# ANNUAL PROGRAM STATEMENT

*Grant program to support civil society in making rule of law topics relevant to the public.*

Funding Opportunity Title: Announcement Type:

Funding Opportunity Number: Issuance Date:

Closing Dates:

Submit Applications to: Questions:

Civic Education Small Grants Annual Program Statement (APS)

2024-APS-002

 March 22, 2024

 December 31, 2024

 Open until amended to close.

ceprolagrants@dexisonline.com

Questions will be accepted on an

ongoing basis.

**Purpose**. The Central Europe Program Rule of Law Activity (CEP ROLA), implemented by Dexis Consulting Group (Dexis) on behalf of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), seeks to support creative local initiatives that make the rule of law (ROL) topics more relevant to the average citizen in Bulgaria, Hungary, and Poland. Proposed small grant activities should involve local community members, especially in underserved areas outside of urban centers, and should encourage greater civic engagement with local government initiatives.

This Annual Program Statement (APS) outlines funding priorities, key ROL themes, and the process for submitting applications funding. CEP ROLA strongly encourages questions to be submitted prior to applying. Applications should be submitted in English, although CEP ROLA will also accept applications in Bulgarian, Hungarian and Polish.

Applications will be reviewed according to the criteria established in the **Evaluation Criteria section V** and will follow **a two-stage process**.

The issuance of this APS does not constitute an award commitment on the part of Dexis or CEP ROLA, nor does it commit Dexis or CEP ROLA to pay for any costs incurred in the preparation and submission of applications. All preparation and submission costs are at the risk and expense of the applicant. Dexis reserves the right to not make any awards under this APS.

 **Section I - Funding Opportunity Description**

**Description of the Proposed Program Background**

Central and Eastern Europe – along with democracies across the globe – are facing challenges including the closing of political space, declining public support for democracy; increasing polarization; disengagement of youth and marginalized communities; complex social media environments; and erosion of civil and political rights.

To meet these challenges, CEP ROLA ([https://dexisonline.com/projects/usaid-central-europe-](https://dexisonline.com/projects/usaid-central-europe-program/) [program/](https://dexisonline.com/projects/usaid-central-europe-program/)) aims to strengthen the resilience and capacity of independent civic actors to protect fundamental freedoms in alignment with national democratic traditions and European values. USAID’s definition of rule of law can be found here <https://www.usaid.gov/democracy/rule-law#:~:text=USAID%20believes%20that%20the%20basic,laws%20that%20apply%20to%20everyone>.

CEP ROLA’s activities can help to increase ROL observance, promote greater transparency, provide greater protection for vulnerable and marginalized groups, and address human rights issues in communities outside of urban centers. Civic education initiatives on ROL issues can engage youth, the creative arts, and other grassroots organizations to address ROL challenges such as corruption, misuse of power, lack of civic oversight and transparency. Through greater engagement of CSOs focusing on these issues, CEP ROLA hopes to also improve the lines of communication and engagement among ROL actors.

**Objectives**. The objectives of this grants program are to:

1. Improve public knowledge of ROL for the average citizen, especially in traditionally underserved communities outside of urban centers.
2. Improve civil society watchdog and advocacy skills via civic education, creative communication, public engagement, and debate on ROL issues with government and cross-sectoral partners.

**Geography.** Proposed activities should take place within Bulgaria, Hungary, and Poland.

Bulgarian applicants (only) should also focus on:

* Improving the capacity of Bulgarian civic actors (e.g., CSOs, communities, individual citizens) to embrace and function in a ROL-oriented society.
* Create networks among Bulgaria civic actors to address the key issue of creating ROL culture in the country.

