



ANNEX 1 - Guidelines

BOOST Regional Acceleration Program & Innovation Challenges

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1 GENERAL INFORMATION

In July 2020, as part of its socioeconomic response to COVID-19, UNDP Europe and Central Asia launched BOOST, a regional acceleration program for social impact innovation. It connects private sector actors, civil society organizations, and academic institutions with resources, trainings, and funding opportunities to scale innovations to development challenges. BOOST was launched in a broader effort by UNDP in bringing together development partners committed to addressing the medium and long-term effects of the pandemic by supporting innovators and changemakers in the region.

Building on the learnings from the first BOOST program, and continuously adapting to the context in which we operate, BOOST has evolved into an established model and platform to run acceleration programs and open call for innovations. BOOST now looks beyond COVID recovery and seeks to learn and generate actionable intelligence around complex development challenges, scale innovations that can help reimagine development, and accelerate the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

BOOST engages public and private partners in a co-design process to define and jointly launch open calls for innovations. Each call targets a specific development challenge, or rather, the intersection between various challenges. From each call for innovations, we select a cohort of innovators to take part in the BOOST acceleration program to incubate and accelerate their innovations.

Together with our knowledge partners, we craft trainings and mentorship sessions, and tailor the program to the needs of each participant. During the program, the selected participants follow a series of modules that help them develop and scale their innovations. At the end of the program, participants have a chance to showcase their innovations in front of a jury of experts during our 'Demo Day'. Grants are awarded the most promising innovations, to enable implementation, sustainability, and further scaling. As opposed to many international startup acceleration programs, BOOST does not take any equity in the companies it supports.

1.1 Objectives

BOOST's mission is to source, boost, and scale innovations that reimagine development through innovation and accelerate the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Each open call defines a certain development challenge, or an intersection of various challenges, that the innovations should address.

BOOST seeks to strengthen innovation ecosystems by working with different actors in society. The BOOST “model” applies systems thinking by listening, making sense of what is emerging, and generating actionable intelligence about complex development challenges.

In the selection of participants, BOOST does not look for single-point solutions. Instead, it seeks to source a *portfolio* of innovations in which inherent, yet unseen interconnections can be found. By enabling learning and understanding of the system context, BOOST helps to define strategic entry points for how actors can intervene in the system to induce structural transformation.

1.2 Sustainable Development Goals

BOOST is rooted in UNDP’s [Strategic Plan 2022-2025](#), which aims to support governments and communities to rebound from COVID-19 and build forward better. Each call for innovations addresses one or more of the Strategic Plan’s six ‘Signature Solutions’: poverty and inequality, governance, resilience, environment, energy and gender equality.

Together with its growing network of changemakers and partners across the region, BOOST works towards building resilience and igniting structural transformation, making sure that no one is left behind. To do this, it boosts innovators that use strategic innovation, embrace digitalization, and mobilize funds for achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The BOOST Acceleration Program supports innovators from across the Europe and Central Asia region to develop and scale their innovations, and simultaneously align their organizations and businesses with the SDGs. Program participants receive hands-on training, tools, and advice on Impact Measurement and Management, to build sustainable and impactful organizations.

Complex development challenges need systemic, integrated responses. BOOST open calls thus address a range of SDGs, and most importantly, their intersections. The first rounds of BOOST calls have particularly sought to provide learning, actionable insights, and support to:

- **SDG 3:** Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
- **SDG 4:** Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
- **SDG 5:** Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
- **SDG 8:** Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

- **SDG 9:** Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
- **SDG 11:** Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

The SDGs in focus and thematic areas of the calls are co-designed and jointly agreed upon by UNDP and the partner. For more information about the SDGs, please visit: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

2 BOOST PROGRAM AND SUPPORT

2.1 Acceleration Program

BOOST is an intensive 16-week online acceleration program that includes a series of training modules, workshops and individual mentoring sessions led by international experts, experienced in leadership, organizational and business development, digital transformation, behavioral insights, impact measurement and management, and other fields.

