

Terms of Reference (ToR)

For

“Engagement of a Service Provider to Support the Startup Albania Agency: Grant Scheme Operational Manual and Methodology for the Legal and Financial Follow-Up of Grant Contracts”

Under Challenge Fund, EU4Innovation 2023-2026 Project

Tirana, Albania
September 2026

TERMS OF REFERENCE AND SCOPE OF SERVICE

1. Background

Partners Albania for Change and Development (PA) is an Albanian NGO, established in 2001. PA's mission consists of the support of civil society and the facilitation of inter-sector cooperation to strengthen democratic institutions and advance economic development in Albania. PA is a member of Partners Global, a network of 19 independent organizations in Europe, the Americas, Africa, and the Middle East, working for peaceful and democratic change.

PA has built its operations in four key programmatic areas, namely:

- 1. Enabling Environment and Sustainable Development of CSOs**, contributing to the empowerment of civil society actors and civic engagement through *capacity building* programmes, *monitoring and advocacy* for an enabling legal and practical environment for CSOs operation, and *financial support* for the sector.
- 2. Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation**, developing and supporting the ecosystem of entrepreneurship and social enterprises (SEs) through research, advocacy, financial support mechanisms, expertise, and networking opportunities.
- 3. Philanthropic Activity and Support Infrastructure**, developing and promoting philanthropic activity in the country through research, advocacy actions for an enabling environment, awareness raising, and promotion activities on the economic and social value of philanthropy.
- 4. Transparent and Accountable Participatory Governance** contributing to the development and growth of civil society practitioners and public administration officials in their efforts to build strong institutions, manage open and transparent processes, and overcome corruption.

PA has vast experience in designing and managing EU-funded projects and sub-granting schemes in the frame of EU projects. Since 2012, PA has implemented **more than 20 projects funded by the EU**. The organization also works for the **development of Social Enterprises** (SEs) and start-ups, generating social impact through a) research; b) advocacy; c) education and public awareness; and d) financial support to 3rd parties.

Since June 2023, Partners Albania is the Cooperation Partner of SIDA for the implementation of the Challenge Fund, under the framework of the EU4Innovation Phase II, 2023-2026.

The Multi Donor Action EU4Innovation Phase II, 2023-2026 is jointly co-financed by the EU, the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), and Sida and implemented by GIZ and Embassy of Sweden in Tirana. The aim of the Challenge Fund is to improve and diversify finance opportunities for Albanian start-ups and MSMEs, with innovative solutions (e.g., products, services, business models, processes) and (ii) start-ups with prominent tech content with the potential for global expansion and rapid growth.

A relevant component of the Challenge Fund is support to Innovation4Albania (I4A), the National Agency for Innovation and Startups established in 2026 under the Ministry of Economy and Innovation.

The Startup Albania Agency, founded in December 2023 and operating since March 2026 within I4A, is responsible for designing and implementing public support instruments for start-ups. Its flagship instrument is the annual Grant Scheme for start-ups and, since 2026, incubators and accelerators.

The scale-up of the scheme and introduction of a new beneficiary category have increased the complexity of its administration and follow-up. Existing procedures are currently reflected across call documentation, contract templates, internal decisions and staff practice. The assignment will therefore support the Agency in consolidating these procedures into a Grant Scheme Operational Manual and a Methodology for the Legal and Financial Follow-Up of Grant Contracts.

2. Objective of the ToR

The main objective of these Terms of Reference (ToR) is to engage a **Local Service Provider** comprising either a team of experts or a company to update and, where necessary, equip the Startup Albania Agency with the rules, tools and governance arrangements needed to manage the grant scheme in a lawful, transparent and auditable way.

Specifically, the experts will:

- **develop, or review and complete**, a Grant Scheme Operational Manual covering the full grant cycle for start-ups and incubators;
- **design a methodology and toolkit for the legal and financial follow-up** of the contracts signed under the 2026 Grant Scheme and future calls;
- **strengthen the governance of the scheme**, with clear roles, segregation of duties and a complete audit trail, and set out a prioritised action plan to close the gaps identified.

The assignment shall be completed within the period from the date of contract signature until **15 December 2026**, which shall be the final and non-extendable completion date, with a level of effort of up to **23 working days** for the Team leader and **17 working days** for the second Key Expert. The working language of the assignment will be **Albanian**. The assignment will be carried out in Tirana. Tenderers shall propose a detailed work plan and calendar, indicating the working days allocated to each task and phase, the responsible expert(s), and the proposed deadlines for completion of each deliverable.