# Illustrative Activities

* Civic education using creative communications (e.g., vlogs, short films, social media campaigns, art, theater, or photography) that focus on ROL issues, such as citizens’ access to justice, education on their individual fundamental rights, information about judicial process, and civic responsibilities.
* Social media curricula that aim to increase citizen engagement in transparency, integrity, and other ROL-related issues.
* Creative communication plans and/or communications implementation training for local CSOs.
	+ Awareness campaigns that build public knowledge of ROL issues and serve as channels of communication between the government and civil society actors.
	+ Training for local CSOs on advocacy and watchdog skills through practical exercises and best practices.
	+ Civic education programming for radio and social media platforms to deepen public knowledge about democracy, democratic norms, and ROL.
	+ Public advocacy programs that work to protect the legal rights and security of watchdog and ROL stakeholders.
	+ Support for bloggers to cover ROL issues and gain new subscribers via networking and other tools.
	+ Mock trial events with local judges in schools to improve understanding of the justice system.
	+ A comedy serial on integrity or other relevant ROL issues that is freely available on YouTube or other platforms.
	+ Debates in regional universities about ROL issues, such as inclusion, democratic norms and

values, and citizens’ rights and responsibilities in a democracy.

* + Data collection, research, advocacy, and other activities related to monitoring the implementation of European Union ROL mechanisms.

CEP ROLA particularly encourages activities that take place in underserved communities, outside capital cities, engage women and youth, and are linked to existing ROL institution initiatives. Activities that do not relate to a ROL topic will not be supported.

Applicants may choose a new concept or scale up existing projects that have demonstrated success. Awardees will be expected to share evaluation results and key lessons and disseminate periodic activities and outcomes with the broader community per the reporting requirements to be stipulated in the resultant subaward agreement.

# Anticipated Results

Initiatives should contribute to the following results:

* + Increased public understanding of ROL.
	+ Increased engagement of the creative sector in civic education on ROL issues.
	+ Improved advocacy and strategic communications skills among ROL actors.

# Ineligible Activities/Costs

Grant funds may ***not*** be used to cover:

* + Projects that are inherently political in nature or that contain the appearance of partisanship/support to individual or single party electoral campaign.
	+ Court fees.
	+ Exchange programs.
	+ Social welfare projects.
	+ Trade activities; fundraising campaigns; commercial projects; scientific research; construction projects; or projects whose primary aim is the institutional development of the organization itself.
	+ Travel to the United States or EU member countries for conferences, scientific research, studies, reporting tours and cultural events.
	+ Reimbursement of pre-award costs.
	+ Profit is not allowable under any resulting award(s) made under this APS.

# Administration of Award

CEP ROLA is required to ensure that all organizations receiving grant funding from USAID comply with the terms and conditions of their grant agreements. For non-U.S. organizations, the rules and regulations contained within the USAID Standard Provisions for non-U.S. Non-Governmental Organizations—and applicable references therein to 2 CFR 200 and 2 CFR 700—will apply. See: <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-II/part-200>[https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-B/chapter-VII/part-700) [2/subtitle-B/chapter-VII/part-700](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-B/chapter-VII/part-700).

Applicants may obtain copies of the referenced Standard Provisions at the following website:

# Standard Provisions for Non-U.S., Nongovernmental Recipients

<https://www.usaid.gov/about-us/agency-policy/series-300/references-chapter/303mab>

**Standard Provisions for Fixed Amount Awards to Nongovernmental Organizations**

https[://w](http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/agency-policy/303mat.pdf)ww[.us](http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/agency-policy/303mat.pdf)a[id.gov/sites/default/agency-policy/303mat.pdf](http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/agency-policy/303mat.pdf).

# Section II- Award Information

1. **Estimated Funding Level and Number of Awards**

Grant sizes are expected to range between USD $5,000-$25,000 depending on the scale and scope of the activity. CEP ROLA reserves the right to fund any or none of the approved applications and may choose to fully fund or incrementally fund the selected application(s). Applicants should also include costs directly related to the implementation of the grant in the grant activity budget.

# Anticipated Start Date of this Award and Performance Period

The period of performance for an individual award will be up to twelve (12) months. However, the duration will be determined by the scope and scale of the activity and may be subject to negotiation. Awards will be issued on a rolling basis with the start date effective upon signature of the award.

