



# Civic Europe Idea Challenge - Call for ideas

## 2020

Civic Europe is an incubator for locally rooted civic initiatives, organizations and individuals in Central, Eastern and Southern Europe<sup>1</sup> realized by MitOst and Sofia Platform, funded by Stiftung Mercator.

Civic Europe assists **civil society** actors by providing them with funding and mentoring to implement their project ideas. We fund up to 15 local projects with grants of up to €50,000 each.

### Why an idea challenge for Civic Europe?

In times of polarization and deep political divisions, **open and functioning civic spaces** and **active citizens** at all levels of society are the strongholds for democracy in Europe. Only a vibrant and diverse civil society lives up to the potential that the core idea of democracy holds: co-creating our own future and having agency to influence our collective lives.

Because polarization has grown over recent years around Europe and the world, support for civil society has become more crucial. Organizations, initiatives and projects that showcase the possibilities for living in diversity and remaining open and tolerant while holding profound disagreements operate most effectively on local level, filling the specific needs of their local community. Their work can also be regarded as “a living practice of democracy”, democracy at its core: actively co-shaping a colorful, vibrant community life that builds bridges, strengthens civic cohesion and creates hope for a better future. This is where the Civic Europe Idea Challenge starts: We are looking for 15 lighthouse ideas that function as bright horizons and inspiration for bringing people together in times of segregation and animosity.

### What is our approach?

- **Target group:** Locally rooted civil society organizations and civic grass-root initiatives outside of the big urban centers. Civic Europe’s aim is to support initiatives that are oases in so-called civic deserts: those organizations already active or willing to fill the gap in places characterized by little to no opportunities for civic and political learning and engagement.

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<sup>1</sup> Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain



The Civic Europe Idea Challenge is mainly aimed at CSOs that have previous project experience and have been active for some time in their communities, to help them upscale their activities, start a new project or develop a structure. However, newcomers with a solid idea to solve societal issues in their community can also apply. Civil society initiatives working in cross-sectoral partnerships with other local actors, e.g. municipalities, are welcome.

- **Funding per project:** Up to €50,000
- **Mentoring and support:** The Civic Europe Idea Challenge is not only about grant giving. The selected civic initiatives receive administrative, strategic and methodological support from the Civic Europe team at all times online and on the phone throughout the program as well as in person during our network meetings. The network meetings are not only an opportunity for the winning initiatives to overcome blockades or get feedback on their projects, but also to meet the other selected civil society actors and learn more about their projects, to extend their network throughout Europe and to get into peer-to-peer exchange and learning.
- **Application & selection process:** Applicants submit their idea in the idea space. Submitted proposals can be edited during the entire duration of the open call period, until May 27. After the call ends, the Civic Europe team creates a shortlist of around 30 submitted projects in cooperation with an external reading team. Shortlisted candidates will be asked to hand in a financial plan in addition to their proposed idea and they will have the opportunity to answer questions about their project idea during a brief interview with the Civic Europe team. All shortlisted proposals will then be considered by a multidisciplinary jury. The jury will select the 10-15 winning initiatives based on the selection criteria for the idea challenge.
- **Community Award:** In parallel to the selection process, there will be a Community Award vote among all applicants that have successfully submitted project ideas. The winner of the Community Award will receive €5,000 and will directly get on the shortlist.
- **Timeline<sup>2</sup>:**
  - Submitting the project proposal: April 15 - May 27, 2020
  - Community Award vote: June 8 – June 29, 2020
  - Shortlist publication: August 3, 2020
  - Shortlist (online) interviews: August 20 – September 8, 2020
  - Jury (online) meeting: mid/end September 2020
  - Announcing the winners: October 2020
  - Kick-off (online) meeting: November 2020

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<sup>2</sup> If needed, e.g. due to external circumstances, we reserve the right to adapt the timetable.



- Realizing the project idea: November 2020 – December 2021
- Project completion (financial & narrative reports): January 15, 2022

## Who can apply?

### Selection criteria

Funding is available for initiatives and project ideas that:

- **Strengthen active citizenship and democracy:** We are looking for initiatives and project ideas that contribute to civic education in their local regions and encourage civic engagement. They should address locally rooted issues that matter to the community and at the same time promote a democratic culture of living in diversity, remaining open and tolerant towards different points of view, etc. This will often require going beyond “easy answers” and making use of nuanced approaches. Thematically suitable examples for project ideas could be establishing a new welcome culture for migrants, dealing with and accepting homosexuality in civic life, improving living conditions for people with disabilities, raising awareness of women’s rights and many more...
- **Are accessible and (try to) engage perspectives from various ends of the local voices:** We will support initiatives and project ideas that invite a wide range of opinions and actors on the issue and include, in particular, residents, citizens, families, newcomers, municipal actors or groups who feel excluded and might find their answers in black-and-white political choices or populist politics. Ideally, our funded initiatives (try to) engage community actors with profound disagreements in dialogue, such as
  - those who believe in civic actions and those who are doubtful about them;
  - those who trust in democracy and those who are dissatisfied with it;
  - those who are convinced of the “European idea”, those who oppose it, those who don’t (yet) have an opinion as well as those who retreat from politics.
- **Take place in relevant region:** We want to reach initiatives and project ideas whose activities target towns, villages and cities situated outside large urban centers that are largely attuned to polarization or that have a low density of civic cohesion and few possibilities for civic and political learning and engagement (so-called civic deserts).
- **Strive for impact:** We are looking for initiatives and project ideas whose impact on re-establishing relationships across (divided) communal actors and (re-) activating the whole field of civic participation in the local context would be explicitly visible and measurable after the end of the funding period.



## Eligibility criteria

- **Regional restriction:** We fund non-profit organizations only from: Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain.
- **Legal status:** Organizations of a non-commercial legal form (“registered non-profit organization”). Possible organizational forms, depending on national legal regulations concerning charitable/non-profit character, could be: NGOs, cooperatives, collectives, associations, clubs, a non-profit private limited company, non-profit public limited company, non-for-profit corporations, etc.

## We do not fund:

- Technical, digital, artistic or other end products (e.g. films, teaching materials, apps, artworks) without co-creative processes and community building aspects
- Events with a pure event or festival character, sports and entertainment events as well as one-time connecting events that do not have a measurable direct impact on the local community and lack a sustainability character
- Pure research
- Construction
- Commercially oriented project ideas / products that are intended for later commercial use
- Individuals or groups of individuals

## How to apply

You can submit your project idea until **May 27, 2020** online in our idea space: <https://civic-europe.eu/ideas/>.

## How to reach us

### Civic Europe Idea Challenge

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