3. Duties and Responsibilities

The **Local Service Provider** shall be responsible for the following duties and responsibilities:

Phase 1. Assessment

Task	Output	Measure of completion
Kick off meeting with Agency management; collection of all scheme documents (call regulation, evaluation records, contract templates, signed contracts, payment files, internal decisions).	Inception Note (D1)	Delivered by Day 3; contains work plan, list of documents received and missing, and interview schedule.
Structured interviews with staff involved in each stage of the grant cycle (programme, evaluation, legal, finance, monitoring, management) and with beneficiaries.	Interview notes, annexed to D2	At least 2 staff interviews
Map the legal basis of each stage of the grant cycle, from call publication to contract closure, and identify gaps, overlaps and conflicts between acts.	Legal framework matrix	Every stage of the cycle (minimum 10) linked to its legal basis; every gap listed with a recommendation.
Clause by clause review of the Call Regulation 2026 and of the two grant contract templates (startups, incubators).	Legal compliance table	100% of clauses rated as compliant, to be amended or missing; proposed wording drafted for every clause rated to be amended or missing.
Review of all financial provisions: budget structure, tranche conditions, eligible costs, co financing, reporting and payment authorisation.	Financial provisions gap table	Every financial clause and every tranche condition of both contract types assessed, with risk rating (high, medium, low).

Task	Output	Measure of completion
Review of a sample of Grant2026 contract files, selected with the Agency by grant size, region and beneficiary type, against a standard compliance checklist.	Completed file checklists and summary of findings	12 files reviewed (10 startups, 2 incubators); one completed checklist per file; findings classified by risk.

Phase 2. Development

Task	Output	Measure of completion
Extract every obligation of the beneficiary from the contract templates and the call regulation.	Catalogue of beneficiary obligations	100% of obligations listed, each with evidence required, deadline or frequency, responsible unit, and the contract clause providing the sanction.
Draft the legal and governance chapters of the Manual: roles and responsibilities, evaluation and conflict of interest, award, complaints and appeals, contracting, amendments, non compliance, termination, recovery, closure, records and data protection.	Legal chapters of the Manual (D3)	Each chapter includes step by step procedure, responsible person, deadline, legal basis and the document produced at each step.
Draft the financial chapters of the Manual: tranche structure and payment conditions, eligible and ineligible costs, supporting documents, financial reporting and payment authorisation.	Financial chapters of the Manual (D3)	Every budget category of both contract types covered; one verification checklist per tranche per contract type.

Task	Output	Measure of completion
Design the risk based monitoring model for all active contracts.	Risk scoring matrix (part of D4)	At least 6 weighted indicators and 3 risk levels, with the frequency of desk reviews, need for on site visits and sample size of documents defined for each level; tested on the 12 sampled contracts.
Build the Contract Compliance Register in Excel, tracking for each contract its obligations, tranches, reports, findings, risk level and status.	Contract Compliance Register (part of D4)	Structured for all active contracts; pre populated with the 12 sampled contracts; one page user instructions.
Develop the financial verification toolkit, including a specific module for incubators.	Toolkit (part of D4)	Financial report template, expenditure verification sheet, on site visit checklist, list of at least 15 red flags, and a form verifying services delivered by incubators to startups.
Define the audit trail of the scheme.	Standard contract file index and document retention matrix	Every stage of the cycle specifies which documents must be on file, who signs them and for how long they are retained.

Phase 3. Validation and handover

Task	Output	Measure of completion
Consolidate all findings into a prioritised plan that strengthens the governance of the scheme and prepares it for audit.	Governance and Audit Readiness Action Plan (D5)	Every high risk finding from D2 addressed by an action with owner and deadline, grouped into actions before the next tranche and actions before the next call.
Present the Manual and methodology to management for validation, and train the staff who will apply them.	Validation workshop and training (D6)	One half day validation workshop; one half day training for at least 6 staff; materials, attendance list and record of decisions.
Finalise all deliverables on the basis of Agency comments and hand over all editable files.	Final versions of D3 and D4; Final Report (D7)	All Agency comments addressed in a comments log; Final Report of maximum 10 pages delivered.

4. Main deliverables

All deliverables shall be written in Albanian, in clear and professional language, and submitted in editable format (Word and Excel).