# Award Type

CEP ROLA's final determination on award mechanism will be based on its assessment of an applicant’s capacity and risk prior to award. If this assessment identifies weaknesses or deficiencies that call into question the applicant’s ability to manage an award, CEP ROLA may elect to remove the applicant from consideration under this funding opportunity or select a mechanism more appropriate for the applicant’s current capacity.

# Section III- Eligibility Information

1. **Eligible Applicants**

The applicant must be a local entity officially registered in Bulgaria, Hungary and Poland and working in compliance with all applicable civil and fiscal regulations, including, but not limited to pertinent local laws and status. The following groups/entities are eligible to apply for funding under this APS:

* + Locally registered (in Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland) civil society organizations, for-profit, not profit, research institutes, and community-based organizations.
	+ Applications from organizations outside the capital as well as youth-, women-, and creative arts-led organizations are strongly encouraged to apply.

# Cost Share

Cost share is **not** required under this opportunity. If generated, such funds may be mobilized from the subrecipient; other multilateral, bilateral, and foundation donors; host governments; and local organizations, communities and private businesses that contribute financially and in-kind to the implementation of activities at the country level. Mobilization of funds from outside sources through cost share of project activities is highly encouraged. Cost share will follow the regulations in 2 CFR 200.306 and the Standard Provisions for non-U.S. NGOs.

# Section IV- Application and Submission Information

# Application Guidelines

# Stage 1: Letter of Intent

# Interested applicants should submit a letter of intent prior to submitting a full application. The one-page summary should address 1) title and duration of proposed activity 2) organizational contact information 3) proposed objectives 4) one paragraph summary of proposed activities and 5) total estimated budget.

# Letters of intent will be reviewed for responsiveness to the APS requirements, alignment to ROL topics, and creativity. Applicants will be notified within two weeks of submission whether they are invited for a follow-up consultation before proceeding to Stage 2.

# Stage 1I: Full Concept/Technical Application

# Upon successful completion of Stage 1, applicants will be invited to submit a full application for funding. Instructions for the full application will be provided upon invitation, but include:

# A virtual or in-person consultation call with CEP ROLA providing feedback and questions from CEP ROLA. The consultation call will share feedback on the initial concept and ensure alignment with countries’ current grant activities.

# Submission of a full concept/technical application. The application should be specific, complete, and concise, demonstrating the applicant’s capabilities and expertise with respect to achieving the goals of this program. Applicants should demonstrate how their proposed work will contribute to the CEP ROLA objectives of 1) enhancing public knowledge of ROL and its significance to daily lives and 2) improving watchdog and advocacy skills via civic education, improved strategic communications, and public engagement, debate, and education on ROL issues with government and cross-sectoral partners.

Formatting / Application Presentation Instructions:

The application must be submitted in **Arial 11 pt.** font and must include page numbers. Each page must be marked with the APS title and number.

Prepare the application according to the structural format set forth below:

 **Cover Page** - no more than one (1) page. The cover page must include:

* + - The APS number and name.
		- Address of organization.
		- Type of organization (e.g., for-profit, non-profit, university, etc.).
		- Organizational Point of Contact (lead contact name; relevant telephone, fax, e-mail information).
		- Names of other organizations (federal and non-federal as well as any other USAID offices) to whom you are submitting and/or have submitted the application and/or who are funding the proposed activity.
		- Signature of authorized representative of the applicant.

**Concept Paper/Technical Approach** – no more than four (4) pages. This section should address the program summary and selected objectives from **Section I** of this document and be responsive to the merit review criteria referenced below in **Section V** and should include:

* + - Concise title and duration of proposed activity.
		- A summary of the 1) activity objectives, 2) proposed approach, 3) anticipated results, 4) core activities, and 5) anticipated impact/how the work will help accomplish the CEP ROLA objectives and sustainability (if applicable).
		- Type of support the applicant requests from the CEP ROLA (e.g., funds, facilities, equipment, materials, personnel resources, etc.).
		- Organizational capacity: background, expertise, and prior experience with projects of similar size and scope in relevant technical area and regions; in addition to names and profiles of proposed personnel.