The program is designed to help selected organizations to strengthen innovation, technology, and social impact in their organizations or business models. Participants learn how to reimagine and implement impact-driven innovations, increase reach and visibility, attract alternative financing and other resources, and establish and nurture long-lasting partnerships. The program aims at strengthening capabilities, improving business and digital skills, investment readiness, and soft skills.

BOOST is a flexible program, tailored to the specific needs of each participant, and offers modules such as i) Sensemaking, ii) Business Development, iii) Digital Transformation, iv) Impact Measurement and Management, v) Behavioral Insights, and vi) Crowdfunding.

2.2 Eligible Applicants

UNDP and partner(s) agree on eligibility criteria during the conceptualization phase of co-designing new calls for innovations. Applicants may include individual innovators, entrepreneurs, startups, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), social enterprises, non-profit organizations, and academic institutions.

At the stage of applying, and regardless of organization type, the applicants must present an innovation addressing the call's defined development challenge. The innovation should have a potential for financial sustainability and scaling.

Furthermore, the applicants should engage users, partners, and stakeholder in the development of their innovation, ensuring viability in its specific context.

BOOST is a *regional* acceleration program, implemented by UNDP's Istanbul Regional Hub, the main knowledge and advisory hub for UNDP Country Offices in the Regional Bureau for Europe and the CIS (RBEC), which supports 19 countries and territories in the Europe and Central Asia (ECA) region. BOOST calls for innovations typically target all ECA countries and territories but can also be limited to one specific, or multiple, as per the priority of the partner(s). Applicants must be operating in the targeted country, but a call can allow the applying entity to be registered in a different country.

Countries and territories currently covered by UNDP RBEC: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan.

2.3 Grants

UNDP and partner(s) agree on the financial support to be included as part of the open call for innovations, if any, during the conceptualization phase in co-designing new calls for innovations.

In determining the appropriate prize for an innovative solution, as per UNDP's Programme and Operations Policies and Procedures (POPP) for [Innovation Challenges](#), the following should be considered:

- 1. Incentives and motivation of potential participants – why would they participate and what is in it for them in both the short and long run?*
- 2. Social value of the prize (e.g., recognition, research opportunities, other non-monetary rewards, etc.) also encourages increased participation.*
- 3. How the prize can be utilized to further optimize the benefits and impact of the solution?*

The maximum number and amount of grants is communicated when launching a new BOOST open call. In the first three call for innovations, a total of 15 grants were awarded, starting from US\$10.000.

The applicants are expected to provide in-kind or financial co-investment to a value of at least 50% of the project's total budget. This commitment should be clearly

described through the proposed budget, and further proof from the organization may be requested by the Evaluation Panel.

Grants are intended to enable scaling of the innovation. Typical items that can be covered by the grant include, but are not limited to:

- Salaries of project staff
- Technology, design, business development and other consultancy services
- Small equipment and supplies
- Training and workshop expenses
- Costs including travel connected to the implementation and scaling of the innovation.

BOOST does never take equity in the organizations it supports.

3 APPLICATION PROCESS

3.1 Application form

Organizations must submit their applications through the Gust platform, which is linked from the [UNDP BOOST Website](#), and [UNDP Procurement Notices](#).

3.2 General rules

- I. An organization may submit one or more applications, presenting different innovations. However, only one innovation per organization can be selected as basis for the organization's participation in the BOOST program, and potentially selected to receive a monetary grant at program graduation.
- II. Re-submission of modified applications are not allowed.
- III. Deadline for application is to be strictly respected.
- IV. In the evaluation process, only complete applications will be considered.
- V. Answers in the submission form and any documents attached must be in the English language.
- VI. UNDP shall examine the proposal to confirm that all terms and conditions under the UNDP General Terms and Conditions and Special Conditions have been accepted by the applying organization without any deviation or reservation.

4 SELECTION PROCESS

4.1 Screening

After submission deadline, all applications are reviewed by the BOOST Project Team against the eligibility criteria, known as the *screening* stage. Eligible applicants proceed to the following stage. Non-eligible applicants receive a regret notice through the Gust platform. For these applicants, the selection process is finished. They also do not have the right to appeal.

