BALKATHON 4.0

COMPETITION GUIDELINES

Contents

1. GENERAL INFORMATION

1.1. Background

The Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) is organising Balkathon – "Smarten up for the future", a regional online competition that encourages Western Balkan (WB) collaboration, co-creation and real-life change, with the idea to help the region, businesses and citizens to strengthen their resilience to global challenges. Balkathon brings together young innovative people, start-ups, digital innovation centres, science parks, universities, small and medium enterprises, etc. from the Western Balkan region in order to trigger digital innovative and practical business solutions in different areas.

The RCC supported the WB region during the Covid-19 in 2020, with the organisation of the first-ever regional competition on digital smart solutions 'Balkathon', as an agile solution to support the region to recover from the effects of COVID-19 pandemic. So far, three Balkathon editions have been successfully organised, and reached almost 250 registrations since the beginning of the competition, of which 15 solutions from the WB region were successfully developed and marketed.

The winners of each Balkathon edition were obliged to further develop their digital and business (herein: digital/business) solutions after the competition, and they presented them at the next WB Digital Summit. The focus was also on the development and improvement of their business.

Following the good practise, RCC is organising the fourth edition of Balkathon competition that will focus on innovative digital solutions that can be used as a response to the challenges of our day-to-day life in different parts of digital areas.

As of March 2023, Balkathon is officially the trademark of the regional competition in innovative digital solutions.

1.2. Objective & Outcome

Balkathon is a regional competition that invites interested young people, start-ups, entrepreneurs, students, digital innovation hubs, scientific parks, universities, SMEs, etc. from all Western Balkan economies to propose and develop innovative digital solutions as a response to the challenges of our day-to-day life. The six most innovative proposals will be awarded 10.000€ each. The awards will be given to digital solutions whose top priority is to support the region in maintaining sustainability of the communities, businesses, cities and individual lives of each community member.

Once implemented, the proposals should provide a positive contribution to creating jobs, maintaining/enhancing operations, and facilitating digital transformation in different sectors.

1.3. Topics

Balkathon 2023 is looking for fresh, innovative and unique ideas and solutions from different digital areas that will mark this year's competition. Consider these guidelines and the proposed topics as an inspiration and directions, not as limitations. At Balkathon 2023, we focus on (i) Sustainable Tourism, (ii) Green Economy, and (iii) Entrepreneurship. As was the case with the

previous competitions, it is important that digital solutions include innovative technological ideas with a clear explanation of their implementation and sustainability.

➢ Sustainable Tourism

Creation of various innovative digital tools and solutions for sustainable tourism in the WB region and improvement of tourist services in various aspects. These tools and solutions should be tailored to local needs and easy to use and understand. They should also be cost-effective, secure and accessible to all stakeholders. Finally, they should support the local community and have a positive impact on the environment.

Under this topic, we seek digital solutions for enhancement of sustainable tourism that can be, but not limited to, marine and coastal, mountain and adventure, health, promotional tourism, sustainable food, sustainable mobility (on land and water), sustainable fashion and performance arts in key touristic destinations, etc., which would result in a reduced environmental impact of the tourism industry and provide innovative, green, responsible and inclusive tourism products and services.

➢ Green Economy

Innovative ideas that help manage and generate renewable /sustainable green economy. These ideas could include investment in renewable energy sources, creating infrastructure that supports green technology, and incentivising businesses to adopt sustainable practices (related to food waste reduction, plastic-free actions, energy-saving actions, re-use of materials, reduced water usage). Additionally, initiatives to reduce waste and promote recycling can help create a more sustainable economy.

Under this topic, we seek digital/business solutions in the fields of renewable energy, green buildings, sustainable transport, water management, waste management, or land management. The digital solutions should focus on reducing negative environmental impacts, minimizing resource consumption, and promoting sustainable practices. The goal is to create innovative and effective digital solutions that can be adopted by the industry to build a more environmentally friendly future.

➢ Entrepreneurship

In order to successfully respond to all the challenges of today, knowledge from various fields such as accounting, fintech, digital marketing and digital entrepreneurship is necessary. Digital entrepreneurship represents the entrepreneurship of the future that keeps up with the times as an ideal area for developing business. This requires the ability to integrate various elements including technology, marketing and finance.

Within this topic, we are looking for digital solutions in the field of web3 business ideas, AI-based entrepreneurial business ideas (customer services, predictive analysis, automated Data Entry, etc.), e –services & digital tools.

1.4. Who can apply?

Geographic limitations: Only applicants from WB economies (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo∗, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia) can apply to Balkathon, while digital solutions should address a need or challenge in any WB economy within the context of a given topic.

Time limitations: After the competition award ceremony, applicants need to develop, finalise and implement digital solutions within a six-month timeframe.

Relevance: The digital solutions must respond to the identified priority areas of the competition (see 1.3.).

Applicant limitations:

- o Digital solutions submitted and implemented by registered teams are eligible to participate in the Balkathon competition.

