

| Nadace OSF



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# The Stronger Roots Program

STRONGER  
ROOTS

Civil society organizations need support from the wider society to be able to fulfill their mission and maintain their legitimacy and financial stability. The importance of **strengthened ties of the civil society organizations to the people and various groups around them** has been demonstrated in post-communist Central Europe over the last decade in particular, when many organizations have been challenged by repeated attempts to delegitimize their work and to limit the space in which they operate. Moreover, the growing fragmentation has evolved as a deeper problem which is making the society break up into groups pitched against each other in a variety of situations. The ensuing distrust among people and organizations alike can undermine a healthy environment for democracy, including the civic space that civil society organizations need to uphold key values and deliver services for all groups in society.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) cannot beat back these trends alone, without being rooted in and supported by the broader public and without some self-reflection on how they function. Through stronger ties, civil society organizations grow stronger roots: increasing their social capital is a vital aim for any organization looking to **become more resilient and to overcome the fragmentation of the society.**

In response to these trends, Open Society Fund Prague, Glopolis, Open Society Foundation Bratislava and the NIOK Foundation have created a consortium to implement the Stronger Roots Program since 2019 and jointly strive to strengthen the roots of civil society in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary; and from 2022 on in Poland as well.

**The Stronger Roots Program aims to increase the resilience of civil society organizations and their networks, strengthen their social capital and embed them in the communities and societies in which they operate.**

#### **DONOR COLLABORATIVE OPEN TO NEW MEMBERS**

The Stronger Roots Program is preparing its next round to start in 2022 with the kind support from Porticus and Open Society Initiative for Europe. The Program is currently seeking more donors, to establish a donor collaborative and help mainstream the practices of social base building and network collaboration into the civil societies in Poland, Czechia, Slovakia and Hungary.

## We are supporting...

CSOs in strengthening their relationships to the people around them (social base building)

networks to strengthen ties to stakeholders with divergent views (transversal collaboration)

internal development of the CSOs and networks through complex financial, expert and peer support

## ... in order to contribute to...

→ increasing people's active participation in public affairs

→ bringing more effective responses to societal challenges

→ increasing the capacities and professionalism of the organizations and networks

## ... which will lead to...

→ professional CSOs strongly rooted in the society

→ increased resilience of the civil society

→ enhanced trust, dialogue and collaboration in the society

→ decreased fragmentation of the society

## → healthy democracy

# The Stronger Roots Program's Benefits

**COMBINING STRATEGIC CONCEPTS WITH HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE** The Program benefits from 30 years of granting experience by OSF Prague and OSF Bratislava, as well as profound methodologies elaborated by the NIOK Foundation and Glopolis.

**FOCUSING ON THE AUDIENCE, COMMUNITY AND PARTNERS** The Program has been eye-opening in making grantees seriously think about their clients and supporters, as well as their partners and stakeholders, as a community which is not only an object for outbound communication but as something that can also provide important inputs and contribute immensely to their ability to fulfill their missions.

**STRENGTHENING INTERNAL DEVELOPMENT** The grantees highly appreciate the inward focus of the Program on organizational development and building up the professional capacities of the staff, rather than financing service-type activities as is typical for the majority of grant programs.

**PROVIDING FINANCIAL, EXPERT AND PEER SUPPORT** The combination of funding with extensive expert support in the form of mentoring, consultations and training as well as peer-learning helps the grantees to reach their goals and increase their impact.

**FOSTERING A PARTNERSHIP APPROACH** Frequent communication between the Program staff and the grantees enables the developing of close relationships and making the support tailor-made to their particular needs.

**TRIGGERING TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE** The Program contributes to enhanced trust, dialogue and collaboration among people, institutions and societal sectors at large and presents a long-term impact on the organizations and the whole society.

# How the Stronger Roots Program Works

## Our Concepts

The Program develops two concepts and is structured accordingly into two separate grant programs:

### 1 SOCIAL BASE BUILDING FOR INDIVIDUAL CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

Social base building is an approach and a long-term process in which an organization strives to build living and mutual relations with the people around them and various groups of society, which in time creates a strong community of passive and active supporters. If this approach becomes an integral part of the organization's strategy, it helps the organization to identify, reach out and grow their supporters and deepen their engagement, pinpoint people's needs, raise more funds, have a better ability to mobilize people and increase the organizations' social legitimacy and resilience.

The Stronger Roots Program supports CSOs in implementing their social base building projects, builds their long-term capacities in related areas, helps them understand and embrace the concept as an approach and to start integrating it into their operations.

