**WBF First Call and Reflecting the lessons learned**

For WBF Secretariat team, the First Call was an important learning process. Taking into high consideration those lessons, relevant improvements were applied during the design, dissemination and the implementation of the 2nd Call for Proposals.

The main improvements consisted:

- The size of the application form was limited to maximum 7 pages of the written text;
- By adding the European Integration, the crosscutting issues were expanded to five;
- The extra section “Visibility and dissemination plan” was added;
- Info sessions were organized more carefully with a better coordination with MFA of all WBF Contracting Parties;
- Questions in the section “Relevance of the action” – were formulated in a more thorough manner for providing a more detailed analysis of the regional challenges to be addressed by the action, regional impact of the project and relevance of the action for the regional cooperation in WB6, in relation to the specific thematic area the application is trying to address;

According to WBF Call Survey, the results of the study show that: the WBF Application Guidelines were very clear and well understood by our applicants, since 97.37% of the study cases have positively rated the WBF documents for project application. Besides that, the WBF Secretariat responding to applicants inquiries resulted in great satisfaction, since 75.79% of them were very happy with the information provided.

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**1. General Information on the Call**

The Second Call for Proposals was launched on 2 November 2018 and deadline for submission of Project Proposals was 13 December 2018.

The overall objective of the Call was to contribute to regional cooperation, and strengthen regional cohesion in the WB6 region.

The Call had foreseen three main areas of intervention through which applicants could have submitted their applications:

1. Cultural cooperation
2. Education and scientific exchanges
3. Sustainable development

Promoting cross-border cooperation, European integration, gender equality and matters pertaining to youth were the crosscutting issues covering all actions under WBF key areas of activities.

- The overall indicative amount made available under this Call for proposals was EUR 260,000
- Any grant requested must have not exceeded EUR 12,000.
- The applicant should have provided at least 20% of the total costs of the project.
- The planned duration of a project may not exceed 12 months.
- It was foreseen to have 24 projects awarded, 6 more compared with First Call.

The project activities should take place in the WB6 region. In certain circumstances, activities that promote WB6 region in other parts of the European Union, were also taken into consideration.

The project partnerships represent the central requirement of the Call:

- Project partnership is consisted of the lead-applicant and minimum two project partners.
- Partnership parties must come from at least three different WB6 Contracting Parties.

The institutions eligible to apply under the 2nd Call for Proposals were the following:

I. Civil society organizations (NGOs)
II. Local or regional public entities including municipalities or regional development agencies, etc.
III. Business associations including: business clusters, agriculture associations, chamber of commerce, tourism associations, etc.
IV. Educational institutions including universities, schools, institutes, libraries, research centers, academies of science/music/art, etc.
V. Institutions of culture or sports including museums, art galleries, theatres, or associations of cultural institutions, sport association, etc.
a) - Dissemination of the Call

The Call was aggressively disseminated through online and social media channels:

- Web Page    http://westernbalkansfund.org/web/
- Facebook     https://www.facebook.com/WesternBalkansFund/
- Twitter      https://twitter.com/balkans_fund
- Instagram    https://www.instagram.com/westernbalkansfund/
- LinkedIn     https://www.linkedin.com/company/westernbalkansfund/

For its dissemination WBF Secretariat organized six Information Sessions in the capitals of the WB.

Tirana- Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs                              8 November 2018
Podgorica- Cultural Information Center “Budo Tomovic”             12 November 2018
Sarajevo- Ministry of Foreign Affairs                                          14 November 2018
Belgrade- Parliamentarians’ Club                                          15 November 2018
Skopje- Ministry of Foreign Affairs                                          16 November 2018
Prishtina- Ministry of Foreign Affairs                                          19 November 2018

The WBF 2nd Call Info Session Tour resulted in great interest and expectations from the civil society organizations (CSO), universities, schools, associations of arts, culture and sports, local authorities, chambers of commerce and industry, media organizations and also other non-profit stakeholders.

More than 500 participants in the sessions were informed in details about the Call and more than 70 direct questions and recommendations were recorded.

Just from the Facebook post announcing the open call, WBF managed to reach 62000 people. During the Call, the total traffic of the WBF web page reached up to 1200 visitors.

2. Overview of the results of WBF 2nd Call in numbers

Through the 2nd Call for Proposals the Western Balkans Fund has received 245 project applications. Our assessment indicates that 911 organizations have participated in this call either as a lead-applicant or as the project partner.

Average number of partners per project was 3.72.