4.2 Participant selection

All applications that pass the screening stage are evaluated by an Evaluation Panel, consisting of four representatives from UNDP and partners, and two observers. Longlisted applications are evaluated according to the following criteria:

- A. **Viability and scalability:** Innovations that have the potential to be implemented and scaled within or even beyond their respective geographical area of operations. (20%)
- B. **Degree of innovation:** Innovations that use cutting-edge technologies or innovative digital tools, or introduce new ideas, approaches, products or services to a target group. (20%)
- C. **Impact potential:** Innovations that can help bridge the gender digital divide by addressing one, two or all three thematic areas, and their underlying challenges. (20%)
- D. **System transformation:** Organizations that work to understand the systems in which they operate, and continuously re-assess and adapt their organizations and businesses to the context. (20%)
- E. **Management:** Organizations must demonstrate that they have an adequate team in place, with clear roles and responsibilities, and the capacity to implement their innovations in 6–9 months. (20%)

Each criteria A-E are equally weighted. The highest scored applicants are offered to take part in the 16-week BOOST regional acceleration program. An email is sent through the Gust platform. Announcement of selected participants are also done on the public BOOST website at minimum of 10 days ahead of program start. Non-selected applicants receive a regret notice through the Gust platform. For these applicants, the selection process is finished. They also do not have the right to appeal.

4.3 Awarding of grants

The BOOST regional acceleration program concludes through a 'Demo Day', during which participating organizations pitch their refined and reimaged innovations in front of an international jury of experts, including representatives from UNDP and partners. Evaluation and decision of awards is based on the same criteria as in previous stage. The highest scored innovations in the pitching session are awarded available grants, if any.

Following the award decision, the selected organization will be offered to sign the Award Agreement (see Contract Template in annex). The Award Agreement contains the final Project Plan and Project Budget, which should be resubmitted by the organization in case of any adjustments since the initial applications.

Prior to contract signature, UNDP and the awarded organization will agree on specific deliverables and timelines for implementation of the innovation. Before signing the Award Agreement, the Applicant must submit all required documentation to UNDP. Awarding is done under the general provisions of the Award Agreement, and the payment is done based on UNDP rules.

5 IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING OF THE INNOVATIONS

5.1 Implementation and duration

The Awardee should carry out the Project carefully and efficiently in accordance with the Project Plan and Project Budget, respecting the provisions of the Award Agreement between UNDP and the Awardee.

The overall implementation of the innovation will be managed through the 'Partnership Project'. Any significant deviation from the Project Plan (e.g. changes of agreed deliverables or timelines) requires prior written consent by UNDP.

The maximum contract length for the project is 12 months.

5.2 Disbursements

Disbursement of funds will be made upon verification of deliverables specified in the Project Plan.

The Awardee is allowed up to ten percent (10%) expenses variations from the total Project Budget within any of the major budget categories. Should the expenses variations related to any major budget category be expected to exceed ten percent, a written request for funds reallocation must be submitted for UNDP's approval.

In the case that the Awardee fails to perform any of its obligations under the Award Agreement, the UNDP shall be under no obligation to issue any further payments, as per the terms of the agreement.

5.3 Monitoring, evaluation, and learning

The purpose of the monitoring is: i) to assess the progress of Project implementation in terms of activities envisaged and the achievement of Project goals, and ii) to assure that financial expenditures are in accordance with the Project Budget for the given period. Methods of monitoring include review of submitted progress reports and on-site monitoring visits. The monitoring will also ensure that key information is regularly collected and tracked so the BOOST and the 'Partnership Project' progress can be measured towards set objectives.

The Awardee must deliver a final report, including key information required for tracking progress against the 'Partnership Project' targets and for uses of impact evaluation, learnings and knowledge management.

UNDP IRH will establish a contact with the UNDP Country Office in the country or territory in which the innovation is planned to be implemented. The UNDP Country Office should be informed about the progress of the Partnership Project and may, if possible, provide expertise to support the on-site monitoring of the Project implementation.

Information collected and analyzed will be used to measure the success of both the 'Partnership Project' and aggregated for the BOOST program. Success will be measured against the set 'Partnership Project' indicators. Learnings, impact measured, and actionable intelligence around the defined development challenge will be documented, analyzed, and disseminated widely.