

Balkan Green Ideas Program

Implementation Guidelines

1. Program Overview

Balkan Green Ideas (BGI) is a regional program that supports innovative green business ideas and social enterprises across the Western Balkans. The program aims to identify, support, and scale initiatives that contribute to environmental sustainability, green entrepreneurship, and inclusive economic development.

BGI operates through a network of national partner organizations across the Western Balkans. These partners coordinate local activities, identify promising ideas, and support entrepreneurs throughout the program cycle.

The program is coordinated regionally by the Balkan Green Foundation (BGF) and culminates in a regional competition bringing together the most promising initiatives from across the region.

BGI is structured around five key pillars:

- Funding
- Program Process
- Monitoring and Evaluation
- Partnerships and Ecosystem Building
- Events and Visibility

1.1 Program Evolution

Building on the great foundation set in the previous editions of Balkan Green Ideas, the programme continues to evolve in response to the changing needs of green entrepreneurs and the regional innovation ecosystem. While preserving its core model, BGI is expanding its support to generate greater long-term impact and strengthen regional collaboration.

Key developments include:

- A stronger focus on post-grant support, enabling selected initiatives to scale beyond the initial funding phase

- Introduction of a structured regional ecosystem through alumni engagement and cross-country collaboration
- Increased emphasis on investment readiness and business development
- Initial steps toward engaging private sector partners and expanding funding opportunities
- Development of a comprehensive BGI database of supported initiatives to improve visibility, learning, and outreach

These developments reinforce BGI's role not only as a regional competition, but as a long-term platform that supports green entrepreneurship, fosters collaboration, and strengthens innovation ecosystems across the Western Balkans.

2. Program Structure

The Balkan Green Ideas program is implemented through a multi-stage process designed to identify, develop, and support innovative green business ideas across the region.

The program consists of five main phases: (1) Local Open Calls; (2) National Competitions; (3) Regional Bootcamp; (4) Regional Competition; and (5) Contract Signing, Monitoring and Support.

2.1 Program Logic (Theory of Change)

BGI is designed to support the development of green ideas into sustainable ventures through a structured process.

The program responds to key challenges in the region, including limited access to finance, lack of mentorship, and insufficient regional collaboration among early-stage green businesses.

BGI addresses these challenges through:

- identification of promising ideas through open calls
- capacity building through national competitions and the regional bootcamp
- financial support through grants
- continued support through mentorship and visibility

Expected outputs include (I) increased number of supported green initiatives; and (II) strengthened entrepreneurial skills among participants.

Whereas, expected outcomes include (I) improved survival and growth rate of supported initiatives; and (II) stronger regional collaboration among green entrepreneurs.

3. Phase 1: Local Open Calls

Timeline: August/ September (1 month)

Objective: To ensure wide outreach and identify innovative green ideas across the Western Balkans.

Description: National partners launch local open calls for proposals in their respective countries. The objective is to reach diverse communities and encourage applications from innovators, entrepreneurs, and grassroots initiatives.

Particular emphasis should be placed on engaging applicants outside capital cities, including smaller municipalities and underserved regions.

Outreach Activities: Partners are encouraged to conduct outreach through:

- Universities and research institutions
- Innovation hubs and incubators
- Local business associations
- Civil society organizations
- Youth networks
- Municipalities and regional development agencies

Partners have to post the open call for proposals using the template provided by BGF and keep it open for 15–30 days. To ensure wider reach partners are advised to organize:

- information sessions
- promotional events
- webinars or workshops explaining the program

4. Phase 2: National Competitions

Timeline: September (within one month)

Objective: To support the development of shortlisted ideas and select national representatives for the regional stage.

Format: Each national partner organizes a 2–3 day National Competition event.

The event should include:

- mentoring sessions distinguished between concept ideas and advanced ideas
- idea development workshops
- pitch training
- networking sessions

Participants refine their ideas and prepare final presentations to a national jury.

Selection criteria: All national partners must follow a harmonized evaluation framework to ensure that projects selected for the regional stage are comparable in terms of quality, maturity, and impact.

The competition targets green ideas and early-stage initiatives that:

- have been operating for no more than three years, and
- generate no more than EUR 20,000 in annual profit.