**Allocation per Contracting Party**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Partners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tirana</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pristina</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Podgorica</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skopje</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarajevo</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgrade</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Allocation of partnerships per Contracting Party**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Partners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tirana</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pristina</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Podgorica</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skopje</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarajevo</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgrade</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The total amount requested from the Fund through the 2nd Call for Proposals was 2.8 million €, while the total value proposed for implementation was approximately 4 million €.
b) - Individual reading and evaluation of all projects: 8 of January – 18 of February 2019.

On 8th of January 2019, the WBF team commenced with the first individual reading as part of evaluation process. Based on Director’s Order, two (2) Evaluation Units were established consisting (2) members, each responsible to provide professional and non-bias individual assessment to projects that passed the Eligibility Check according to the evaluation scoring sheet.

It is important to highlight the fact that WBF Secretariat evaluated 224 project applications in-house by internal staff of WBF Secretariat;

The evaluation process that was conducted by WBF “in house” capacities, has proven to be not only cost effective but also, it creates a ground for better knowing the context, stakeholders and a better assessment of the specific needs according to different areas of intervention.

Working in rotating pairs of internal assessors allowed WBF to tap into the skills and knowledge of all team members and facilitated constant quality control of the assessment process. Overall, this process also increases the capacities of the Secretariat and builds a solid basis for the follow up phases of negotiation, monitoring and successful implementation of the projects.
For this purpose, the WBF experts have developed detailed assessment methodology to administer the evaluation process, outlined in the WBF Assessment Guidelines.

During the individual reading, it was foreseen that each expert had to read about 120 applications with approximately 4-5 applications per working day. The total amount of the pages to be carefully assessed was more than 5500 pages and, as it is the practice, each project was assessed by two experts and, after taking notes/assessing the conformity of the application to the already established evaluation criteria, a consensus session was done for each project under consideration, resulting with an overall score (points) from min. 1- to max. 100 points.

c) - Consensus process
There were cases, when there was a considerable difference in scoring between two assessors and this issue was solved by the consensus, where two assessors set and discussed on their scoring. If there was a case that assessors couldn’t find a middle ground, another assessor from the other Unit joined the team to assist in establishing a more objective evaluation.

Also, during the process, it was taken in high consideration the standard of avoiding any conflict of interest by the evaluators. Each of the assessors had to declare the conflict of interest, if any, and was withdrawn from the assessment of the specific project, replaced by another assessor.

The main result of this long and demanding work was the creation of a List of all Projects, created on ranking/scores.

d) - Establishing the short-list of the best ranking projects: 19-20 of February 2019.
Upon a meeting with all assessors, following the Guidelines requirements, the short-list of the best projects for each WBF Contracting Party was created. The list of 54 projects (9 for each contracting party) was created based on the results (scores) of the first evaluation phase.

In order to create the shortlist, WBF had to apply a threshold for each contracting party by identifying the average of the scores, for example for the projects coming from Belgrade, since the quality of projects was better, the threshold set was higher and other elements like, experience of the applicant, area of intervention and co-financing commitment were taken into consideration.

The final list of 54 short-listed projects was distributed to the WBF – Council of Senior Officials, on 21 February 2019.

e) - Preparation for the Evaluation Panel: 20 of February-3 of March 2019.
Based on the last year experience, WBF team this time extended the period for reading 54 shortlisted projects in order to enable the Panel members to read and get acquainted with all the short-listed projects. The Panel composition was decided by an Order of the WBF ED (Annex 2)
The Evaluation Panel was composed by five WBF Internal Evaluators.
Aiming to ensure a more transparent and comprehensive process, WBF inquired from Peace Nexus Foundation to provide with additional expertise. With the endorsement of WBF’s request for external expertise, the Evaluation Panel, was enriched with two new members: Ms. Deborah Raymond, Mr. Arben Rama and Mr. Randall Puljek-Shank, (observer). During the Evaluation Panel, projects visibility section was seriously elaborated, where WBF designated its PR and Media Coordinator to join discussions and provide suggestion and recommendations.

During the preparatory period of the Evaluation Panel (nine working days), each of the Panel members had to read all 54 short-listed projects in order to be ready for the discussions during the panel and be actively engaged.

