

2025



# Call for Partners

## Western Balkans

### Overview of the Call

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# I. OUR CALL AT A GLANCE

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*This call is for Western Balkans\* civil society organisations that are either contributing to stronger collaboration and trust across ethnic divides or working towards responsible dealing with the past. The call is not reserved to organisations that exclusively focus on those fields: organisations that contribute to stronger social cohesion through fields such as environmental protection, youth engagement, and cultural cooperation are also eligible. If selected for support, your organisation will receive tailored and close accompaniment meant to support your internal strengthening and thereby increase your impact and ability to adapt to challenging times. **This call is open until 8 February 2026.***

## Why we are launching this call

Civil society actors in the Western Balkans have long been at the forefront of social movements that bridge social divisions and support change through democratic processes at all levels. This work is made even more urgent given global and local geopolitical dynamics that increase polarization. Given these trends, the actors that work across divides for tolerance and peace are more vulnerable than ever. However, their essential work is now undermined by different factors. The civic space is increasingly under threat. Activists and organisations that advocate for social change increasingly find themselves at the receiving end of various forms of hostility and pressure. This particularly affects those who challenge the unfavourable status quo head-on, whether they do so through a principled stance on dealing with the past issues, by trying to break ethnic and ideological bubbles, or by enabling local activism. The entire civil society sector is also negatively impacted by funding shifts, placing many organisations in a survival and firefighting mode.

In short, the combination of long-term challenges and new sources of vulnerability and uncertainty means that work aiming to transform dividing lines and build a peaceful future has never been more important. It also means that many organisations doing that are finding themselves at a crossroads, being forced to adapt significantly to stay both afloat and impactful.

In these uncertain and difficult times, PeaceNexus will continue to invest in organisations and initiatives that aim to bridge divides. We will select brave organisations and initiatives and provide them with breathing space and tailored support to get stronger internally. Our process support is a great opportunity for organisations wanting to proactively adapt to changing circumstances.

- Through our **organisational development support (OD)**, we wish to partner with actors whose primary focus is to contribute to sustainable peace and reconciliation and who wish to become stronger by tackling key internal challenges.
- Through our **conflict sensitivity support (CS)**, we wish to support actors who do not necessarily have a focus on reconciliation but are interested in contributing to bridging divides and fostering interethnic trust through their broader mandate.
- **In both areas of support**, we work with you as partners on organisational change to help you overcome internal challenges that hinder your effectiveness and ability to reach your own goals. The difference between the two support areas relates to the different audiences and to the fact that conflict sensitivity support is more narrowly focused on helping organisations digest the complexity of the context and adapt accordingly.

## What are we offering ?

Selected applicants will be supported through a tailored process of internal strengthening, focusing either on **conflict sensitivity** (support area 1) or **organisational development** (support area 2). PeaceNexus (PN) accompaniment support will take the form of:

- **A non-financial component** in the form of close and direct accompaniment by two PN staff members who will dedicate time and OD & CS expertise to your organisation and will be available throughout the partnership to help you progress on your own OD/CS goals, act as sounding boards, or brainstorm adaptations when needed. For more details on our accompaniment approach, see section V.
- **Financial component** in the form of a small grant ranging from 15'000 to 40'000 per year to cover external expertise and process costs (for example, for meeting costs, fees of specialised consultants, capacity development investments). We do not offer project or core funding, but up to 20% of our grants can be dedicated to overhead costs. The size of the grant depends on the size of the organisation and on its geographic scale, with larger grants being meant for regional entities.
- **Learning and Leadership development** - Once you are a PN partner, you will also have opportunities to attend peer-learning and leadership development opportunities and benefit from on-demand coaching.

