity-building

The projects should focus on knowledge gaining, acquiring skills, and building the capacity of local communities to effectively implement LFM practices. This includes organizing workshops, seminars, and training sessions to educate community members and local stakeholders about LFM. The communities can be engaged in fire prevention and preparedness efforts through community-based LFM prevention campaigns.

Furthermore, youth can be engaged in landscape fire education and stewardship programs to foster environmental awareness, leadership skills, and community engagement.

### 4. Prevention, Preparedness and Restoration

The projects should focus on enhancing community resilience to landscape fires through prevention, preparedness, and restoration measures. This includes projects such as: Conducting community-wide assessments to identify and prioritize vulnerable areas to fires. The projects can engage communities in fuel reduction activities to enhance landscape resilience and safeguard the local communities.

Fuel reduction refers to the removal of flammable material, such as stubble and crop residuals from agricultural land, branches from forests, or the creation of firebreak to mitigate risks in fire-prone landscapes. This process can be accomplished through applying silvicultural and agricultural activities such as manual removal, mechanical thinning, or prescribed burning. The restoration measures can include planting of less inflammable native species as green fire breaks that can help landscape restoration, while also serving as habitat for other native species.

*Climate change is considered a crosscutting topic and should be incorporated into integrating traditional knowledge, fostering innovation, building capacity, and enhancing prevention, preparedness and restoration efforts while adaptively managing landscapes.*

**We encourage cross-border collaboration** between/among communities from different countries in the WB to apply and exchange LFM practices and experiences. Cross-border collaboration can be established between/among non-neighboring countries.

## 4. Financial Allocation

LFMWB promotes open competition in its grant-making process to ensure fairness and transparency.

The total amount available under this call for proposals is 500.000 CHF. The contracting authority reserves the right to allocate funds only to the eligible projects, regardless of the presented total amount.

### Size of grants

- National projects:

The grant per community-based competitive project is up to 30.000 CHF.

- Cross-border/Regional projects:

In the case of cross-border<sup>1</sup> applications within the WB the grant per community-based competitive project is up to 80.000 CHF. The cross-border applications need to include local communities from at least two or more countries. The total number of cross-border projects that will be financed by the Programme is up to 3 projects.

### Contribution

Contributions by the applicants are divided as follows:

- In-kind contributions: non-monetary goods or services provided by the applicant to support the implementation of the project (ex. Rent, office equipment, running costs, voluntary engagement, vehicles, another type of equipment, etc).
- Co-financing: the provision of financial resources that contribute to a portion of the total project amount.

In-kind contribution and/or co-financing by the applicant is a **minimum of 10%** of the total project amount. Additionally, co-financing is optional. Therefore, in case of co-financing, in-kind contribution and co-financing **should not exceed 40%** of the total project amount.

## 5. Eligibility Criteria

The eligibility is based on three criteria:

- Eligibility of applicants;

---

<sup>1</sup> **Cross-border collaboration** between/among communities from different countries in the WB to apply and exchange LFM practices and experiences. The Cross-border collaboration can be established between/among non-neighboring countries.

- Eligibility of activities;
- Eligibility of costs.

## 5.1 Eligible Applicants

The Applicants can be divided as follows:

- **Leading applicant** – the organization/institution that submits the application form is the primary point of contact for the contracting authority. The leading applicant is directly responsible for the implementation of the activities with the co-applicant and oversees the design and implementation of the project. Moreover, the leading applicant cannot submit more than one application under this call. If the organization or institution has applied as a leading applicant, it can participate as a co-applicant in a maximum of two other applications under this call.
- **Co-applicant** - the organization/institution that acts as a project partner to the leading applicant. Co-applicants can participate in a maximum of two grand applications.

Leading applicant and co-applicants can include various partners in the process of project implementation. The partners will not be directly responsible for implementing the project activities, however their inclusion might be crucial for project realization.

### Leading applicant

To be eligible for applying as a leading applicant for a grant, the following criteria must be fulfilled:

- To be a legally registered local organization/institution within the scope of the call (Section 2) such as:
  - Civil society organizations (CSOs);
  - Local government units (municipalities etc.);
  - Public sector (e.g. public enterprises, local agencies etc.);
  - Local research and educational organization/institution;
  - Management authorities of protected areas or
  - Other local organizations/institutions related to LFM, and etc.
- Minimum of one year (i.e. 12 months) of confirmed experience and at least 1 project implemented in relation to the overall goal and priority areas (Section 3).

