

INNOVATION FUND OF MONTENEGRO**publishes****PUBLIC CALL FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS IN
THE AREAS OF SMART SPECIALIZATION¹****I SUBJECT OF PUBLIC CALL**

The subject of the Public Call is support for activities related to the implementation of intensive training, lifelong education courses, special training programs, etc. for pupils, students, young researchers, and professionals, in the areas of smart specialization of Montenegro.

II OBJECTIVES OF THE PUBLIC CALL

The general objective of this program is to make a continuous contribution to the growth of Montenegro's competitiveness and the construction of an economy based on innovation and knowledge. The specific objectives of this program are:

- Engagement of prominent professionals, scientists, innovators and/or entrepreneurs from the country and abroad, who could contribute to improving the knowledge and skills of young people (pupils, students, young researchers and professionals) in a structured form, through training lasting up to 6 months;
- Strengthening the capacity of human resources for current and prospective scientific and technological fields in which the national education system still cannot develop the necessary skills;
- Affirmation of the cooperation of educational institutions and companies in order to create a program of lifelong education by applying learning based on experience and solving problems in practice.

III ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

The following can apply for the Public Call:

- Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (hereinafter referred to as MSMEs) established as legal entities as defined by the current Law on Business Companies ("Official Gazette of Montenegro", No. 065/20, 146/21 i 004/24), as well as the Law on Accounting ("Official Gazette of Montenegro", No. 145/21 i 152/22), registered in the Central Register of Business Entities of Montenegro (CRPS) with headquarters in Montenegro and majority privately owned, where the share of ownership of a large company may not exceed 10%;

¹ This is an unofficial translation. In case of any discrepancies, the version in the official language of Montenegro shall prevail.

- NGOs registered in Montenegro;
- Public/private educational institutions registered in accordance with the General Law on Education and Upbringing

The applicant's eligibility will be checked before signing the Financing Agreement, based on the applicant's statement and accompanying documentation. However, for the purposes of good administrative practice, the Fund may screen and then exclude applicants at any stage of the evaluation process if it is immediately apparent that they do not meet the eligibility criteria.

IV AMOUNT OF FUNDING

The total amount of support provided for the program line for the implementation of educational programs in the areas of smart specialization in 2025 amounts to 150.000 euros. The applicant may be entitled to funds from this program line in an amount up to 10.000 euros.

Support type: According to the type, the support granted for this program line in the case of entities performing business/economic activity, regardless of their legal status and the way they are financed, will be carried out under the de minimis aid regime (small value state aid), and these users will be obliged to act in accordance with the Rulebook on the list of rules on of state aid ("Official Gazette of Montenegro", no. 35/2014, 2/2015, 38/2015, 20/2016, 33/2020, 38 /2020, 53/2020, 98/2020, 130/2020, 44/2021, 107/2021 and 131/2021, 15/2022, 52/2022, 34/2023, 57/2023, 115/2023 and 26/2024.) and are obliged to act in accordance with the provisions of the legal acts governing this area. The total amount of de minimis aid granted to one beneficiary may not cumulatively exceed 300.000 euros during any period of three fiscal years. A completed de minimis aid declaration form must be submitted to the Fund in case the project is positively assessed.

Grant may be awarded to an individual beneficiary only once for one type of activity, that is, the same costs may not be financed twice from the state budget, Union programs, international sources and other state aid providers under any circumstances.

The applicant² (institution/organization) can obtain funds based on a maximum of one application per program line within this Public Call. This rule does not apply to universities in Montenegro.

Co-financing of project activities is not mandatory, and if it exists, it can be provided by the Applicant, partners in the project, donors, etc.

The Fund reserves the right not to allocate all available funds, as well as to allocate additional funds should they become available.

² The terms used in this document for natural persons in the masculine form apply equally to the feminine form.

V ELIGIBLE PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Eligible activities are the organization of education in priority areas determined by the Smart Specialization Strategy of Montenegro (2019-2024) are:

1. Sustainable agriculture and the food value chain;
2. Energy and sustainable environment;
3. Sustainable and health tourism; and
4. Information and communication technologies as a horizontal priority.