*A phase of PN accompaniment support typically lasts between 12 to 18 months and the majority of PN partners are supported for two phases of support. PN does not impose deadlines for progress and seeks to adapt to the pace of its partners.*



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## What to consider before responding to this Call

### Is this call is the right fit for your organisation?

While PN support comes with some financial resources and significant staff time, the processes that we support also require significant engagement and motivation from partners. Therefore, this call may be for you if the answer to following questions is yes:

- Is there broad agreement, among leadership and staff on the for organisational change?
- Is the timing good to launch this process?
- Do you have sufficient (human) resources to maintain your work and invest in organisational development?
- Are you ready for a partnership that will facilitate open and honest reflections to advance as an organisation?

PN believes that organisational change takes time and effort, as well as sufficient headspace and capacity. This call is likely not right for you if you currently find yourself in one of the situations below:

- There is no consensus at all in your organisation about the relevance and timeliness of organisational change
- Your organisation finds itself in a severe crisis, for example financially
- Your organisation is not in a position to prioritise organisational change
- You just want external expertise to produce quickly one document or policy
- You do not fit the eligibility criteria outlined below

### Is organisational development (OD) or conflict sensitivity (CS) support more suitable for your organisation?

Both OD and CS support aim to strengthen your organisation through an internal change process. The differences relate to:

- Your organisational mandate: If you work directly on addressing drivers of conflict and have a track record in peacebuilding and/or dealing with the past, then you are particularly welcome to apply for OD support. If your ambitions to contribute to social cohesion are lower or new, then CS support might be a better fit.
- What challenges you want to address: Regardless of your mandate, we encourage you to apply for CS support if your internal challenges relate mostly to how to adapt to the polarised context.

Please apply for the support area which you feel is a better fit for you. However, if after selection, your organisation needs elements of both areas of support, we will adapt accordingly (some of our partnerships contain both strong OD and CS elements), noting that OD support is reserved for organisations with strong peacebuilding ambitions.

## II. ZOOM ON EACH SUPPORT AREA

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The section below presents the gist of each support area to help you determine which area of support is the best fit for you. For more detail on each support area, you can consult the dedicated concept note.

### SUPPORT AREA 1 - CONFLICT SENSITIVITY (CS)

Helping organisations adapt to their context and contribute to social cohesion

**RATIONALE** Conflict sensitivity is typically defined as the ability of an organisation to:

- Understand the context in which it operates
- Understand the interactions between its actions and the context
- Act upon this understanding to avoid negative impacts and maximise positive impacts on lines of tension present in the context

While the region has moved away from violent conflict, lines of division remain present, particularly across ethnic lines. These complicate the work of organisations pursuing social change, whether their focus is on reconciliation or other topics such as environmental protection, youth engagement, or media development. Due to this, Western Balkans organisations often face conflict sensitivity challenges. For example, they can do harm by unintentionally reinforcing (or simply being perceived as reinforcing) existing prejudices between different groups, excluding those who are different, or communicating in a way that can increase polarisation. Organisations can also face internal conflict sensitivity challenges, for example, in situations where multi-ethnic staff teams have vastly different views on the context and priorities.

Conflict sensitivity is crucial to help organisations “do no harm” and to maximise positive impact. By being more conflict sensitive, organisations are better equipped to navigate complex political environments. They can also directly or indirectly contribute to social cohesion within their existing thematic focus, for example by being able to drive collaboration between a broader and more diverse group of actors or by showcasing that joint actions based on mutual trust are possible, beneficial and sustainable despite polarizing narratives that affect Western Balkans societies.

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**FOR WHOM?** This support area is meant for actors positioned in areas significantly affected by ethnic or political divides and who want to a) better adapt their work to this challenging context, b) contribute more to social cohesion (e.g. more trust and collaboration between groups).

We are for example interested in supporting:

- **Environmental protection organisations and networks** that connect diverse stakeholders within and across divided communities within or across borders
  - **Grant-making organisations** aiming to develop conflict-sensitive funding & partnership practices
  - **Organisations that want to counter polarisation**, including through conflict sensitive reporting or engaging meaningfully with young people
  - **Regional or national networks of organisations/groups that mobilise different actors across divides** and whose work has potential to contribute to social cohesion
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## SUPPORT AREA 1 - CONFLICT SENSITIVITY (CS)

Helping organisations adapt to their context and contribute to social cohesion

### TYPE OF SUPPORT

The support is provided through a facilitated process of organisational change focused on helping organisations to adapt to their context, including in terms of internal organisational functioning.

