

CULTURE AND Creativity FOR THE WESTERN BALKANS

Open call for Proposals

Ref : CC4WBSOR 003/2025



Funded by
the European Union

Culture and Creativity for the Western Balkans (CC4WBs)

Open Call for Proposals for peer-to-peer exchanges

Ref: CC4WBSOR003/2025

Total amount available under this Open Call: 90,000.00 EUR

Applications must be submitted by 17:00 (CET) on 16 February 2026

1. Background information

The joint project ‘Culture and Creativity for the Western Balkans’ (CC4WBs) implemented by UNESCO, the British Council and the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS), aims to improve the performance of the cultural and creative sectors in order to enhance skills, knowledge, and access to financial aid to increase competitiveness and sustain co-production and circulation of goods and services in the Western Balkans. This systemic and people-centred approach to development is intended to deeply embed progress across the sector, while ensuring ownership and engagement as key requirements for local sustainability.

The project was launched in April 2022 and its duration is of 60 months. Within this period the project will include a range of activities such as technical advice on data analysis and management for the culture sector, capacity-building for inclusive policy-making and regional exchanges, establishment of public/private partnerships to promote the cultural and creative valorisation of public spaces, cultural leadership programmes, connecting independent media portals to create and share content on culture in the region, mentoring and peer learning to bridge skills and knowledge gaps, activities to promote cooperation/co-production fostering a regional approach for inclusion and intercultural dialogue, mechanisms to stimulate private financing, market access and internationalisation, small-scale cultural heritage projects to boost local participation and community engagement for sustainable development, and sharing good practices within the region and with EU Member States on community involvement in managing cultural heritage.

The priority of this Call for Proposals is the promotion of meaningful and constructive international and regional dialogue among actors from the Western Balkans involved in one of the following thematic areas:

- Heritage interpretative planning
- Integrating a sustainable development perspective in cultural heritage management
- Understanding and safeguarding intangible cultural heritage through community engagement in local contexts
- The role of visitor/information centres for cultural heritage sites
- Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage



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This Open Call for Applications allows cultural and creative organisations and institutions from the Western Balkans IPA Beneficiaries the opportunity to visit one of the awarded grantees¹ (**hosting organisations**) of the two CC4WBs Calls for Proposals so to explore together the features of a particular action and to draw mutually useful recommendations.

2. Who can apply?

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Participation in this Call on peer-to-peer exchanges with the hosting organisation as APPLICANT interested in Thematic windows 1 and 4 herewith presented:



is open on equal grounds for:

- **Public institutions** (museums, galleries, theatres, institutes for the protection of cultural and natural heritage, universities, cultural institutions, research institutes, tourism offices, and others, in accordance with the legislation), local governments (municipalities/cities) legally established in the Western Balkans IPA Beneficiaries²
- **Civil society organisations** (CSOs): foundations and non-profit organisations, registered in one of the Western Balkans IPA Beneficiaries

The Applicant must be an organisation/institution established in the Western Balkans IPA Beneficiaries **before 1 January 2024**.

The Applicant will be directly responsible for the preparation and management of the peer-to-peer exchange project.

¹ The word 'grantee' hereby refers to the Lead Applicant AND the Partner(s). Thus, the hosting organisation could either be the Lead Applicant, the Partner, or both.

² Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo* (as per UNSCR 1244/99), Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia

Awarded applicants in the previous two Open Calls for Proposals, in Thematic Windows 1 and 4, will be invited by the Applicant to agree to host the visit from applicant with the activities planned to this Call for Proposals. The full list is provided at Section 5.

3. Fundamental principles for selecting the proposal for Peer-to-Peer exchanges

Regional Cooperation: Regional Cooperation must be ensured through the creation of a partnership among actors (Applicant and hosting organisation) from different WBs IPA Beneficiaries. Other possible contributions to the reinforcement of regional cooperation will have a positive impact on the evaluation.

Gender equality and female entrepreneurship: All projects should ensure gender balance across project target groups (beneficiaries). Proposals envisaging dedicated activities encouraging female participation will be given preference in ranking as an evaluation criterion to be applied in case of equal scores.

Youth participation and youth entrepreneurship: Projects should ensure substantial participation/representation of young people. Proposals with clear activities encouraging youth participation will be given preference in ranking as an evaluation criterion to be applied in case of equal scores.