### 2 TRANSVERSAL COLLABORATION FOR NETWORKS OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

Transversal collaboration is a concept based on the assumption that the more conscious contacts, constructive dialogue and collaborative interactions exist among diverse actors, the more resilient and effective the civil society is.

The Stronger Roots Program thus supports civil society networks to systematically engage with outsider groups of stakeholders with whom they had little or no collaboration with before, be it either civil society groups with diverging ideological worldviews or from more distant geographical locations, or businesses and government institutions.

This results not only in empowering the networks, improving their relationships, processes and competences, but above all in generating new or more effective solutions to societal problems presented by the networks and their partners.

## ↓ How the Stronger Roots Program Works

### Who We Support

The Program works with CSOs and networks of **different size, geographical scope and thematic focus** (environmental protection, education, culture, children & youth, social services etc.). The applicants have to submit a solid proposal and prove they have a strong commitment to implement the project by going through

a rigorous selection process which includes proposal evaluation by external experts as well as personal interviews with selected applicants.

**In 2022 – 2024, the Program plans to support 32–60 CSOs and 12 networks.**

### What Kinds of Support We Provide

**The Program provides its grantees with a combination of financial, expert and peer support.** The grant supports 1½ to 2 years-long social base building or transversal collaboration projects with 20 – 35,000 EUR and thus gives the grantees the financial stability and the capacities to implement their projects.

- **Training and workshops:** The external experts help the grantees to improve their skills and competences at joint sessions whenever common needs are identified.

**The peer support** consists of other networking, joint evaluation and experience sharing sessions which provide more learning and networking opportunities for the grantees.

**The expert support program** offers a complex and flexible package tailored to each grantee's individual needs and gives meaningful additional value to grant-making. It includes:

**In social base building, the expert and peer support program is based on a concept-specific methodology created by the NIOK Foundation, which has been developed and tested in Hungary within the OSIFE Social Base Building Program since 2016 and in Slovakia, Czechia and Poland since 2020. More than 80 CSOs have already benefited from this support.**

- **Mentoring:** Each grantee is supported by an experienced CSO or corporate professional that builds a trustful partnership with their mentees, provides inspiration, encouragement and external expert view.
- **Individual consulting:** The grantees have access to consultancy hours with experts from fields relevant to their projects and based on their specific needs (communication, fundraising, collaboration and negotiation, leadership and change management, etc.).

## ↓ How the Stronger Roots Program Works

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### Our Impact

In social base building, the Program focuses on increasing the awareness, capacity and performance of its grantees. Throughout their projects, the grantees not only implement activities and achieve specific objectives, but they experience a change in terms of their mindset in looking at their supporters and clients, learn new outreach and engagement strategies and **make concrete changes in their strategies, processes or practices.**

Similarly in assessing the networks' transversal collaboration, the Program not only examines the stage of engaging with divergent stakeholder groups, but also how it **improved relationships, enhanced the strategic processes in a network and advanced the competences of the networks.** The impact data are gathered through both internal and external evaluations.

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### Our Academy

Although only a limited number of organizations can receive the intensive financial, expert and peer support, the Stronger Roots Program aspires to influence a wider community. The Program systematically **builds the methodology** of supporting social base building and transversal collaboration and shares it with other experts, capacity building organizations or donors. Besides, the Program **publishes case studies and toolkits** and plans

to hold public workshops and sharing sessions on both concepts for interested CSOs. With a growing number of former grantees, an alumni group will become engaged in mainstreaming the concepts of social base building and transversal collaboration.

# Who We Are

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### Open Society Fund Prague (CZ)

OSF Prague is one of the largest foundations in Czechia and over the almost 30 years of its existence it has supported 10,000 projects with almost 2 billion Czech Crowns. Its mission is to support a vibrant civil society. It coordinates the Stronger Roots Program consortium.

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### Open Society Foundation Bratislava (SK)

OSF Bratislava plays a key watchdog role in the development of civil society and sensitization of the society on corruption and human rights in Slovakia and since 2009, it has been one of the operators of EEA grants with its total budget amounting to 3,5 million EUR.

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### The NIOK Foundation (HU)

NIOK's mission is to strengthen civil society in Hungary. As the leading service provider, NIOK has strived to develop the sector with a complex, need-based ecosystem of services and programs for over 25 years.

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### Glopolis (CZ)

Glopolis is a think-tank facilitating collaboration towards sustainable democracy. After 15 years of research, awareness raising and advocacy it focuses on bringing together civil society, government, business and other stakeholders to address key challenges.

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