Smart Specialization Strategy of Montenegro for the period 2019–2024 is available at the following link: [Smart Specialization Strategy of Montenegro \(2019-2024\)](#). Until the adoption of the new Smart Specialization Strategy (2026–2031), Montenegro has ensured the sustainability of the priorities and measures from the previous strategic cycle.

Depending on the quality of the projects, the Fund will allocate at least 70% of the budget for education programs in the following areas:

- biotechnology, biomedicine;
- application of technologies in medicine;
- Green technologies (sustainable urban mobility, blue technologies, renewable energy sources, energy efficiency, sustainable tourism, sustainable resource management, bioproduction, green chemistry, etc.);
- New digital technologies (artificial intelligence and machine learning; virtual and augmented reality; blockchain technologies, Internet of Things (IoT), robotics, game development technologies, etc.).

Depending on the topic, the training must last a minimum of five working days and include a minimum of 25% practical work, presentation of examples of good practice, demonstrations, experiments, etc.

VI ELIGIBLE EXPENSES

The following categories of costs can be financed under this call:

- **Costs of personnel engaged in the project.** The staff engaged in the project can be employed by the Applicant or solely for the purpose of implementing the project.
- **Costs of external experts/lecturers** for the purposes of project implementation
- **Costs of equipment, materials and small inventory** for the purposes of the project. Small inventory refers to materials and devices whose unit value is less than 300,00 euros VAT excluded.;
- **Promotion costs for the purposes of the project;**

- **Official travel costs related to the implementation of the project**
- VAT on eligible costs for which the applicant cannot secure its refund.

The Fund reserves the right to request documentation justifying the budgeted costs, should it deem necessary.

VII INELIGIBLE COSTS

The following costs will not be considered eligible:

- Value Added Tax (VAT) for which a refund can be requested;
- Indirect costs incurred directly as a consequence of project implementation;
- Costs reported by the applicant and financed under another action or program receiving funds from other public financing sources;
- Representation expenses;
- All other costs that are not listed in the category of eligible costs.

VIII CONTENT OF THE APPLICATION

The project application should contain the following documentation:

1. Application form;
2. Project budget;
3. Biographies of the Project Manager and project team members;
4. Signed and stamped statement of the Applicant;
5. Signed and stamped Declaration of the partner on the intention to participate in the project and the responsibility assumed (if there are partners on the project);

If all the above-mentioned documentation is not submitted by the application deadline, or the documentation is not complete and properly filled out, the application will not be considered.

Applicants are advised to verify that their application is complete by using the Checklist, which is an integral part of this Public Call.

IX PROJECT DURATION AND IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD

The duration of the project is from 3 to 6 months. The planned activities must be implemented by the Applicant by March 31, 2026.

X REVIEW AND APPROVAL PROCESS OF THE APPLICATION

The evaluation process will be carried out by an internal Committee (hereinafter referred to as the Committee) appointed by the Fund in accordance with the Rulebook on the Evaluation Process. The evaluation process includes:

1. Administrative check - verification of the formal fulfillment of the conditions of the Public Call; and
2. Evaluation process of project applications.

All applications that have met the administrative criteria enter the evaluation procedure in accordance with the selection criteria.

Administrative check

After the end of the public call, the Fund will carry out an administrative check of each application, which includes checking that the formal conditions for participation prescribed by the Public Call have been met. These conditions are strictly applied and any Application that does not meet all the formal conditions specified in the Public Call will not enter the evaluation procedure.

After reviewing the formal conditions, applicants whose projects did not meet the formal requirements will be sent a decision on rejection, i.e., exclusion of the project proposal from the evaluation process.