Inclusivity: Proposals should aim to include disadvantaged groups in both rural and urban contexts; proposals envisaging activities that include vulnerable groups, and/or different ethnic and social groups working together, will be given preference in ranking as an evaluation criterion to be applied in case of equal scores.

Do no-harm: Proposals shall adopt a 'do no harm' approach, i.e. avoid exposing people to additional risks, by looking at the broader context and mitigating potential negative effects on the social fabric, the economy, and the environment, prior to undertaking any intervention.

Geographical distribution: Without prejudice to the quality of funded projects, selection processes will consider principles of equitable geographical distribution among the WBs IPA Beneficiaries. While securing the highest standards of quality in the selection of eligible applications, the Evaluation Committee will pay due regard to select proposals on as wide a geographical basis as possible.

4. Ethics clauses and code of conduct

a) Absence of conflict of interest

The applicant must not be affected by any conflict of interest and must have no equivalent relation in that respect with other applicants or parties involved in the actions. Any attempt by an applicant to obtain confidential information, enter into unlawful agreements with competitors or influence the evaluation committee or the contracting authority during the process of examining, clarifying, evaluating, and comparing applications will lead to the rejection of its application and may result in administrative penalties according to the Financial Regulation in force.

b) Respect for human rights as well as environmental legislation and core labour standards

The applicant and its staff must comply with human rights. In particular, and in accordance with the applicable act, applicants who have been awarded contracts must comply with the environmental legislation including multilateral environmental agreements, and with the core labour standards as applicable and as defined in

the relevant International Labour Organization conventions (such as the conventions on freedom of association and collective bargaining; elimination of forced and compulsory labour; abolition of child labour).

Zero tolerance for sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment

The European Commission and the CC4WBs project apply a policy of 'zero tolerance' in relation to all wrongful conduct which has an impact on the professional credibility of the applicant.

Physical abuse or punishment, or threats of physical abuse, sexual abuse or exploitation, harassment and verbal abuse, as well as other forms of intimidation shall be prohibited.

Applicants whose application has been provisionally selected or placed in a reserve list shall assess their internal policy against sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEA-H) through a self-evaluation questionnaire.

c) Anti-corruption and anti-bribery

The applicant shall comply with all applicable laws, regulations, and codes relating to anti-bribery and anti-corruption. The contracting authority reserves the right to suspend or cancel project financing if corrupt practices of any kind are discovered at any stage of the award process or during the execution of a contract and if the contracting authority fails to take all appropriate measures to remedy the situation. For the purposes of this provision, 'corrupt practices' are the offer of a bribe, gift, gratuity, or commission to any person as an inducement or reward for performing or refraining from any act relating to the award of a contract or execution of a contract already concluded with the contracting authority.

d) Unusual commercial expenses

Applications will be rejected or contracts terminated if it emerges that the award or execution of a contract has given rise to unusual commercial expenses. Such unusual commercial expenses are commissions not mentioned in the main contract or not stemming from a properly concluded contract referring to the main contract, commissions not paid in return for any actual and legitimate service, commissions remitted to a tax haven, commissions paid to a payee who is not clearly identified or commissions paid to a company which has every appearance of being a front company.

Grant beneficiaries found to have paid unusual commercial expenses on projects funded by the European Union are liable, depending on the seriousness of the facts observed, to have their contracts terminated or to be permanently excluded from receiving EU/EDF funds.

e) Breach of obligations, irregularities, or fraud

The contracting authority reserves the right to suspend or cancel the procedure, where the award procedure proves to have been subject to breach of obligations, irregularities, or fraud. If breach of obligations, irregularities, or fraud are discovered after the award of the contract, the contracting authority may refrain from concluding the contract.

5. Eligible activities for the peer-to-peer exchange with the hosting organisation

Eliminatory Criteria

The Peer-to-peer exchange visit must be carried out in a Western Balkans IPA Beneficiary other than that of the seat of registration of the applicant. For example, an applicant established in Albania shall not apply for a peer-to-peer exchange visit in Albania.