The list that follows is not exhaustive, but conflict sensitivity support can be about:

- Developing tools and capacities for regular context analysis and adaptations, that minimize risk of fuelling divides and maximise chance of building trust
- Helping organisations determine the positioning they want to have within a polarised context and be intentional and strategic about their impact and relationship with different stakeholders
- Developing stronger collaborations, outreach and coalitions across divides
- Developing a conflict-sensitive organisational strategy
- Updating grant-making tools and approaches so the resulting portfolio of projects/partnerships takes into account divisive issues and contributes to social cohesion.



## SUPPORT AREA 2 - ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Helping organisations focused on reconciliation become more effective

### RATIONALE

We believe that organisations cannot stay resilient and impactful without being intentional and strategic about their internal functioning, particularly at a time when the external political and funding context is full of challenges. Our understanding of organisational development is a holistic process through which organisations strengthen their capacity and impact by identifying and working on key internal challenges, such as strategic direction, governance, and learning, among others. It is suitable for both well-established organisations and newer actors, but the needs, depth, and focus will differ depending on the organisation's size, maturity, mission, and context.

Our OD support is informed by the idea that carving out space for self-reflection, coupled with dedicated accompaniment and resources for it are significant enabling factors for organisations to address what impedes their ability to effectively deliver on their mission. While OD processes need to be fully owned internally to be successful, we believe that process accompaniment by a third party, such as PeaceNexus, can facilitate a transformation that is difficult to achieve alone.

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### FOR WHOM?

This support area is exclusively meant for actors that primarily focus on reconciliation or conflict transformation, either by strengthening interethnic cooperation or by contributing to dealing with the past. We seek out change-makers with a demonstrated potential to challenge the status quo in their environment. We are for example interested in supporting:

- **Actors that work on reconciliation within and across borders**, or at the local level, especially in divided communities
- **Organisations that work on dealing with the past**, engaging in memory activism, supporting survivors, and advocating for a responsible and principled approach to the legacy of the past.
- **Organisations effectively engaging with young people**, for example those countering hate speech and promoting peace education

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### TYPE OF SUPPORT

The support takes the shape of a facilitated process of organisational strengthening, for example to help an organisation with reviewing, updating and developing one or several of the following:

- role, focus and strategy
  - structure, role division and management levels
  - approaches to funding and funding diversification
  - organisational culture, including internal communication approaches and ways of working together
  - monitoring, evaluation and learning approaches
  - governance structures and processes (e.g. Board and/or Assembly)
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### III. WHO CAN APPLY

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#### ► Eligibility criteria

In order to be eligible, your initiative needs to fulfil ALL of the following criteria:

- Be working in one or more of the following countries: Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and
- Be a civil society organisation, or an organisation from one of the following categories:
  - A foundation
  - A multilateral or intergovernmental organisation
  - A network
- Be directly responsible for the preparation of the application and management of the process if selected
- Confirm that their activities will not violate the USA PATRIOT Act (18 U. S. C. §2339B)
- Already have an impact on social cohesion or are interested in contributing to it in the near future

Under this call, applications from Serbia are particularly welcome given the current composition of our portfolio.

Note: Being registered as a legal entity is not an eligibility requirement, but is preferred.

#### ► Selection criteria

Our calls for proposals are highly competitive because we only select a handful of organisations for intensive accompaniment support, typically over longer periods of time. We have put systems in place to ensure our review is rigorous and impartial, and all eligible applications will be assessed according to the following selection criteria:

##### Support Area 1:

##### CONFLICT SENSITIVITY

- **Positioning in area(s) significantly affected by divides/tensions**  
We need to understand whether the dividing lines and tensions in your area are pressing or salient and the degree to which they affect your work.
- **Interest in and potential for contribution to social cohesion**  
We need to grasp the impact your work is already having and to understand the connection between your work and social cohesion. It is particularly key for us to understand where you see opportunities for you to directly or indirectly counter ethnic and political divides and contribute to social cohesion.
- **Motivation for internal change and readiness to take up conflict sensitivity at an organisational level**  
We want to understand the challenges that you face in adapting to your context, why you want to invest your time and energy in this internal strengthening process, and whether you have enough organisational capacity to do so at this time. We're particularly keen to know what makes you think that greater conflict sensitivity would make a positive difference for your organisation and on your impact on the ground.

