



GUIDE FOR THE APPLICANTS

SOCIAL STARTUP 2025

Introduction

A social startup is defined as an initiative that employs entrepreneurial strategies and technology to achieve measurable, positive social impact. Projects may be non-profit or for-profit, with financial sustainability serving as a means to scale impact rather than an end goal.

The program aims to support innovative projects and ideas that address pressing social challenges through entrepreneurial approaches, leveraging technology and innovation. Projects must align with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and focus on creating sustainable, positive societal change.

A key component of the program is a mandatory training based on an incubation/acceleration model, incorporating social impact elements. This program is designed to enhance project development, strengthen social orientation, and ensure sustainability. All costs associated with participation in the training program are covered by the organizer.

Thematic areas and content

Projects at the Minimum Viable Product (MVP) stage or beyond are eligible to participate in the program.

To qualify, teams must meet the following criteria:

- Have a prototype, pilot, initial tests, or first sales of a product or service.
- Demonstrate validation of need from the target audience (e.g., early users, reviews, or testing results).
- Clearly understand the project's business model and how it will operate.
- Consist of at least two members committed to participating in a mandatory training program for social startups, which includes elements of incubation and acceleration, as well as a focus on social impact.

The program provides funding for projects aimed at creating social impact across various fields. Supported areas include, but are not limited to, the following:

Area	Examples of Project Topics
Inclusion and Equal Opportunities	Employment for vulnerable groups, accessibility technologies, educational and career opportunities for all.
Education and Skills Development	Online training, soft and hard skills development, educational technologies for rural areas.
Art, Technology, and Society	Art projects addressing social issues, immersive technologies (AR/VR) for social good, platforms for creative industries with public impact.
Healthcare and Mental Health	Psychological support, diagnostic and preventive technologies, support for families and the elderly.
Ecology and Sustainable Development	Waste reduction, renewable energy, conscious consumption.
Community Mobilization	Local entrepreneurship, youth self-governance in schools, improving quality of life in regions.

Social startups must integrate entrepreneurship and technology to address social challenges. Technology is a core tool for scaling, automating, or improving accessibility.

Examples of applicable technologies include:

Technology	Examples
Artificial Intelligence (AI)	Chatbots for psychological support, risk prediction (e.g., bullying, depression), recommendation systems.
Machine Learning (ML)	Personalized educational programs, user behavior analysis to improve services.
Robotics and Automation	Smart assistants for the elderly, assistive robots for children, automated waste sorting systems.
Digital Platforms and Mobile Apps	Online education, health monitoring apps, marketplaces for local producers, crowdsourcing platforms.
Immersive Technology (VR/AR)	VR for empathy training, AR for cultural/educational routes, simulators for challenging scenarios.
Internet of Things (IoT)	Environmental monitoring sensors, smart homes for people with disabilities, wearable health devices.
Blockchain (Optional)	Transparent charity processes, secure data handling for vulnerable groups.

Teams are not required to develop new technology but can use or adapt existing technology purposefully to address social challenges.

Participants

Individuals/initiative groups or teams aged 18 years and over may participate in the program.

The selection is carried out through an open competition among initiative groups/individual entrepreneurs/LLPs/non-profit organizations, where a student or alumnus of the Nazarbayev University, holding a key role in the team, must be a permanent team member throughout all stages of project implementation.

Terms of Participation

Projects must be implemented within a maximum of two (2) years.

The maximum funding amount per project is 10,000,000 KZT.

A key stage is a 6-8-week training program for social startup teams, incorporating acceleration and social impact components. Participants will exchange ideas, test innovative approaches, and develop skills to build successful social startups.

Only one application may be submitted per applicant.

Application Process

Applications must be submitted online via <https://sdf-portal.kz/>.

Applications must be signed with an electronic digital signature (EDS) by the Team Leader. Applicants should ensure they have a valid EDS, keys, and password in advance.

Schedule

The program follows this timeline to ensure quality promotion and smooth management:

Period	Implementation Stage
May-June 2025	Publication and dissemination announcement.
June-July 2025	Application submission period via https://sdf-portal.kz/ .
July 2025	Technical selection: Verification of application completeness. Applications passing this stage proceed to the training program.
August-October 2025	Training program (6-8 weeks) with mentoring, project development, and training on sustainability, scalability, and social impact. Costs are covered by organizer.
October 2025	Final application refinement, pitching, evaluation, and grant allocation decisions.

Period	Implementation Stage
November-December 2025	Grant awards and signing of Grant Agreements.

The application deadline is 2:00 p.m. Astana time, July 10, 2025, via <https://sdf-portal.kz/>.

Selection Criteria

Applications are evaluated based on the following criteria to ensure alignment with the program's objectives and societal benefits:

Evaluation uses a 10-point scale for each criterion to assess compliance with the Fund's goals and the startup's long-term impact.

Criteria include:

Criteria I: Social Impact and SDG Alignment - Relevance and measurable social impact (0-10 points).

Criteria II: Business Model - Viability and clarity of the business model (0-10 points).

Criteria III - Team Composition - Strength and roles of team members (0-10 points).

Criteria IV - Startup Sustainability: Potential for long-term viability and scalability (0-10 points).

Experts independently evaluate each criterion based on the proposal's alignment with these priorities.

Terms of Grant Fund Expenditure

Grants can be used for:

1. Remuneration for the specialists directly involved in the project implementation (including taxes and mandatory deductions);
2. Purchase of goods, works and services necessary to achieve the objectives of the project (including consumables and laboratory materials, equipment rent, transportation services, printing, etc.);
3. Organization of events related to the implementation of the project (seminars, trainings, conferences, public events, focus groups, forums, etc.);
4. Information and educational activities aimed at achieving the goals of the project (creation and dissemination of information materials, conducting information campaigns, working in social networks, mass media, etc.);
5. Travel expenses related to project activities;
6. Rent of premises and equipment necessary for the implementation of the

- project;
7. Software, development and maintenance of technological solutions, if they are part of the project;
 8. Administrative expenses directly related to project management, including remuneration to members of the project team (within the established limit, but not more than 20% of the total project budget);
 9. Other expenses directly related to the project implementation, reasonable and consistent with the goals and objectives of the project, as well as the terms of the program.
 10. Taxes and other mandatory payments shall be included in the grant amount.

It is not allowed to direct grant funds to the following:

1. Construction work, reconstruction/repair work;
2. Services of religious organizations, religious education, publication of religious literature;
3. Purchase of vehicles for local administrative authorities and other government agencies;
4. Acquisition of land plots;
5. Conducting research;
6. Support of political activity (activities of political parties, individual political person);
7. Carrying out activities that directly or indirectly violate the principles of equality established by the legislation of the republic of kazakhstan;
8. Other goods, works and services unrelated to the project implementation.

Mandatory Terms for Grant Agreements

Selected projects will enter into a Grant Agreement with the Fund.

Grant Agreements are signed only with registered legal entities (e.g., IE, LLP, or NGO). Individuals must register a legal entity before signing.

Rights under the Grant Agreement are non-transferable.

Grantees must submit at least two reports (interim and final) during project implementation, including documentation verifying the appropriate use of funds.

Grantees must publicize project progress, acknowledge the Fund's support, and participate in Fund events upon invitation.

For more information

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