Each proposal to this Open Call for Applications should include:

- The peer-to-peer exchange visit shall not be limited to sharing experiences between the two parties, but must also include meetings with local experts and key stakeholders who were involved in the implementation of the project of the hosting organisation and who can share valuable lessons learnt to the applicant;
- The expected outputs from the peer-to-peer exchange visit, can be training material by local experts, if any, joint activities/events/workshops, written and/or audio-visual deliverables, etc.

6. List of previously awarded CC4WBs grantees³ (hosting organisations) for the peer-to-peer exchange

For the full list of contacts, please visit this table: [List of contacts](#).

7. Budget

- Any grant requested under this call for proposals **must not exceed 10.000,00 Euro**.
- The contracting authority reserves the right not to award all available funds.

The minimum amount of co-financing is 10% of the requested amount for grants while the maximum co-financing is 40%.

Example: The required grant is 8,000 EUR; the minimum amount of co-financing is 800 EUR (10%). The total budget would in this case be 8,800 EUR.

The balance (i.e. the difference between the total budget and the amount requested from the contracting authority) must be financed from sources other than the general budget of the European Union or the European Development Fund.

Co-financing provided by the Applicant or third parties may also be an in-kind⁴. The amount and type of co-financing (financial or in-kind) should be clearly indicated in the Project Budget document.

What is in-kind contribution? Co-financing provided by the Applicant and/or third parties may also be an in-kind yet monetised contribution. This may include goods, services and the use of premises, professional services in the form of time that employees spend on the implementation of activities, the use of (own) equipment or materials deemed necessary for carrying out activities and achieving the project's objectives which can be monetised through amortisation rate. The Applicant must indicate as exact as possible the value of the in-kind contribution in the proposed budget. This value must not be subject to subsequent changes. If a cost cannot be valued on the market, it cannot be accepted as in-kind contribution. Market value should be

³ Please note that both the Lead Applicant and the Partners of previously awarded grants can have the role of 'host' in this Call for Applications.

⁴ Co-financing in-kind means the provision of goods or services to the grant beneficiary free of charge by a third party. Therefore, contributions in-kind do not involve any expenditure for the grant beneficiary. If contributions in-kind are accepted as co-financing, the applicant must ensure they comply with national tax and social security rules.

evidence-based. The Applicant must also ensure that in-kind contributions comply with legally required tax and social security rules. During the implementation of the project, the Contracting Authority reserves the right to request supporting evidence of in-kind contributions, according to its internal rules and procedures and the relevant legislation of the WBs IPA Beneficiary of the Applicant.

Note: The Contracting Authority reserves the right to propose budget changes to maximize budget utilisation, ensuring that the principles of value for money and the overall project efficiency are applied.

If co-financing in-kind is proposed, it must be included in Form 2 (Worksheet 3) to the guidelines for applicants on the expected sources of funding for the action. The same amount must be indicated in the Form 2 budget (Worksheet 1).

Other co-financing shall be based on estimates provided by the applicant.

8. Non-eligible expenditures and/or activities under this Open Call for Applications

The following expenditures and/or activities are ineligible under this Open Call for Proposals:

- Settling debts and losses or debt contingencies
- Settling interest debt
- Return of capital
- Costs incurred during the suspension of the implementation of the Agreement
- Payment of VAT and duty charges that are recoverable/deductible by the Applicant
- Bonuses, provisions, reserves or non-remuneration related costs
- Banking charges for the transfers from and to the Contractor
- Procurement of equipment unless required for the project's successful implementation and fully justified
- Activities supporting political parties
- Financing regular activities of the Applicant i.e. activities that are not carried out specifically for the purpose of implementing the project
- Costs of purchase of land or buildings
- Entertainment costs such as: gifts, alcohol, restaurant bills or hospitality costs for personnel not directly participating in the project
- Costs declared by the Applicant under another agreement financed by the European Union budget (including through the European Development Fund)
- Currency exchange losses
- In addition, projects funded under this Call cannot be used to pay for the engagement of public officials⁵ in this project

⁵ Under this Open Call for Applications, a public official is any nominated, appointed or delegated person in a public administration body, judicial authority, local government body, public institution, public company, a state fund and another legal entity pursuing activities of public interest.

9. Project duration

The duration of the Project shall be **at least one (1) month and up to three (3) months** from the date of the contract's signature or any other date agreed upon in the contract.