## Support Area 2:

### ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- **Relevance of the applicant and ability to contribute to sustainable peace and reconciliation**

We need to understand what difference your work makes and to whom. In this respect, we are particularly interested to know the scale at which you operate and whether your work has multiplying effects (e.g. by enabling others to develop their own activism/create impact). It is important for us to understand where you already have a track record that contributes to conflict prevention, dealing with the past or reconciliation and where you see potential for even more impact.

- **Openness and motivation to engage in a participatory process of internal change**

We want to understand what 'success' would look like and how you expect the OD process to contribute to your effectiveness and impact. The content of your application is, of course, confidential, and we encourage you to be self-reflective and upfront in the articulation of your internal challenges.

- **Organisational capacity to engage in a process of internal change**

We need to understand whether your organisation will have the necessary headspace and human resources to engage in a process of internal change. We need to understand how you will approach the OD process internally if you are selected for PN support. We are also interested in your track record with internal adaptation.

## IV. APPLICATION AND SELECTION PROCESS

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We have designed the selection process with the hope that:

- For your organisation, it serves as a tool for self-reflection around what you want to change in your organisation
- For PeaceNexus, it serves as a way to better understand your needs and the support you may require.
- For you and us, it serves as a tool for discussion to assess if collaboration would work out

### ***Expression of interest stage – until 8 February 2026***

In view of these ambitions, you will need to provide the following documents if you decide to apply. We commit to keeping all application documents strictly confidential.

#### **a) Organisational profile form & organisational documents**

This form requests:

- Some basic information about your organisation
  - You to outline 2 references who could speak either about the impact of your work or about your capacity for internal change
  - The leader of your organisation to answer a couple of individual questions
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At the end of the form, you will be invited to submit the following organisational documents:

1. Latest organisational strategy, if you have one (in whichever form available)
2. 2025 budget (please only include the budget you actually secured and you may share just the basic overview, we do not require detailed budgets)
3. 2026 budget (clearly indicating what is already secured)
4. Current list of staff, inclusive of their work percentage and role/job title

These documents help us start assessing your needs and organisational situation. Document 1 is just the last strategy your organisation developed. If your organisation never developed a strategy, please just write a couple of paragraphs in a word document instead, explaining your situation. Documents 2, 3, and 4 regarding your financial and staffing situation need to be up-to-date. Please do not submit other documents with your application as they will not be taken into consideration.

## **b) Expression of interest form for the selected area of support**

You can download the form for conflict sensitivity [here](#) and the form for organisational development [here](#). The expression of interest form is meant as a reflection tool rather than a classic application. It should be developed in a consultative manner within your team and submitted with other documents.