Evaluation process of project applications

For applications that meet the required administrative conditions, the Committee evaluates them according to the criteria specified for the program lines. The committee assigns points (valued from 1 to 5) and provides comments for each criterion. Based on the Committee 's evaluations, a final ranking list is formed, whereby the project is positively evaluated if it receives a minimum of 10 points. In the case that two applications are evaluated with the same number of points, advantage will be given to the application in which the Applicant provided his own share of co-financing.

Criteria for the evaluation of project applications for the implementation of educational programs in the areas of smart specialization in Montenegro

1. References of the project team and experience in similar activities (5 points);
2. Quality of the implementation plan (5 points);
3. Relevance of the project and its impact on the improvement of skills in identified priority S3 areas (5 points).

The final decision on funding is made by the Fund, based on the Committee's proposal, the obtained ranking list, and the available budget for this Public Call.

The Fund will inform each Applicant about the outcome, **within 60 days from the closing of the Public Call**. The list of projects selected for financing will be published on the Fund's website.

Environmental Impact Assessment for S3 Educational Programs

Due to the nature of activities focused on the implementation of intensive training sessions, lifelong learning courses, specialized development programs, etc., aimed at students, pupils, young researchers, and professionals in the areas of Montenegro's smart specialization, the environmental and social impact assessment will focus on compliance with the Exclusion List defined in the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment Framework Program of the Innovation Fund. Accordingly, the Program for the implementation of educational programs in the areas of smart specialization is exempt from the obligation to conduct a detailed environmental and social impact assessment, provided that none of the proposed activities fall under any of the items listed in the Exclusion List within the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment Framework Program (ESIAFP) of the Innovation Fund.

All applications considered for support will be reviewed by the Fund to determine whether the proposed activities are included in the Exclusion List. Applications that include activities from the Exclusion List will be excluded from further consideration.

XI CONDITIONS FOR SIGNING THE FINANCING AGREEMENT

Based on the formed ranking list, and prior to the final funding decision, the Fund will contact the highest-ranked applicants to conduct the negotiation procedure and prepare the Financing Agreement. The remaining applications constitute a reserve list, and the Fund may invite applicants if additional funds are secured for this Public Call or if the negotiation procedure with any of the top-ranked applicants is unsuccessful.

The negotiation and preparation procedure of the Financing Agreement pertains to the financial, legal, and/or content section of the project proposals, taking into account the Committee's comments. The budget proposed by the successful applicants must be corrected to eliminate any obvious arithmetic errors or ineligible costs and must be reasonable, justified, and in accordance with the requirements of sound financial management, particularly in terms of economy and efficiency.

Applicants at this stage will be invited to submit some of the following documents, depending on the type of applicant:

- Decision on registration/Decision on enrollment in the Register of NGOs;
- De minimis aid declaration form (in the case of subjects who perform business/economic activity).
- Statute defining objectives and activities, i.e., the field of operation;
- Statement on (non)refundability of VAT.

In the event that the Fund is not satisfied with the information and documentation submitted by the applicant, it may request the submission of additional documentation to unequivocally determine eligibility criteria.

XII APPLICATION METHOD

The application is submitted via the Fund's portal (www.programifonda.me) in electronic form. Before submitting the project application documentation, the Applicant must register on the Fund's portal. The registration request is automatically approved, after which the Applicant receives the necessary access credentials (username and password) to log in to the Fund's portal.

After completing the registration, the Applicant can submit the mandatory documentation for the application through the Fund's portal. The application must contain the set of documents listed in chapter VIII Contents of the application.

After uploading the mandatory application documentation, the Applicant is obliged to officially submit the application by clicking the Submit Application button. This action informs the Fund that the Application has been submitted. Additionally, the Applicant cannot modify or supplement the application documentation after clicking the Submit Application button.

Detailed instructions for submitting an application for the Fund's programs are available on the portal www.programifonda.me.

XIII DEADLINE FOR APPLICATIONS

Applications for the Public Call are submitted through the Fund's portal **from April 23 to May 26, 2025, by 3pm.**

Incomplete applications, as well as applications that were not submitted electronically via the Fund's portal, will not be taken into consideration.

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