Eligible applicants include individuals, civil society organizations, or small private companies.

Public institutions (e.g., municipalities, public universities, or state agencies) are not eligible to apply.

Applicants must be citizens or residents of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, or Serbia.

Projects will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

1. Environmental Sustainability (25%)

The idea must contribute clearly to environmental protection or climate action.

Evaluation indicators include:

- reduction of environmental impact (waste, emissions, pollution)
- efficient use of natural resources

- contribution to renewable energy, circular economy, sustainable agriculture, or biodiversity protection
- measurable environmental benefits

2. Economic Viability (20%)

The idea should demonstrate the potential to generate sustainable income or financial stability.

Evaluation indicators include:

- clear value proposition or product/service
- realistic revenue model
- potential market demand
- feasibility of implementation within the local context

3. Innovation and Creativity (20%)

The idea should introduce a new or improved approach to addressing environmental challenges. Innovation may include:

- new technologies
- new applications of existing technologies
- new business models
- creative use of traditional knowledge or practices

Innovation should be assessed in relation to the local context.

4. Social Impact (20%)

The idea should generate positive social benefits for local communities. Evaluation indicators include:

- job creation
- community engagement
- benefits for vulnerable groups
- improvement of local livelihoods
- contribution to local sustainable development

Projects that combine environmental and social benefits will be prioritized.

5. Local Resource Utilization (15%)

Projects should rely primarily on local knowledge, skills, and resources. Evaluation indicators include:

- employment of local people
- use of local materials or traditional practices
- strengthening local supply chains
- contribution to local economic development

Alignment with Sustainable Development Goals

All projects should contribute to at least one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Particularly relevant SDGs include:

- SDG 7 – Affordable and Clean Energy
- SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth
- SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities
- SDG 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production
- SDG 13 – Climate Action
- SDG 15 – Life on Land

Applicants must indicate which SDG(s) their project supports and how.

Additional Selection Requirement: To improve consistency across countries, national juries should also assess project readiness. Each idea should demonstrate:

- a clear problem definition
- a proposed solution or prototype
- basic understanding of the market or beneficiaries
- commitment of the founding team

Projects that are only conceptual with no implementation plan should not advance to the regional stage.

Scoring System: Each idea will be evaluated using a 100-point scoring system:

Criterion	Weight
Environmental Sustainability	25 points
Economic Viability	20 points
Innovation	20 points
Social Impact	20 points
Local Resource Utilization	15 points
Total	100 points

Ideas scoring below 65/100 cannot qualify for the regional competition. National partners should select the three highest scoring projects to represent their country at the regional stage. A total of 3 winning ideas per country get selected to compete at the Regional Competition. National Partners are selecting at least one competitor in the first lot (Green Idea Concept) and one competitor in the second lot (Green Idea Advance), the third competitor is nominated in any of the two categories and is decided by each partner.

Expected Outcome: A total of 18 teams (3 per WB6 country) advance to the Regional Bootcamp.

5. Phase 3: Regional Bootcamp

Timeline: October (depending on scheduling)

Duration: 2 days

Objective: To prepare teams for the regional competition and foster collaboration among participants from different countries.

Description: The Regional Bootcamp is organized by BGF and takes place in a location different from the regional competition venue.

The bootcamp serves as:

- an introduction between teams
- a networking and team-building opportunity
- a knowledge exchange platform

Activities may include mentoring sessions, expert lectures, peer-learning workshops, group discussions, and team bonding exercises.

If budget constraints prevent in-person participation, the bootcamp may be organized online.

6. Phase 4: Regional Competition

Timeline: October/November

Duration: 4 days

Objective: To showcase the most promising green business ideas from across the Western Balkans and select the final winners.

Format: The regional competition combines startup pitches, panel discussions, podcast-style moderated conversations, and networking activities. The event provides a platform for entrepreneurs to engage with experts, investors, and policymakers.

Event Components:

Idea Presentations: Each team presents its project to an international jury.

Knowledge Sessions: Moderated discussions with speakers and audience participation focusing on green entrepreneurship and sustainability.

