BCSDN Civic Space Hackathon:
Open Call for CSOs and Academic Institutions

Innovate for Impact: Let's Design the Future of Civic Resilience
📍 Skopje | 📅 June 17–18, 2025

Application Deadline: May 11, 2025

Are you ready to turn bold ideas into real-world solutions?

The Balkan Civil Society Development Network (BCSDN) is inviting civil society organizations (CSOs) and academic institutions from across the Western Balkans to assemble their best team and join our first-ever **Civic Space Hackathon: Innovate for Impact!**

Together, we will co-create powerful solutions to some of the most urgent threats facing civil society today: **disinformation, smear campaigns, and shrinking access to essential resources.** This is your chance to bring together your brightest minds — activists, tech experts, legal thinkers, communicators, designers — and **design the future of civic resilience**.

🎯 What's the Goal?

Through the Western Balkans Civil Society Hub, this hackathon is all about **sparking fresh ideas, building real solutions, and fueling action**. Our mission is to strengthen civic space and support the sustainability of CSOs across the region by:

- **Co-creating actionable responses** to financial and legitimacy challenges
- **Inspiring innovation** through digital tools and new approaches
- **Backing promising solutions** with mentorship, visibility, and seed funding

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🧩 The Challenge: Designing the Future of Civic Resilience

Civil society in the Western Balkans is under double pressure:
💬 **Smear campaigns and disinformation** are eroding public trust.
💶 **Restrictive and politicized funding practices** are undermining CSO independence.

Undermined trust leads to weakened support. Financial instability makes CSOs more vulnerable. Lack of transparency allows fake organizations (GONGOs) to dominate the scene.

It's time to flip the script. At the hackathon, you'll work on possible solutions that could:

- Detect, expose, and counter smear campaigns
- Build strategic communication and narrative resilience
- Foster cross-border solidarity and real-time response networks
- Create open tools for transparent public funding tracking
- Promote public trust and strengthen grassroots philanthropy
- Reimagine sustainable resource models for civil society

🔹 **Important**:

The hackathon will create a space where **ideas are meant to be questioned, strengthened, or even reimagined based on collective input and shared experience**. Together, we will move from brainstorming to prototyping, with guidance from experienced mentors every step of the way. You don't need a fully developed concept — just an initial idea, an open mind, and a willingness to think creatively.

🚀 What's in It for You?

- 🥇 **€3,500 First Prize**
- 🥈 **€2,000 Second Prize**
- 💼 **Post-Hackathon Support**: Seed funding and possibility of follow-up contracts* for further development (up to €50,000 available)!
- 💬 **Expert Mentorship**: Get hands-on support from experienced mentors in tech, communications, advocacy, and digital innovation.
- 🤝 **Connections**: Meet regional innovators, civic tech experts, and potential supporters.
- 📣 **Visibility**: Your solution will be showcased across the region and beyond through BCSDN's network and partners.

Plus: travel, accommodation, and local expenses are fully covered for selected teams.

Important: These are not grants. Solutions selected for further development will be contracted by BCSDN, which will retain intellectual property rights. This ensures long-term use and impact as part of building shared civic infrastructure in the region.

🏛 Who Can Apply?

We are inviting **NGOs and academic institutions based in the Western Balkans** (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia) to **form interdisciplinary teams of 4–6 people**.

- The lead applicant must be a registered NGO or academic institution from the region.
- Individual applications are **not** accepted.
- Teams must bring together **diverse skills** - from activism to tech, design, legal, communications, or research.
- Participants must be committed, collaborative, and ready to work intensively before and during the event.

📝 How to Apply?

Submit your proposal by answering these questions (in no more than 200 words each):

1. **The Challenge**: What specific civic space problem do you want your team to tackle?
2. **The Idea**: What is your initial approach to solving it — and what would you like to explore at the hackathon? What are the main challenges you can perceive already?

👉 **Application link: https://bit.ly/4jTtjki**
📅 **Deadline: May 11, 2025**

🔍 Selection Criteria

Your application will be evaluated based on:

1. **Relevance/Impact**: The idea clearly addresses a specific civic space challenge and will inspire or help many.

2. **Team Diversity**: Your team combines different skills, backgrounds and perspectives.
3. **Feasibility**: Your idea is practical, usable, and can be developed into a prototype during the hackathon.

📍 Event Details

- 📅 Timeline:
    - Selection of participants: 16 May
    - Onboarding and pre-hackathon work: 5 - 15 June
    - In-person event: June 17–18, 2025 (arrival June 16, departure June 18)
- 📍 Location: Skopje, North Macedonia
- 🗣️ Working language: English

🌍 Why Join?

Civil society is strongest when we **work together**.
Join forces with activists, technologists, advocates, and creators from across the region. Build solutions that matter. Defend civic space. Shape the future.

🛠️ **Let's hack the system for good. Apply now and bring your team's vision to life!**