



**Spotlight
Initiative**

*To eliminate violence
against women and girls*



SPOTLIGHT GRASSROOTS ACTION PLAN

**Ensuring Spotlight Initiative funding
reaches local and grassroots civil
society organisations**

**Spotlight Initiative Secretariat
Version June 2021**



Initiated by the European Union and the United Nations:



BACKGROUND

Strong women’s movements are essential to ending violence against women and girls. Women's rights and progressive civil society organisations are central stakeholders and partners of the Initiative. The quality of the Initiative’s engagement with civil society partners and its allies (and detractors) will, therefore, be one of the key determinants of its success.

Civil society has consistently raised the importance of the Initiative reaching grassroots, local and feminist women’s organisations that have traditionally been excluded from UN funding. Civil society actors have reported that the processes to engage as implementing partners are rigorous, cumbersome and unharmonized across the different UN agencies, which becomes a barrier for many small organisations to participate and successfully be selected as UN implementing partners.

The objective of this Grassroots Action Plan is to guide Spotlight Initiative Programme Teams to fully utilise existing UN policies and procedures to better reach and engage local and grassroots organisations in the Spotlight Initiative as recipients of funding (implementing partners, grantees and vendors).

In this document, grassroots organizations are defined as “organisations that focus their work at the local and community level and do not have a national scope. They tend to have a small annual operational budget (for example, under USD \$200,000); to be self-organised and self-led; and to have a low degree of formality”.

The guidelines in this Grassroots Action Plan are recommendations from the Spotlight Initiative Secretariat. Programme Teams are encouraged to find solutions that are suitable for their specific context and working environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

<p>Joint calls for proposals</p>	<p>UN Programme Teams are encouraged to launch joint Calls for Proposals and/or Expressions of Interest (“call”) for activities across all outcome areas, and to simplify processes and harmonize templates to the extent possible. This practice fosters inclusivity and leads to greater efficiency and reduced transaction costs for the applicants as organisations only apply through one UN entry point. Please find a standard Joint EOI template here, and examples from Spotlight countries here.¹</p>
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¹ Programme example: In Liberia, responding to 2019 concerns raised by civil society organizations that the different UN processes to apply for calls for proposals as implementing partners were time-consuming, complicated and cumbersome, the United Nations conducted extensive civil society organization capacity-building and held open-day orientation sessions to train potential applicants. A major achievement was a joint call for potential civil society organizations to apply for partnerships through an Expression of Interest using a single partnership platform. More than 50 civil society organizations and 100 civil society organization representatives participated in the orientation session and gained knowledge on using the platform, including the registration process and submission of Expressions of Interest and concept notes. This resulted in the use of one standard process by all civil society organizations through one platform.



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Languages	The call should be available in all of the main local languages. Recipient UN Organizations (“RUNOs”) are recommended to avoid jargon and dense technical language. Consider making calls available in braille and as voice recordings for those with vision impairments. Accept proposals in all local languages. Translation costs (if needed) should be covered by the RUNOs through the programme budget.
Consortiums	Organisations should be encouraged to apply through a consortium. This allows local and grassroots organisations to apply jointly through a larger network that has more resources and capacities to develop and submit a proposal. This also allows local and grassroots organisations with limited absorption capacity to implement parts of a proposal. This is likely to reduce the transaction time and costs for the UN and implementing partners.
Sub-partners and sub-grantees	Reach local and grassroots organizations through sub-granting and sub-partnering policies. Require implementing partners to detail how they will engage with sub-grantees and sub-partners when delivering the activities. For instance, the applicant can describe plans of engaging local and grassroots organisations as Responsible Parties ² for specific outputs/activities.
New partners	The Secretariat recommends excluding the requirement of “ <i>previous UN experience is an asset/desirable</i> ”, as this requirement limits the engagement of new partners. All Spotlight Initiative RUNOs are encouraged to broaden their civil society engagement and reach partners that have not been contracted by the UN before, rather than restricting it.
Dissemination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Share hard copies of calls in remote areas. This will enable those who lack access to internet, computers and printers or groups in hard to reach areas to access and participate in the calls. - Use different media platforms, as suitable in the specific context. Calls can be advertised in national and local newspapers, radio and social media channels, such as Twitter and Facebook. - Share the call through partner networks including the Reference Groups, EU Delegations, academia, civil society networks and umbrella organisations that can share the call further with their members at local and grassroots levels.
Q&A – open day session	Programme teams are recommended to hold an open day Q&A session for civil society organisations to address any questions about the partner selection process.
Deadlines	Sufficient time should be allocated to submission of proposals. It is recommended to allow a submission time of 4-8 weeks. Proper planning will ensure that programme delivery and implementation are not compromised.
Submissions	Allow applicants to submit handwritten or video proposals to enable those who lack access to computers and printers to participate.
Review panels	To the extent agency policies allow, consider inviting Civil Society Reference Group (CSRG) and EU Delegation members to participate as participants or observers in

² A *Responsible Party* is usually selected by the Implementing Partner and responsible for the implementation of project activities or specific components of a project, including specific inputs and/or delivery of agreed outputs to assist it in programme implementation. This is done to take advantage of their specialised skills, to mitigate risks, and to relieve administrative burdens on partners with limited capacities. The mechanisms and policies of engaging Responsible Parties varies between the UN Agencies, but the Responsible Party is usually accountable to the Implementing Partner through to a written contract.



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	review panels. When including CSRG members, please ensure there is a code of conduct in place to avoid any conflict of interest.
Intermediaries	Explore channeling funds through intermediaries, such as women’s funds, that absorb the risks while reaching small organizations. Women’s funds have decades of expertise and experience reaching the most marginalized populations. The main opportunity is to leverage their grant making and thematic expertise to reach local and grassroots organisations and movements to provide them with access to resources, expertise, and structural support.
Small, unrestricted grants	Invest more intentionally in a portfolio of small grants to direct institutional funding to national and local women’s organizations – without any programmatic requirements. Unrestricted funding fuels and strengthens autonomous movements, which is core of transformative and sustainable change. An increasing number of programmes are applying small grants programmes, but these need to be further expanded, simplified and made accessible.
Capacity building	RUNOs are recommended to use the partner selection process to build capacities of civil society organisations in areas where capacity gaps are identified or requested. This may be proposal drafting, reporting, financial management etc. It is suggested to partner with a national feminist facilitator/organization with knowledge of the local context. To promote an integrated approach and avoid siloed pillars, RUNOs may have <i>one</i> joint workshop to be held for all pillars. This is especially helpful for civil society organisations that wish to work under multiple outcome areas. The workshop can also be included in the Spotlight workplans to enable execution. It is advised to invite a representative from the EU Delegation to participate as an observer in such a workshop. The workshops should be held in a venue accessible for people with disabilities and held in the local language(s), this includes sign language interpreters (if needed).
Protection of Women’s Human rights Defenders	Ensure that the partner selection processes and programme activities are taking into consideration the protection and safety of women’s human rights defenders. Consult the Spotlight-Specific Integrated Protection Approach (here) and the Civil Society Reference Group members.
Monitoring and evaluation	The UN Spotlight Initiative Programme Team and the CSRG are encouraged to jointly monitor and evaluate the engagement of grassroots organizations as recipients of funding. It is recommended to apply a Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation approach for this purpose by including civil society stakeholders throughout the monitoring and evaluation cycle.

For any questions, comments or to share experiences, please write to the Spotlight Secretariat: Erin Kenny (erin.kenny@un.org), Gabrielle Dorey (garielle.dorey@un.org) and Zebib Kidane (zebib.kidane@un.org).