Evaluation and Selection: An international jury evaluates projects and selects the winning initiatives. The available fund is distributed to maximum of five regional

winners each year. Depending on the available financial means the international jury members are selecting between:

Advanced Lot - \$10,000

Is the prize for each winner in the Advanced Lot Category

Concept lot - \$5,000

Is the prize for each winner in the Concept Lot Category

7. Phase 5: Contract Signing, Monitoring and Support

Timeline: November – May

Objective: To support the implementation and development of the winning initiatives.

Description: Following the regional competition: (I) winners sign grant agreements with BGF; (II) implementation begins; and (III) progress is monitored through periodic reporting and mentorship.

BGF and national partners provide ongoing support, which may include:

- structured mentorship over a period of 6–12 months
- business development and scaling support
- access to networks of experts, partners, and potential investors
- visibility through regional events and communication channels
- participation in follow-up events, demo days, or networking opportunities
- guidance on accessing additional funding opportunities

This phase aims to increase the sustainability and growth potential of supported initiatives beyond the initial grant.

8. Pool of Experts and Mentors

National partners contribute to a regional pool of experts composed of long-term collaborators, practitioners, and sector specialists.

Experts may be engaged as:

- mentors during national competitions

- trainers during the regional bootcamp
- speakers during the regional competition

Engagement may be voluntary or contractual, depending on program needs and available resources.

8.1 Learning from Previous Cycles

BGI builds on the experience of previous program cycles and incorporates key lessons learned:

- limited structured post-grant support reduced the scaling potential of winning initiatives
- collaboration between teams across countries remained limited after the competition phase
- engagement with private sector actors was minimal
- some projects lacked sufficient readiness for scaling at the regional level

In response, BGI introduces more structured post-grant support, intensive monitoring during the first six months, transitioning into an annual follow-up system. There will also be a stronger emphasis on readiness and evaluation criteria, as well as initial steps toward private sector engagement. Overall the programme will aim at an increased focus on regional networking and alumni engagement

9. Pool of Judges

The evaluation of projects at the regional level is conducted by an international jury.

Judges should:

- come from outside the Western Balkans region
- have expertise in entrepreneurship, sustainability, finance, or innovation
- provide independent and objective evaluation

National partners may propose candidates for the regional pool of judges, which will be coordinated by BGF.

10. Roles and Responsibilities

Balkan Green Foundation (Regional Coordinator) is responsible for:

- overall program coordination
- organizing the regional bootcamp
- organizing the regional competition
- managing the pool of experts and judges
- contracting and monitoring the winning initiatives

National Partners are responsible for:

- organizing local open calls
- conducting outreach activities
- organizing national competitions
- mentoring participating teams
- nominating experts and judges
- supporting national winners throughout the program cycle

10.1 Private Sector Engagement

BGI aims to gradually increase the involvement of private sector actors in the program.

Private sector engagement may include:

- sponsorship of awards or program components
- participation in mentoring and judging processes
- contribution to thematic challenges or problem statements
- support for scaling successful initiatives

This engagement is intended to strengthen the sustainability of the program and create additional opportunities for participating teams.

11. Key Principles of the Program

The BGI program is guided by the following principles:

- Regional Collaboration
- Transparency and Fairness in Selection
- Promotion of Innovative Green Solutions
- Support for Grassroots Initiatives
- Inclusiveness and Geographic Diversity

12. What Does Success Look Like?

Beyond the awarding of grants, the success of BGI is measured through the longer-term performance and impact of supported initiatives.

Key success indicators include:

- continued operation of supported initiatives after 1–2 years
- growth in revenue or financial sustainability
- number of jobs created
- environmental impact achieved (e.g. reduced emissions, waste reduction, resource efficiency)
- level of regional collaboration and participation in follow-up activities

These indicators help assess the effectiveness of BGI in contributing to sustainable green entrepreneurship in the region.

13. Pathway to Internationalization

BGI aims to strengthen its regional position and explore opportunities for broader international engagement.

Future development may include:

- partnerships with European and global green entrepreneurship initiatives
- participation in international events and platforms
- increased visibility of BGI-supported initiatives beyond the Western Balkans
- gradual positioning of BGI as a regional platform for green innovation

These steps are inspired by successful global models and aim to increase the long-term impact and recognition of the program.