### Co-applicant

To be eligible for applying as a co-applicant for a grant, the following criteria must be fulfilled:

- To be a legally registered organization/institution within the scope of the call (Section 2) such as:
  - Civil society organization (local and national NGOs);

- Local and regional government units (municipalities, regional development centers etc.);
- Public sector (e.g. public enterprise, agencies etc.);
- Research and educational organization/institution;
- Management authorities of protected areas
- Private sector or
- Other organizations/institutions related to LFM, and etc.

### **Not eligible applicants**

Applicants that are not eligible to apply for a grant are the following:

- International NGOs;
- Religious or Faith-based organizations;
- Central government units (ministries, public agencies);
- LFMWB Programme partners.

### **5.2 Eligible Activities**

The activities of the proposals should contribute to the Overall goal and priority area (Section 3) mentioned above and be aligned with the LFMWB Programme's overall goal of preventing fires and enhancing landscape resilience. Furthermore, it is recommended the proposals to consider the objectives of the global initiatives and agreements related to sustainable development, nature, and climate change such as the Paris Agreement, EU Green Deal, Agenda 2030's SDGs and Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. In relation to climate change, the proposed activities should contribute or be in alignment with NDC<sup>2</sup>, NAP<sup>3</sup> or NAMA<sup>4</sup>.

Applicants must submit comprehensive proposals located in vulnerable areas to fires following the provided guidelines in a one-step approach.

Additionally, the **eligible activities need to:**

- Contribute to tangible and measurable impacts related to the Overall goal and priority areas of the call;
- Encourage a partnership-based approach with local stakeholders;
- Ensure the sustainability of the outputs of the project;
- Enable visibility and promotion of the project results, as well as acknowledge the support provided by the LFMWB Programme;
- Involve communities in transferring research into practice (if applicable);
- Foster cross-border cooperation (if applicable).

---

<sup>2</sup> Nationally Determined Contribution (NDCs)

<sup>3</sup> National Adaptation Plans (NAPs)

<sup>4</sup> Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions (NAMAs)



For investment activities, the proposed location must be either publicly (municipal or state-owned) or privately owned. The applicants should provide legal approval for implementing the proposed activities.

Non-eligible activities include:

- Scientific projects.
- Activities that do not comply with the defined Priorities and LFMWB overall goal;
- Proposals related to suppression are not eligible for funding;
- Increase the adverse effects of climate change;
- Activities that generate profit;
- Direct involvement in political campaigning.

### 5.3 Duration

The duration of the implementation of the community-based projects should not exceed 18 months. The duration of the project implementation cannot be less than 12 months.

### 5.4 Eligibility of Costs (Budget Form)

#### Direct eligible costs

- Direct costs for the implementation of the project activities (minimum 70% of the total project budget):
  - Services (experts, events, logistic expenses for events, media, etc.);
  - Costs for purchase and installation of equipment;
  - Other direct costs for project implementation;
  - Contingency reserve not exceeding 5% of the estimated total direct eligible costs (optional).

#### Indirect eligible costs:

- Project management and supporting costs (maximum 30% of the total project budget);
  - Fee and equivalent payments for project staff;
  - Travel and accommodation expenses;
  - Administrative costs (printing, bank fees, accounting, communication, etc.);
  - IT/office equipment.

#### General financial principles:

- Eligible costs must comply with the principles of sound financial management (economy, efficiency, and effectiveness);
- The costs must be recorded by the lead applicant and determined based on the applicable national accounting standards;
- The costs must comply with relevant tax and national legislation requirements;
- Eligible costs must be based on expenses that are supported by proof of payment;

- Follow the eligibility rules for costs and audit rights as applicable to the lead applicant under the grant agreement, ensuring avoidance of unnecessary or excessive expenses. The lead applicant must retain justifying documentation for ten years after the fund's final payment.

### Non-eligible costs

- Debts or provisions for losses (fines, financial penalties, and expenses of litigation);
- Purchase of land, buildings, and vehicles;
- Costs for profitable activities;
- Credits to third parties or regranting;
- Currency exchange losses;
- Taxes, including VAT (The granted applicants will be exempt from taxes and VAT in alignment with national legislative requirements);
- Fee for the employees of governmental units and public institutions;
- Reimbursement of costs executed prior to signing the grant contract is not allowed;
- Any other non-eligible costs defined in the grant contract.

## 6. Application Process

To be more environmentally friendly and reduce the carbon footprint, all stages for implementing the process for Competitive Fund for LFM community-based projects will be conducted online. This includes the procedures for application, evaluation, and reporting. The leading applicants must submit the application in English via the [Competitive Fund Application Platform](#) on the [LFMWB Programme webpage](#). Applications sent by any other means will not be taken into consideration.