The duration of the actual peer-to-peer exchange visit to the selected partners in the Western Balkans can be shorter, but not less than 3 full days.

10. Project documentation

All applicants shall provide the following documentation:

Form 1	Project Proposal (Word)
Form 2	Project Budget (Excel)
Form 3	Activity, Communication and Visibility Plan (Word)
Form 4	Administrative Identification Form (filled out and signed, PDF)
Form 5	Financial Identification Form (filled out and signed, PDF)
Form 6	Declaration of Eligibility for the Applicant (filled out and signed, PDF)
Form 7	Confirmation by the hosting organisation, duly signed, stamped, and dated at the moment of the submission of the application

Please complete the full application form carefully and as clearly as possible so that it can be assessed properly.

- Forms are provided in the [LINK](#) to this Call for Proposals and their format should not be altered.
- Handwritten form submissions will not be accepted.
- Each Application must contain the complete set of the required documentation. Referencing a different application instead of submitting the complete set of the required documentation to other proposals shall not be accepted as a valid process and the incomplete submission of project proposals shall be excluded from the further evaluation process.

11. How to submit the Proposals

Applications must be submitted in accordance with the instructions in the forms provided at the link below. Applicants should then keep strictly to the format of the application forms and fill in the paragraphs and pages in order.

Documentation for this Call for Proposals in English is available for download at the following link:

[APPLICATION](#)

Applications with the required documentation must be submitted in the **English language**.

Applications must be submitted electronically, no later than **16 February 2026 by 17:00 (CET)** to the **following email address**:

cc4wbs.tirana@aics.gov.it



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With the email subject line consisting of the Applicant’s name, followed by the reference number **CC4WBSOR003/2025**.

Example: Applicant’s name_Ref. CC4WBsOR003/2025

Please note:

- Applicants will receive an email confirming the receipt of their application.
- Applications received after the deadline will not be considered.
- Applications must be sent as an email, containing seven (7) mandatory forms as ‘attachments’, that should not exceed **35 MB** and **should not be shared through We Transfer, One Drive, Google Drive, or similar platforms**.
- Applications received in any other form other than as described above will not be considered.
- **Last-minute submissions are strongly discouraged, due to the potential technical glitches.**
- **If the application is not received on time, applicants must prove with email outbox that the file has been submitted prior to 17:00 (CET) on 16 February 2026. In case applicants fail to submit proof, their application will be rejected.**

12. Number of Project Proposals & Grants per Applicant

Applicants may not submit more than 1 application(s) under this call for applications.

13. Evaluation of Proposals

Applications will be examined and evaluated by the Contracting Authority with the possible assistance of external assessors. All applications will be assessed according to the following steps and criteria.

The evaluation of the submitted Proposals is conducted in a two step-process:

1. ADMINISTRATIVE CHECK

An administrative check will be performed in accordance with the table below. The Proposal is considered approved for technical evaluation if the administrative requirements are met according to the Administrative Check List below. **Failure to pass the administrative check**, i.e. obtaining at least one ‘NO’ in all columns as per the below table, will result in the automatic rejection of the Proposal, and it will not be submitted for the Technical Evaluation.

ADMINISTRATIVE CHECK LIST		
Compliance with administrative criteria:	YES	NO
1. Application submitted within the deadline		
2. Application fulfils the eliminatory criteria		
3. The proposed duration is not in line with Section 8 (1-3 months).		
4. Filled out Project Proposal (Form 1)		
5. Filled out Project Budget Form provided in the requested format (Form 2)		
6. Filled out Activity and Visibility Plan provided in the requested format (Form 3)		
7. Filled out Administrative Identification Form provided in the requested format (Form 4)		



8. Filled out Financial Identification Form provided in the requested format (Form 5)		
9. Declaration of Eligibility of the Applicant provided in the requested format (Form 6)		
10. An invitation letter from the hosting organisation addressed to the Applicant (Form 7), is included, signed and stamped		

The applications will also be rejected if:

- The Contracting Authority of the Call for Proposals was provided with false information;
- The Applicant and/or the hosting organisation attempted to obtain confidential information or influence the Evaluation Committee.

2. TECHNICAL EVALUATION

The technical evaluation of applications will be done in accordance with the criteria set out in the evaluation table below.