### ***How to submit your application:***

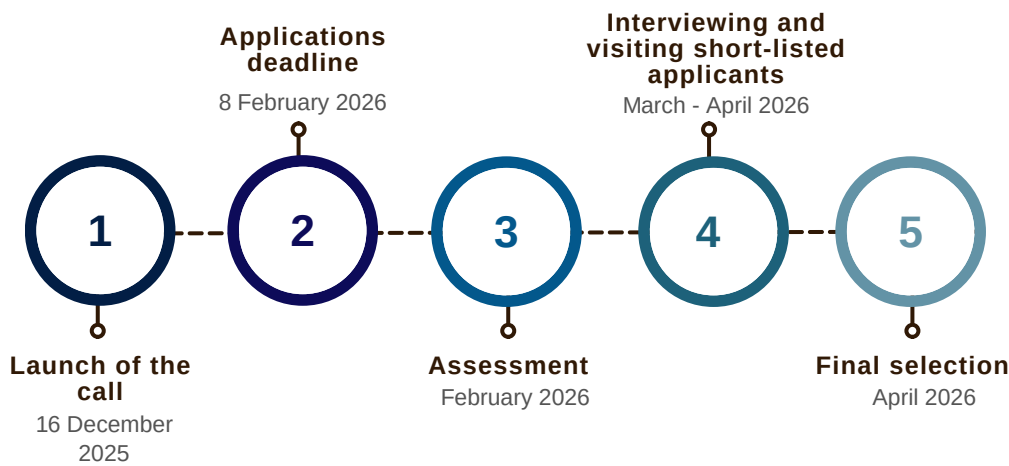
- To prepare your expression of interest, we encourage you to read both this overview document and the documents related to the support area you are interested in. For any questions, you may contact [vladica.jovanovic@peacenexus.org](mailto:vladica.jovanovic@peacenexus.org), preferably by 30<sup>th</sup> January 2026.
- Applications should be written in English. However, if it is not possible for you, you may submit it in BCMS or Albanian. However, please kindly note that the working language of our partnerships tends to be English.
- Once your expression of interest form is finalised, please visit our website and: 1) fill in the organisational profile form (requesting basic information about your organisation), 2) upload the required organisational documents, 3) upload your expression of interest (EOI) form (in word or pdf format). **The deadline for applications is 8<sup>th</sup> February 2026 (23.59 pm CET).**
- Once you submit your application, you will receive an automated confirmation of receipt.
- There is no need to follow up with us from your side, we will get in touch if we need clarification about your application.
- All applicants will hear back from us in March.

## ***Shortlisting stage - March 2026***

Given that processes of organisational change take time and effort, we want to make sure that the envisaged collaboration is a good fit for everyone involved. Organisations that have been assessed as a potential good fit for our support based on our eligibility and selection criteria will first be invited for an online call. We will then visit the final shortlisted organisations. Those visits to your organisations are expected to take place no later than the first half of April and are expected to take up to 3h of your time and serve as a deeper mutual introduction and exchange.

## ***Final decisions – April 2026***

Final decisions will be announced no later than the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of April. They will be made by a selection committee composed of members of PN's Western Balkans Team and of PN's Management team.



## V. ZOOM ON OUR ACCOMPANIMENT APPROACH

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### If selected, how will the partnership start?

**PeaceNexus works with selected partners based on their own internal objectives.** If you are selected as a partner, our accompaniment will start with us facilitating participatory conversations to help you further identify your priority internal challenges and what you want to achieve with our support. The reflections contained in your Expression of Interest will serve as an important starting point for these conversations.

Indeed, if you are selected for support, the PN team will visit you again after selection, between May and June, for an initial internal strengthening retreat. This reflective and participatory workshop will serve to better understand your starting point, goals and challenges so that the accompaniment provided by PeaceNexus can be tailored to your needs and specificities. This retreat will normally last 2 days, and either involves all staff members or a representative group of staff from different departments. This depends on the size of the organisation, and in cases where it is not possible for all staff to attend the retreat, PeaceNexus may engage in collecting additional inputs (e.g. through a staff survey) before the retreat. The retreat is facilitated by PeaceNexus and builds on the conversations held in the shortlisting stage. This retreat is an important first component of our support. Its main purpose is to create a shared understanding of:

- the internal challenges that should be addressed
- the desired outcome of the organisational change process
- the roadmap on how to get there

This means that what comes out here may differ to some extent from what you identified in the expression of interest form as key organisational challenges at the time of the application.

PeaceNexus staff will write a summary of this meeting, with observations and recommendations. PN does not however set internal change objectives for you and only summarises what comes out of collective conversations of your team. On the basis of your organisation's feedback on this report, we will jointly finalise partnership objectives and the roadmap for the process, with both elements reflected in a partnership outline and grant agreement forming the basis of our collaboration.