In terms of quantity, there were more than 800 pages, including researches on internet, Google, web pages of the organizations, in order to acquire as much information as possible, relevant for increasing the objectivity of judgments and scoring for each application under consideration.

f) - Organizing and proceeding with the Evaluation Panel.
The Evaluation Panel took place at the WBF Secretariat premises from 4th to 5th of March 2019. The WBF Evaluation Units presented the 54 highest ranking projects, following the alphabetic order of the Contracting Parties Capitals, beginning from the highest scored. For each project there was a presenter. 54 Power Point presentations, explaining in details each project’s strengths, were prepared and made available to all Panel members for giving wider insights on the project and for justifying the evaluation/scores of the first individual reading phase.
Each member of the Panel had the right to make questions, ask for clarifications and further information, in order to elaborate his/her opinion on the specific project. After the presentations/discussions for the projects of each Contacting Party (nine projects), each Panel member was invited to rank 6 projects per Contacting Party (4 recommended and two in the reserve list) starting from the highest to the lowest ranked project and provide the rationale for such ranking.

WBF Project Coordinator and WBF Program Assistant, were in charge to include all results in the Ranking list of the Evaluation Panel, per each Contacting Party. After the calculation of all the scores and the relevant discussions, the WBF Executive Director with the administrative personnel created the Recommended List (4 recommended and 2 reserve), endorsed by all the members of the Panel.

The balanced distribution of the projects among Contracting Parties and among WBF Areas of Intervention was taken into consideration during delivering of the Panel.

Each member of the Panel is responsible to keep the confidentiality of the results, until the Executive Director will communicate them to the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of each WBF Contracting Party.

36 shortlisted organisations + 121 project partners = 157 organisations involved

4 Winning Projects
2 Reserve Projects

The deliberations of the Panel led to very rich discussions and highlighted a number of strategic questions the WBF is facing:

- At times, the Panel noticed trade-offs and dilemmas between two core principles of WBF, namely the principle of equal geographical distribution of the project, and the ambition to select the highest quality projects overall. The quality of the submitted and proposed projects was not the same across all Contracting Parties, which is unsurprising given the different pools of potential applicants in each Contracting Party. Like last year, the Secretariat prioritized the balanced regional distribution of the projects, and identified which projects will require the careful accompaniment of the Secretariat team due to the lower level of experience of the applicant and/or lower quality of the initial project design. In the long run, this could lead to a difficult situation, with many high potential applications turned down in some Contracting Parties and weak proposals funded in others. Mitigation measures could be to a) revisit the numeric distribution according to the lead applicant and apply a regional lens instead (ensuring that overall organizations of all Contracting Parties are sufficiently included in projects) and, b) invest in project development capacities of potential applicants.

- Because of the requirement for applicant co-funding of 20%, it was important for the Panel to understand whether the co-funding has been secured and whether other donors have decided to support a project. WBF was able to receive information from other potential donors in several cases, thus limiting the risks of double-funding, and strengthening cooperation with other donors and regional actors.

- WBF’s priority areas are attractive for a large variety of actors and project ideas. When composing its portfolio, one of the underlying questions that could inform future strategic discussions between the Secretariat and the CSO is whether to privilege the depth of its potential impact (by further focusing its priority areas) or breadth (by supporting a diverse range of actions and actors).
h) - The 2019 WBF grant portfolio

The list of projects recommended for funding represent a compelling mix of themes and actors, in line with WBF’s ambition to foster people-to-people contacts at different levels. Collectively these projects enable WBF to fulfil its mission. This section will highlight a few of the areas of focus and their impact within the Contracting Parties, the WB, and beyond.

- The sustainable development priority area includes high visibility projects with economic impact by strengthening export promotion, policies for cross-border digital services, entrepreneurship training and the creation of social enterprises.

- The education and scientific research is well represented in the recommended projects. Some of the notable projects in this area focus on inclusion of handicapped youth and training youth workers, seminars and summer schools that bring together targeted groups from across the region, and a project to edit Wikipedia pages on topics of joint regional cultural heritage which can reach internet users, particularly students across the WB.

- The cultural cooperation priority area includes some of the most innovative projects and also ones that may reach wider audiences. Different project Ideas include a range of methods such as theatre plays, documentaries and creating 3D models of Roman buildings.

- Overall, youth inclusion, gender equality and EU integration have largely informed the design of many project proposals, and as such are mainstreamed in the WBF portfolio.

In addition, the recommended portfolio includes two projects seeking renewed support from WBF. In this way we continue to primarily emphasize working with new applicants while also supporting continuing funding for successful projects to deepen their impact.

- This year the portfolio was enriched with one more cross cutting issue: cooperation among media professional in the region, enhancing exchange of experiences on freedom of media and freedom of expression, in the digital era.

The final list of projects distinguishes between the 24 projects recommended for funding and the 12 reserve list projects. In addition to summarizing basic information about each project, the final list provides more information about what each project entails and about their added value for WBF.

It is important to highlight that projects included in the reserve list offer viable alternatives should any of the 24 projects recommended for funding fall through during the budget clearance and contracting phases.