# Full Budget with supporting documentation (including but not limited to demonstration of actual costs through previous awards, receipts, etc.); at minimum this will include:

* Brief budget including cost breakdown along major budget lines (e.g., salaries, supplies, equipment, travel, etc.); proposed optional amount of the applicant’s financial as well as in-kind (non-financial support) participation, if applicable. The budget should be calculated in the local currency.
* References: Brief description of the applicant’s relevant past performance with names and contact information. References should be donor organizations or local stakeholders that can provide feedback on past performance.

# Pre-Award Assessment completion depending on the sub-grant type including a self-assessment, verification of policies and procedures, etc.

# Representations and Certifications.

# Any other supporting documentation necessary for making the grant award.

CEP ROLA will review the Concept Paper/Technical Application to make an initial determination for moving forward in the process.

# Full Application Submission

# A. Selection Process

As applications containing all the required elements/information referenced above in section B.1- III are received, CEP ROLA will review them on a regular/rolling basis and provide feedback to applicants on the status of their application (either accepted or rejected).

Selected applicants will be contacted to provide further information, elaborate further technical details, clarifications, and/or for pre-award due diligence purposes.

Applications that meet the application guidelines and fulfill the basic technical criteria as outlined in the APS will be reviewed by a selection committee.

Applicants will be selected and approved on a rolling basis based on the evaluation criteria described in **Section V,** below.

# Section V – Application Review Information

**A. Evaluation Criteria for Applications**

Applications will be reviewed in terms of responsiveness to the APS requirements, appropriateness of subject matter, and creativity. Applicants are encouraged to demonstrate how their proposed work will contribute to the program objectives described in **Section 1** above. Applicants will be expected to respond to questions for clarification and/or submit revisions to applications, as requested.

# Merit Review Criteria

Submitted applications will be evaluated as follows:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Area** | **Comments** |
| Technical Approach | * Extent to which application matches priorities and objectives of CEP ROLA.
* Relevance and sustainability of proposed activities to meet results.
* Clarity of timelines and meaningful ways to measure results.
* Extent to which youth, and citizens outside of key cities are engaged and included and the degree to which gender, vulnerable groups, youth, and political/conflict sensitivity considerations are thoroughly integrated throughout the proposal.
* Potential to facilitate trust/partnerships with different types of civic and public institutions.
* Expected impact on target groups/public and potential for a positive multiplier effect.
* Sustainability of results after activity end, if applicable.
 |
| Organizational Capacity | * Institutional or personal profile, background, expertise, experience with projects of similar size and scope in relevant technical areas and regions.
* CEP ROLA reserves the right to visit each organization, and request and contact references for due diligence purposes.
* Experience of the proposed personnel to reach program results.
 |
| Cost reasonableness | * Feasibility of overall budget and justification of proposed budget costs.
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# Section VI - Project Contacts

The point of contact for submitting applications in response to this APS and for any questions during the APS process is:

**ceprolagrants@dexisonline.com**

Any prospective applicant desiring an explanation or interpretation of this APS must request it in writing at the email address above. Oral explanations or instructions given before award of a grant will not be binding. Any information given to a prospective applicant concerning this APS will, as appropriate, be furnished to other prospective applicants as an amendment of this APS, if that information is necessary in submitting applications or if the lack of it would be prejudicial to any other prospective applicants.

# Section VII - Other Information

Issuance of this APS does not constitute an award or commitment on the part of Dexis or the CEP ROLA program, nor does it commit Dexis or the CEP ROLA program to pay for costs incurred in the preparation and submission of an application.

Dexis and the CEP ROLA program reserve the right to fund any or none of the applications submitted.