The internal strengthening retreat and our mutual engagement around it serves as an important initial investment in the partnership. It ensures that PN will understand you well and will be able to provide useful support. Our current partners all point to this initial engagement as intensive but key to success.

## **After the initial workshop, what will the PeaceNexus support process look like?**

After we have agreed on partnership objectives and the roadmap, we stay engaged throughout the partnership to help you succeed on these goals. As we accompany you in this process, it typically comes with the following contributions:

- **Supporting the design of internal change processes:** we know that designing processes of internal change is difficult and often new to our partners. We support you by helping you plan for a process that matches your needs and specificities. For example, we may help you design a strategy process that is not generic but really addresses your specific questions. We don't take a "one size fits all" approach but rather tailor our accompaniment to what is needed by each partner. We are also there to help identify adaptations if anything does not work according to plan or gets stuck.
- **Helping the process move along:** your process of internal change will be driven by you. But we play a supportive role. We will have regular check-ins with you to discuss how the process is going and what we can do to support you. We will visit when suitable (e.g. when you request our facilitation support), but also provide feedback on documents produced during the process (e.g. strategies). We will also help you find relevant expertise when an external expert is needed.
- **Serving as an organisational ally and sounding board:** From the moment that we select you, we are in your corner and ready to put time and effort into helping you succeed. This means that our accompaniment relationship is close and constant, and we serve as both a sounding board and a critical friend to you throughout the whole partnership. Advice seeking varies from partner to partner and from their own context, but the majority of partners reach out to us often/share their dilemmas with us and use us as a sounding board on organisational challenges that go beyond our partnership objectives. While we do stay focused on organisational objectives, we do engage with you on other pressing issues on which you may want our advice. Those pressing issues can't be ignored because they often come up as obstacles to the agreed priorities.

## **If we use the PN grant to work with an external expert, what will the collaboration and respective roles look like?**

A significant portion of the accompaniment (on your objectives and roadmap) will come from PeaceNexus staff. However, most of our partners use part of their grant to engage additional expertise, which can be useful to prepare the ground for some reflections (e.g. an expert to facilitate consultations with partners before a strategy meeting) or be necessary to identify suitable options (e.g. an expert to analyse organisational structure and help identify areas for improvement). Whenever you need external expertise, we are here to assist you in articulating your needs in a ToR; identify the right expertise and work with the selected experts.

External consultants are accountable to you as the partner and are contracted by you unless there are strong administrative barriers to doing so. On our side, we have a responsibility to ensure that PN-funded experts have the necessary background to support you meaningfully. This means that while you, as a partner, select whom you want to work with among appointable candidates, PeaceNexus has a role in confirming which candidates are appointable based on their skills and track record.

Once experts are recruited, we aim to play complementary roles whereby the selected expert provides targeted technical or advisory support in line with the ToR and we continue to play a broader accompaniment role, which also entails supporting you in briefing the expert(s) and providing them with feedback.

## Partner Support Process



### What are the reporting requirements of PeaceNexus?

Since we are in close touch with our partners throughout the process, our reporting requirements are light. We only ask for a brief (learning-oriented) narrative report at the end of each phase of support, and a simple financial report reflecting the actual expenses.

### How is potential renewal of support from PeaceNexus discussed and what does closing of partnerships look like?

Most of our partnerships last for two phases of support. This renewal of support is determined based on the same selection criteria contained in this overview: if your organisation still demonstrates relevance for social cohesion as well as capacity and interest for internal change, we will likely stay engaged for another cycle and discuss that with you at the end of the first phase. If the collaboration continues, we will once again visit you, similarly to initial retreats, to take stock of where the process is and what remains to address.

When the partnership is nearing completion, we discuss this in advance and agree with you. Our closing conversations will also aim to create space for you to identify what you will continue to work on without PN accompaniment when it comes to your internal development. We also usually provide closing recommendations, written in a report that outlines findings, takeaways and recommendations for the future.

Additionally, to reflect on our practice, we conduct online surveys with our partners every other year, and we may commission external evaluations of long-term partnerships (more than 3 years).