- The total envelope requested from WBF for the 24 top projects is 279,493.00 EUR. The figure is higher than the limit of 260,000.00 EUR committed for the Second WBF Call for Proposals. In this respect WBF Secretariat is engaged in a deep review process of the budgetary inquires by the applicants. The deep discussion during the Evaluation Panel have already provided a good baseline for negotiation process aiming to reduce some costs without hindering the main objective of the project.
h) - Rejection Letters

We appreciate your interest and efforts to take part in the Second WBF Open Call for Project Proposals. During the Call we received 245 project proposals which networked more than 900 organizations from the Western Balkans. We enjoyed getting to know more about your ideas for making our region more connected, by enhancing people-to-people links. Thank you!

This encourages us to consider that Western Balkans Fund is really relevant and needed in the Western Balkans region, but please consider that the Fund is limited in resources, and unfortunately, we are not able to fund all the great project proposals we have received. Thus, we regret to inform you that, because of financial resources limitation, your application could not be supported in this round of granted projects.

Please consider the information that our decision in no way indicates a negative assessment of your project proposal. As a matter of fact, it speaks about the needs of our region and about our intentions to respond to them in a balanced, equitable and responsible manner.

We would really like to stay in touch with you. We will inform you about our next grant cycle and we hope that you will consider submitting other great project proposals in the future.

In case you need additional information on the selection process, please do not hesitate to contact us. We will do our best to respond to you as soon as possible. The deadline for submitting the questions regarding the selection process is April 2019, not later than 3 p.m.

Thank you, once again, for taking the time to apply. We wish you all the best with your future activities.

Sincerely,

WBF Secretariat

4. The way forward

a) - Validation of the list by the Council of Senior Officials

In addition to the final list of projects, the Secretariat prepared project factsheets related to all 36 projects. The meeting of CSO members leads to the collective endorsement of all 24 regional cooperation projects supported by WBF.

![Diagram of project applications and funded projects](image-url)
b) Negotiation and Contracting process

The contract negotiation will start after the projects are approved by the WBF Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs. The short-listed applicants are required to submit the following supporting documents for review:

1. Statute and the registration
2. Financial statement
3. Partnership agreement

Based on the Evaluation Panel’s decisions, the winning applicants may be asked to revise the budget or the project indicators/activities. In this phase, and prior to the signing of the Grant Contracts, the WBF enters in an intense exchange with the grantees in order to make sure that desired or necessary changes, for example of project partners, outputs, timelines, locations, budget, methods are taken into account in the final contract. For the purpose of the Contracting process, the WBF experts have designed a grant contract template including all reporting templates.

5. Publication of the results

All the lead applicants will be duly informed on the WBF decision concerning their application. The WBF team will publish the list of the winning projects on the WBF web site and social media.

Following the experience of last year, for the purpose of extending the reward the WBF Secretariat has planned to organize a Grant Reward Ceremony and Conference on May 2019.
## Annex 1
### Individual assessment sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scoring sections:</th>
<th>Specific Criteria</th>
<th>Justification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relevance of the project partnership:</strong> (up to 25 points)</td>
<td>1. The partnership parties (lead applicant and project partners) have sound background and track record relevant to the sector indicated in the project proposal.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. The roles of the partnership parties are clear and in line with the objectives of the project proposal.</td>
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<td>3. The project action is jointly prepared and implemented.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4. The importance of the cross-Contracting Party approach to the topic addressed is clearly demonstrated; the results cannot (or only to some extent) be achieved without cooperation.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Relevance of the project:</strong> (up to 25 points)</td>
<td>1. The main objective is in line with the WBF’s call for proposal</td>
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<td>2. The problem has been defined in a clear and comprehensive manner</td>
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<td>3. There is a reasonable link between the situation analysis, objective of the call and proposed set of action</td>
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<td>4. The solution is realistic and achievable</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5. The project has substantial regional relevance</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6. The project is based on a novel idea and/or enhances people to people action in innovative manner.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Methodology:</strong> (up to 10 points)</td>
<td>1. The applicant has provided a detailed timetable and work plan</td>
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<td>2. The proposed budget is reasonable and provides a detailed breakdown of the costs associated with the project</td>
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<td>3. The activities and the related resources are necessary and sufficient to achieve the projected results</td>
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<td>4. The expected results are consistent with the objectives of the project</td>
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<td>5. The outputs and deliverables are clearly described and relatable to each of the project activity</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. The outputs and deliverables are easily measurable (quantitatively and/or qualitatively)</td>
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<td>7. Target groups are identified within each of the project activity (where applicable)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>8. The potential risks that could endanger the achievement of the project results have been identified and the applicant has proposed a strategy to mitigate these risks.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Project Management Capacity:</strong> (up to 20 points)</td>
<td>1. The applicant has previous experience relatable to the proposed project</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. The applicants have demonstrated to have stable and sufficient financial resources to maintain their activity throughout the proposed action</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. The applicants have other technical tools and facilities at their disposal relevant for the project implementation.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sustainability and visibility</strong> (20 points)</td>
<td>1. The applicants have a clear visibility strategy to ensure WBF visibility during the implementation of project activities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. The extent to which the proposed plan for dissemination of the project results and achievements is clear, comprehensive and meaningful</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. The project outcomes can be used as good practices lessons by other actors in the region</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4. The sustainability of the project is addressed comprehensively in the proposal</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5. The project activities and results are in line with strategic initiatives both on local and regional levels.</td>
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</table>