A deliverable is complete when it meets the measures above and is accepted in writing by **Partners Albania for Change and Development (PA)**, following confirmation by the I4A.

No.	Deliverable	Minimum content
D1	Inception Note	Work plan, document inventory, interview schedule. Maximum 5 pages.
D2	Legal and Financial Assessment Report	Legal framework matrix, legal compliance table, financial provisions gap table, 12 file checklists, risk rated findings.

No.	Deliverable	Minimum content
D3	Grant Scheme Operational Manual	Legal, governance and financial chapters; flowcharts of the core processes; RACI and authority matrix; proposed amendments to the contract templates; templates and forms in annex. Maximum 60 pages excluding annexes.
D4	Contract Follow Up Methodology and Toolkit	Obligations catalogue, risk scoring matrix, Contract Compliance Register, verification toolkit, escalation matrix, 5 model decisions, file index and retention matrix.
D5	Governance and Audit Readiness Action Plan	Prioritised actions with owner and deadline for every high risk finding.
D6	Validation workshop and staff training	Workshop and training delivered; materials, attendance and decisions recorded.
D7	Final Report and handover	Summary of work and results, comments log, recommendations for the next call, handover of all files.

The Service Provider shall carry out the assignment using the following methods:

- **Initial consultation-** A minimum of 2 physical meetings with Agency management: a kickoff meeting on Day 1 and a validation workshop in Phase 3.
- **Document review-** Analysis of the legal framework, the call regulation, the contract templates and a sample of contract files.
- **Structured interviews-**With staff and beneficiaries
- **Testing-** The risk model and checklists are tested on the 12 sampled contracts before being finalised, so that the tools are proven in practice and not only on paper.

To enable the experts to complete the assignment within the contracting period, I4A will:

- appoint a focal point with authority to request documents and schedule meetings;
- provide all documents listed in the Inception Note;
- give access to contract files at its premises for the file review;
- provide consolidated written comments within 2 working days of receiving each draft;
- ensure the availability of staff for interviews, the workshop and the training;
- and provide consolidated written comments after receiving each draft deliverable.

5. Experience and qualifications

Expert 1: Legal Expert, Team Leader shall have:

- Graduate or postgraduate degree in Law; license to practice as a lawyer in Albania is an asset;
- at least 8 years of professional legal experience, including at least 4 years with public institutions;
- proven experience in drafting internal regulations, procedures, manuals or legal acts for Albanian public institutions;
- proven experience with public grant schemes, subsidy programmes or donor funded financing instruments;
- sound knowledge of administrative procedure, contract law, conflict of interest and public finance legislation;
- fluency in Albanian and English (oral and written).

Expert 2: Financial Compliance Expert shall have:

- Graduate or postgraduate degree in Finance, with demonstrated specialization in public finance, financial control or audit;
- at least 8 years of professional experience;
- proven experience in the financial monitoring, verification or audit of grant contracts or publicly funded projects;
- proven experience in designing risk-based monitoring systems, checklists or control procedures;
- sound knowledge of the Albanian legislation on public financial management and control;
- fluency in Albanian and English (oral and written).

Experience with startups, innovation funding or EU programmes will be considered an asset for both positions.

The Team Leader is responsible for the coordination, quality assurance and timely delivery of all deliverables related to this assignment.

6. Timeline of the assignment

The assignment shall be completed within the period from the date of contract signature until **15 December 2026**, with a level of effort of up to 23 working days for the Team leader and 17 working days for the second Key Expert. The experts shall ensure their availability throughout the agreed implementation period. They must be independent and free from any actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest in relation to the responsibilities they undertake.

The assignment will be carried out in Tirana, with no office space provided. Meetings, the file review, the workshop and the training will take place at the premises of the Agency. No travel outside Tirana is planned within this assignment.

7. Contracting Authority

The Service Provider shall work under the supervision of Partners Albania for Change and Development

(Partners Albania), which shall also serve as the primary reporting and coordination point for the assignment. All deliverables, tools and materials produced under this assignment shall be the exclusive property of the Agency, which may use, adapt and publish them without restriction.

8. Submission of the documents

The deadline for submitting the application is **19 October 2026 at 09:00 hrs.**

Application documents must be in English and sent via e-mail to the following address:

partners@partnersalbania.org

Partners Albania for Change and Development embraces diversity in its hiring, welcoming individuals of all religions, ethnicities, genders, and orientations to apply.