Scoring system:

Evaluation criteria are divided into sections and sub-sections. **Every section must be scored between 1 and 5 as follows: 1 = very poor; 2 = poor; 3 = average; 4 = good; 5 = very good.** Each Evaluation Committee member signs his/her own individual evaluation table, and all members jointly sign a summary evaluation table for each project proposal. The ranking of project proposals is made in such a way that the first-ranked project proposal is the one with the highest total score, followed by the project that comes in next with its total score and all the way to the lowest total score.

Important:

If the total sum in Section 1 is less than 10 points, the project will be excluded from the rest of the evaluation process, as it is estimated that Applicant lacks the minimum capacity for quality implementation of the proposed project.

If the total sum in Section 2 is less than 18 points, the project will be excluded from the rest of the evaluation process, as this assessment implies that, although the Applicant meet the financial and operational capacities, the project idea itself is not relevant or in line with the defined priorities of the Open Call for Proposals and lacks sufficient impact on the needs of the target community or group.

Technical Evaluation Chart

Criterion	Maximum score	Points
1. Financial and operational capacity	20	
1.1 Does the Applicant have sufficient experience for project management ?	10	
1.2 Does the Applicant have sufficient in-house technical expertise ? (Specific knowledge in the relevant field including qualified staff)	10	
2. Relevance	20	
2.1 To what extent does the proposal respond to the priorities identified in this Call for Proposals, including specific themes/sectors/areas? (see Section 1)	5	
2.2 How relevant is the proposed peer-to-peer exchange to the particular needs and constraints of the identified group of beneficiaries?	10	

2.3 To what extent are youth participation and entrepreneurship, and gender equality and female entrepreneurship addressed in the Project Proposal?	5	
3. Design of the activities for the peer-to-peer exchange	15	
3.1 Does the proposal indicate the expected results to be achieved by the end of peer-to-peer exchange?	15	
4. Implementation approach	15	
4.1 Is the action plan for implementation of the peer-to-peer exchange clear and feasible? Is the timeline realistic?	5	
4.2 Are the roles of the Applicant and of the host clearly defined and strategically assigned?	10	
5. Sustainability	15	
5.1 Does the project have the potential to be replicated or scaled up? (Including a possibility of its application to other target groups or implementation at different locations and/or scale-up impacts of activities and exchange of information on the experience gained through project implementation)	15	
6. Budget and Cost-Effectiveness	15	
6.1 Is the ratio between estimated costs and expected results satisfactory?	5	
6.2 Are the proposed costs necessary to implement the planned activities?	10	
Maximum total score	100	

14. Further information about the Call for Proposals

Further information about the application process for the Call for Proposals with potential applicants will be held through the Western Balkans. and **social media** – **insert link** of all partners organising this Call for Proposal.

For further information and clarification, potential applicants may send their questions concerning the Call for Proposals via the [link](#).

Answers to the received questions will be provided **publicly** each Monday during the whole period of the Open Call for Proposals. The publicly provided answers will be available via the [link](#).

Timetable for further information and clarification:

Deadline for requesting clarifications:	06.02.2026
Last publication of FAQ (Questions and Answers)	09.02.2026

15. Notice of Decision

All applicants will be notified in writing of the decision regarding their project proposal **within 75 days** from the deadline for submission of applications.

The results will also be published on CC4WBs [Action Page](#) and the Organisers' of [the Call's websites](#).

16. Steps following the decision on Grant Award

Signing of contract

Following the decision on grant award prior to contract signing, the Contracting Authority, may request the Applicant to introduce changes to the project proposal, including budget adjustments to comply with the Contractor's rules and procedures and with the recommendations of the Evaluation Committee, including the currency of the contract, realistic cost estimates, and availability of funds. After the evaluation of project proposals, the Applicant may be asked to provide original documents for review together with the due diligence procedure as requested by the Contracting Authority. Upon satisfactory completion of the due diligence procedure, the contract with the Contracting Authority can be signed.

Documents pertaining to the administration of the grant in support of the contract with the Contracting Authority will be collected in accordance with the Contracting Authority's rules and regulations. In case of possible conflicts of interpretation, the disposition of the contracts will prevail.