**Total score:**
From 8 January to 18 February 2019, the assessment process of WBF Second Call for Proposals took place. Six Project Evaluation Units, composed by 4 internal assessors, assessed 224 projects that passed the Eligibility Check. The Evaluation Panel will decide/recommend a consolidated list of projects to be proposed to the WBF CSO for selecting the winners of the WBF Second Call for Regional Projects.

1. Guidelines for Evaluation Panel

The Evaluation Panel will take place at the WBF Secretariat premises from 4th to 5th of March 2019. The Evaluation Panel will be composed of:

1. Mr. Gjergj Murra, WBF Executive Director - Chair of the Panel
2. Ms. Dafina Beqiri, WBF Program Manager - Member
3. Ms. Antoaneta Ivanova, WBF Program Manager - Member
4. Ms. Ksenija Vukmirovic, WBF Program Coordinator - Member
5. Ms. Valbona Dedja, Executive Assistant - Member
6. Ms. Arben Rama, WBF External Expert - Member
7. Ms. Deborah Reymond, Peace Nexus Foundation - Member

WBF PR and Media Coordinator, opinion will be taken into consideration during the discussions about the visibility and PR relevance of projects under evaluation.

Panel Proceedings

- The WBF Evaluation Units will present the 54 highest ranking projects, following the alphabetic order of the Contracting Parties Capitals, beginning from the highest scored.
- Annex 1 provides the list of shortlisted projects for each WBF Contracting Party, specifying the composition of the Evaluation Unit for each;
- Each Unit decides who will be the relator/speaker;
- Each presentation can’t be longer than four minutes
- Each Unit should justify their overall evaluation/scores on each project;
- Each member of the Panel has the right to make questions, ask for clarifications and further information, in order to elaborate his/her opinion on the specific project

2. Ranking Procedure

- After the presentations/discussions for the projects of each Contacting Party (nine projects), each Panel member is invited to establish a ranking list of 6 projects per Contracting Party (4 recommended and two in the reserve list) starting from the highest to the lowest ranked project.
- Annex 2 provides the format for the creation of the individual ranking list of the projects per the contracting party.
- Each member will rank a project following the below listed criteria:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Relevance of the Project Proposal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>How relevant is the project proposal to the objectives and priorities of the WBF Call for Proposals?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td>How relevant to the particular needs and constraints of the target contracting party(ies) is the proposal (including synergy with other regional initiatives and avoidance of duplication)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td>How clearly defined and strategically chosen are those involved (final beneficiaries, target groups)? Have their needs been clearly defined and does the proposal address them appropriately?</td>
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<tr>
<td>IV.</td>
<td>Does the project proposal contain specific added-value elements, such as regional cooperation, people to people mobility, connectivity and regional cohesion or innovation and best practices?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Panel members are invited to provide the rationale for such ranking.

WBF Program Coordinator and WBF Program Assistant, will be in charge to include all results in the Annex 3 Ranking list of the Evaluation Panel per the Contracting Party.

After the calculation of all the scores and the relevant discussions, the WBF Executive Director with the administrative personnel will create the Recommended List (4 recommended and 2 reserve), to be endorsed by all the members of the Panel;

In order to preserve the overall interests of WBF, the Executive Director, in limited cases, has the right to include project from the shortlist to the reserve list;

The balance distribution of the projects among Contracting Parties and among WBF Areas of Intervention should be highly taken into consideration during delivering of the Panel;

Each member of the Panel is responsible to keep the confidentiality of the results until the Executive Director will communicate them to the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the Contracting Parties.

Done in Tirana, on 25 February 2019