To apply for this call for proposals the applicants need to:

1. Download the instruction Guidelines for Registration and Application Completion on the Competitive Fund Application Platform;
2. Register and create an account;
3. Download the templates for the documents;
4. Fill out the online application documents following the instructions given in the Guidelines;
5. Submit the application.

Upon submission, the leading applicant will receive an automatic confirmation of receipt by email.

The online application will not be accessible after the deadline.

## 6.1 Application Timeline

Info Days	June/July
-----------	-----------

To present the requirements of the Guidelines for application for community-based projects, Info Days were organized by the contracting authority, LFMWB REA, in the Western Balkan region. The REA was supported by the Country Project Staff (CPS) in organizing the Info Days and disseminating information through different channels in the WB. During the Info Days, the Regional Fire Monitoring Center (RFMC) provided insights into the LFM approach to potential applicants.

The Info Days aimed to allow potential applicants to ask questions regarding the application rules and procedures. The questions raised during the Info Days are published on the Competitive Fund Application Platform.

Additionally, after publishing the call, questions can be sent on the platform within a period of 10 days. The responses to the questions will be public and available on the platform.

Public Call	July
-------------	------

Duration: 10.07.2024-10.08.2024

The call will be published on the official Programme's website on July 10<sup>th</sup>, following the Info Days. The duration of the public call will be 30 days. After registering on the website, applicants can fill out the application form directly on their accounts, where the information will be automatically saved and adjustable before official submission. Additionally, information related to the public call will be disseminated through various media channels and with the active involvement of CPS.

Evaluation and Selection	August/September
--------------------------	------------------

The applications will go through administrative and eligibility checks by the LFMWB REA team. Afterward, the evaluation committee will check if the applications satisfy the evaluation criteria as well as align with the call priorities.

The lead applicants for the approved grants will be informed by e-mail and the information will appear online automatically in the profile of the user who submitted the application. Please note that the lead applicant is the intermediary for all communications between the co-applicants.

The administrative selection criteria and the evaluation grid are presented in the chapter Evaluation Procedures.

Signing Contracts	October/November
-------------------	------------------

The grant-awarded applicants will sign a contract with the contracting authority LFMWB REA (Farmahem). By signing the contract, the applicant agrees to accept the contractual conditions.

After signing the contract, the applicants will be presented to the LFMWB Programme and LFM approach supported by RFMC. Moreover, specific training for monitoring and reporting (narrative and financial) will be conducted.

### **Project Monitoring**

The LFMWB REA will monitor the project implementation twice per year by using adequate monitoring tools that will be shared with the selected applicants.

## **7. Supporting Documents**

The following documents are required for submitting the online application:

### **General documents**

- Organizational/institutional legal status evidence (leading applicant and co-applicant);
- Declaration of honor (leading applicant and co-applicant);
- Reference list of projects (leading applicant and co-applicant);
- Portfolio of the organization/institution (leading applicant and co-applicant);
- Letter for collaboration between applicants (applicable in case co-applicants);
- Official nomination by the organization/institution of the contact person (leading applicant).

### **Financial documents**

- Statement of Financial Position/Balance Sheet (leading applicant);
- Statement of Activities/Income Statement (leading applicant);

### **Documents for project activities (optional)**

- Ownership act or certificate for ownership;
- Relevant documentation required by the respective national legislation;
- In the case of equipment supply: Technical specifications should be provided.

**Note: Please sign the documents with an electronic signature.**

## 8. Evaluation Procedures

### 8.1 Administrative Selection Criteria

No	Administrative and eligibility criteria	YES	NO	N/A
1.	The Application Form is duly completed in compliance with the guidelines.			
2.	All the supporting documents stated in Section 7 are provided.			
3.	Technical specification is provided for equipment supply.			

### 8.2 Evaluation of the Application

Applications that pass the first step will be evaluated using the evaluation criteria in the evaluation grid below.

#### *Scoring:*

The evaluation grid is divided into Sections and subsections. Each subsection will be given a score between 1 and 5 as follows: 1 = very poor; 2 = poor; 3 = adequate; 4 = good; 5 = very good.

#### Evaluation Grid

Section	Maximum Score
1. Operational capacity of the applicants	15
2. Relevance of the proposal	25
3. Design of the proposal	15
4. Implementation approach	10
5. Sustainability of the proposal	15
6. Budget and cost-effectiveness of the proposal	20
Maximum total score	100