Disbursement of funds, transfer schedule, the mode of transfer, currency of the contract as well as other mutual rights and obligations, will be regulated by the Grant Contract.⁶

As part of the due diligence procedure, the following documents are required **translated in English** to be available for review by the Contracting Authority. If the Applicant fails to provide any of the below documents, the proposal risks to be disqualified. The Contracting Authority reserves the right to request the original documentation (in hard copy).

- 1 Valid legal entity's registration form** (applicable for the Applicant). Please note that the Applicant must be established prior to 01 January 2024.
- 2 Statute** (for Organisations) or other document confirming the mandate of the organisation (for Institutions), applicable for the Applicant.
- 3 Balance sheet and income statement** for maximum the last three close financial years certified by a chartered accountant or authorised person, or equivalent (financial statements), if applicable, for the Applicant.
In case of public entities, equivalent financial reports and certificates are accepted. Please note that these reports need to be signed and stamped by an authorised person within the entity/organisation.
- 4 Certificate from relevant tax authority** that the Applicant has paid all due taxes in accordance with the local legislation. This certificate should be issued in 2025. In case of public entities, equivalent financial reports and certificates are accepted. Please note that these reports need to be signed and stamped by an authorised person within the entity/organisation.

Reporting on implementation of project activities and financing of justified costs

The Applicant is responsible to fully implement the project for which it has been granted the funds in accordance with the established budget.

⁶ Contracting authorities (UNESCO and AICS) shall proceed with contracting peer to peer exchange visits according to their respective official mandates applicable to Culture and Creativity for the Western Balkans Project.

The responsible person and legal representative of the Applicant determined under the Grant Contract will be required to submit Project Final Report on Project Implementation, and other contractual documentation including where applicable the evidence enclosed on the procurement of tangible and intangible assets and services incurred during the reporting period, as well as other evidence on the funds spent (invoices, contracts, timesheets, bank account, and transaction statements).

Visibility

The applicants must take all necessary steps to publicise the fact that the European Union has financed or co-financed the action. Unless the European Commission agrees otherwise, actions that are wholly or partially funded by the European Union must ensure the visibility of EU financing by displaying the EU emblem in accordance with the guidelines set out in the Operational guidelines for recipients of EU funding, published by the European Commission. If applicable, communication activities may be undertaken to raise the awareness of specific or general audiences of the reasons for the action and the EU support for the action in the country or region concerned, as well as the results and the impact of this support.

All measures and activities relating to visibility and, if applicable, communication, must comply with the latest Communication and Visibility Requirements for EU-funded external action, laid down and published by the European Commission **'EU visibility guidelines for external actions'**.

17. Privacy Notice

UNESCO (The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization) and AICS (Italian Agency for Development Cooperation) are joint controllers of the information that you provide for the purpose of processing your application and administration of your involvement in the EU-funded **programme 'Culture and Creativity for the Western Balkans'**. UNESCO and AICS comply with their applicable data protection regulations and rules that meet internationally accepted standards. The legal basis for processing your information is agreement with Terms and Conditions of application/Who can apply – section II above.

Your personal information will be shared among the British Council, UNESCO and AICS, and the following organisations for the purpose of project implementation:

- EU Commission, as Contracting Authority, for monitoring and reporting purposes https://european-union.europa.eu/privacy-policy_en
- partners' corporate accounts for Microsoft MS365 Products will be used for communication and collaboration <https://privacy.microsoft.com/en-us/privacystatement>

In order to achieve the necessary purposes outlined above, your personal information will be securely transferred and/or stored in the following locations: WB IPA Beneficiaries, EU Member States, UK. We will keep your information for a period of 7 years after the programme closure if your application has been successful, and 5 years if your application has been unsuccessful.

You have the right to ask for a copy of the information we hold on you, and the right to ask us to correct any inaccuracies in that information. If you have concerns about how we have used your personal information, you also have the right to complain to a privacy regulator.

For further detailed information about your rights, how to raise a complaint and how we process personal information, it is strongly advised to applicants to refer to the Privacy sections before submitting the application, as per the links below:

- UNESCO at [UNESCO's Principles on Personal Data Protection and Privacy | UNESCO](#);
- AICS at [AICS's Personal data protection webpage](#).