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SIGN Network Membership Document

SIGN Network, established in 2009, is a regional network of indigenous grantmakers dedicated to the development of sustainable local communities in civil society. The goal of the network is to promote and support the sustainability of philanthropic efforts and cross-sector partnerships within the local communities in southeastern Europe. The network uses its strong understanding of local conditions to partner with grassroots organizations, think tanks and other local associations. It provides meaningful experience in successful grant-making, renowned expertise in philanthropy and advocacy, local community development, and cross-sector partnerships at both the domestic and international level.

Presently, the full members of SIGN Network are Trag Foundation in Serbia, MOZAIK Foundation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Fund for Active Citizenship (fAKT) in Montenegro, Forum for Civic Initiatives (FIQ) in Kosovo and HORUS in North Macedonia. In the desire to expand its membership, SIGN Network established a task force to create this document, which establishes the following: membership status, the rights and responsibilities of individual groups, the criteria, rules and procedures for a potential membership application, selection and termination. This is a living document and thus can be amended with a majority vote of the steering group, the executive directors of the full members of SIGN Network.

Membership types

This document acknowledges two types of membership in SIGN Network:

1. **Full membership** is open to CSOs registered in one of the Western Balkan countries¹ and is predominantly focused on grant-making, philanthropy and community development.
2. **Associate membership** is open to representatives of academia, think tanks, institutions, businesses, business associations, networks, media outlets and CSOs that do not comply with the full membership criteria. Associate members may include entities from within and outside of the Western Balkans region.

Full membership

Full membership is open to non-state-controlled, non-profit, non-partisan entities registered in a country from the Western Balkans. To be eligible for full membership, a CSO must comply with the following criteria:

1. It has given grants to civic initiatives on a regular basis over the past three years.
2. It focuses its action on community development.
3. It works intentionally to develop its philanthropy branch.

1. ¹ The Western Balkans region is defined in accordance with the EU Strategic documents.





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4. It publicly and freely disseminates its knowledge, skills, information, methodologies, practices and principles about community development and philanthropy.
5. It has a defined organizational structure, especially in terms of governance, management, functional systems, the policies and procedures of grant-giving, reporting, procurement, employment and conflicts of interest.
6. It has an institutional audit from the previous three years and/or the ability to provide other substantial evidence, such as an annual report, which showcases that its financial statements and non-financial disclosures are true and fair. It attests that the books of accounts are properly maintained and accurate as required by the laws of the respective country.
7. It is reputable and transparent in its work.
8. It is independent from its government and decision-making team.

The steering group can make exceptions in regards to criterion 1 should the candidate demonstrate a solid track record and exceptional results in philanthropy, civil society and/or community development.

Rights and responsibilities:

Full members of SIGN Network have the rights and responsibility for the following: participate in the decision-making process, meetings and activities, contribute to the network's strategies and action plans, share their knowledge, skills and practices with other members and develop SIGN Network's contacts and outreach within the Western Balkans. In their conduct, full members are obliged to respect and apply anti-discrimination rules as related to ethnicity, religion, gender, age and sexual orientation. All stated rights and responsibilities apply to both current and future full members of SIGN Network.

Associate members

Associate membership is open to representatives of academia, think tanks, institutions, businesses, business associations, networks, media and CSOs that would otherwise not comply with the full membership criteria. Associate members may include entities from within and outside of the Western Balkans. In order to be eligible for associate membership, the applicant must comply with the following criteria:

1. It must be relevant to researching, fostering strong public relations, practicing advocacy ideals, sharing and disseminating knowledge, networking, grant-making and developing philanthropic communities.
2. It has a clearly defined organizational structure including governance, management, functional systems, policies and procedures in terms of grant-making, reporting, public procurement, employment and conflict of interest.
3. It is reputable and transparent in its work.
4. It is independent and non-partisan.



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Rights and responsibilities

Associate members of SIGN Network may be invited to take a role in working groups, task forces, projects, events and activities. They are welcome to contribute to the network's knowledge base, skills, practices and contacts. They can offer ideas in order to develop and improve SIGN Network's outreach within the Western Balkans and beyond.



Application procedure

Candidates for full and associate members are invited to apply throughout the year by submitting an expression of interest (EOI) to the steering group. This EOI package must comply with the following:

1. It is submitted in English.
2. It has been prepared and signed by the legal representative of the organization.
3. It addresses the compliance with SIGN Network's full and associate membership criteria.
4. It addresses all supporting documentation.

This supporting documentation must include the following:

- A statement of purpose in the form of an application letter
- Its most recent proof of registration in English
- The most recent version of its statutes in English
- The most recent version of its organizational chart
- A list of current board members and their professional backgrounds
- The most recent audit report and/or other substantial evidence showcasing that its financial statements, as well as non-financial disclosures, are true and fair
- Its most recent annual report
- Its code of conduct

The steering group will make a decision on the membership status and inform the applicant within 15 business days upon reception of the completed EOI. Should the applicant be admitted, it will be expected to sign and comply with SIGN Network's standards for transparency, adopted in 2013.

Termination of membership

Should the steering group determine that an organization no longer complies with the membership criteria described by this document, it shall issue an official notification and provide the member with 30 days to respond in writing. Based on the organization's response and ability to prove their eligibility, the steering group will then make a final decision on their membership status within 15 business days.

The steering group reserves the right to automatically terminate the membership of any organization which is inactive without prior notice for more than one year or with prior notice but for more than two years. This also applies to those who, by violating the membership criteria and/or standards for transparency, were a detriment to



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the functioning and reputation of SIGN Network. Such termination of membership is permanent, and these former members cannot apply to SIGN Network again.

CSOs whose membership status was revoked based on inactivity have the right to apply again one year after their membership termination date; however, they must address in writing the ways in which they intend to improve their participation in and contribution to SIGN Network. Organizations whose membership status was terminated twice cannot apply for SIGN Network membership again.

Organizations may ask to withdraw from membership. The request for withdrawal from either full or associate membership status must be submitted in English to the steering group, who will acknowledge and notify the member on the termination of their status within 15 days. All entities which voluntarily withdraw from SIGN Network may apply again, in accordance to the procedures and criteria stated by this document, within one year. Standard decision-making procedures and deadlines will apply.

Concluding remarks

The steering group has concluded that all existing members of SIGN Network enlisted in the second paragraph of this document are in compliance with the stated membership criteria, rules and regulations. As such, no further re-appliance is necessary to acknowledge their full membership status.

This document has been adopted on July 4, 2018 and will come into force within 8 working days of its adoption.



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