- o Eligible applicants:

    - Teams should be composed exclusively of the representatives of the WB economies[1];

    - Teams are encouraged to be composed of members from two or more Western Balkan economies;

    - Teams are encouraged to be composed of qualified individuals; ICT companies, students, non-governmental organisations; educational institutions; start-up companies, etc.;

    - Proven experience in projects relevant to the priority areas of the competition will be taken as advantage;

- o Applicants will be disqualified from participating in Balkathon competition if they are in one of the following situations:

    - Involved in previous competitions organised by RCC[2];

    - Working in the public and local administration/authorities of any Western Balkan economy, including institutions such as Statistics Offices, public agencies, etc.[3];

    - They hold an active contract with RCC at the time of application;

∗ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

[1] This refers to people who have the citizenship of some of the WB economies and live in the WB region.

[2] This refers to individuals from the winning teams of all Balkathon competitions, Futourismo, etc.

[3] This does not refer to the Universities and Faculties from the WB region.

- o Applicants will be disqualified at any time from the competition and/or from the final Award Ceremony if it is proved they tried to obtain confidential information, exert influence over RCC, judges or authorised contractual party during the proposal evaluation process;

- o General rules[4] (more information can be found on www.rcc.int/balkathon):

  - Participants can register only as a team;

  - Applicant can get inspiration from existing solutions, however plagiarism, copy and/or any other form of treachery or deception are strictly forbidden;

  - Only one team member can submit the team's solution;

  - Registered applicants or teams can be disqualified and excluded from Balkathon for breaching one of the rules defined in the Rules of Balkathon 2023, Statement of Honour or Balkathon Guidelines.

1.5. When and where?

Registration process starts on 12 July 2023 and ends on 13 September 2023 at 12:00 (CET+1).

The Award Ceremony will be held in hybrid form on 3 October 2023.

1.6. How to apply?

All applicants need to prepare documents elaborated in the section "Application documents" and submit them by 13 September2023, 12:00 (CET+1) via registration form on the website: www.rcc.int/balkathon .

Please note that the maximum size of incoming e-mail/registration form submission is 10 MB. In case the application documents exceed this size, you have to use the .zip data compression file format, compress all documents to a single .zip file and send it via WeTransfer.com to the email: balkathon@rcc.int.

When applying, identify your submission as responding to this competition by naming the subject line of your message as: BALKATHON Application.

Any concepts submitted after the deadline, not prepared in accordance with the competition instructions or being incomplete will be rejected.

One team can submit maximum one application under this competition.

1.7. Application documents

All teams have to submit the following documents:

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[4] In addition to being published on the website, Rules of Balkathon2023 and competition Guidelines will be automatically sent to applicants upon registration.

➢ A Concept Note (max 2 A4 pages, font Calibri size 12) that should include 4 (four) mandatory parts and 1 (one) optional part:

- o Part 1 (Concept and Strategy): Outline of the objectives, concept, approach and ambition of the project (idea/digital solution). Please indicate whether the project is already ongoing or new.

- o Part 2 (Solution): The methodological and operational approach to the problem and the solution(s) addressing the technical criteria, as well as activities to maximise impact, e.g. dissemination and exploitation.

- o Part 3 (Implementation): Project implementation scheme including a work plan, inputs/outputs (deliverables) and resources.

- o Part 4 (Organisation and Management): Outline of the operations including, for example, the organisational/management structure, roles/responsibilities, IT needs, etc.

- o Part 5 (optional): Where possible, provide samples, demos or design concepts in a standard digital format, or describe the design of your proposed solution in sufficient detail for the jury to visualise your intention.

➢ Names and short bios of applicants, outlining relevant knowledge and experience in line with the Balkathon competition goals, including contact details (e-mail, LinkedIn, website), if available.

➢ Profile of the team's composition should be submitted by the team leader.

➢ In case of applying as a company you need to submit:

- o company profile and brief description (max. 1 page). For a team of individuals from the company, the team leader should submit a profile of the team's composition

- o copy of the company's Registration Certificate for legal entity submissions or a corresponding written authorisation for teams of individuals

➢ Statement of Honour (download from Balkathon website www.rcc.int/balkathon).

➢ List of references for relevant activities implemented (e.g. implemented projects, mobile apps, designed platforms, etc.), if available.

1.8. Key dates

Dates:	Activities:
13 July 2023	Registration process starts
13 September 2023, 12:00 (CET+1)	End of registration process

14-18 September 2023	Pre-selection of the registered teams (Phase I, up to 20 teams per topic selected)
18 September 2023	List of shortlisted teams published on the website
19-20 September 2023	Mentors working with teams, start of the competition
21 September 2023, 12:00 (CET+1)	Submission of final presentation
25 September 2023	Phase II, selection of up to 18 teams and publishing finalists on the website
3 October 2023	Announcement of the winners and Award Ceremony (Phase III - selection of winners)

2. INFORMATION ON THE COMPETITION PROCESS

2.1. Selection and evaluation process

All eligible applications will be judged by a panel of businesses and ICT professionals from WB economies and professionals from particular digital area(s), as well as members of RCC. The proposals must be original and have not been submitted, published or used before. Applicants that are found to have breached this rule will be disqualified.

All applications that meet basic technical criteria will be evaluated based on the following criteria:
- Quality
- Originality
- Feasibility
- Sustainability

The selection/evaluation process will be performed in three phases (see section 2.2.). Each phase will contain certain/additional criteria.

2.2. Competition selection phases

Phase I

The first phase will be conducted after the closing of the registration process and presents "filtering" of ideas that best fit into the BALKATHON 2023 vision. After evaluation, the shortlisted applicants (up to 20 teams per each topic) will be offered a mentorship assistance to help them upgrade their ideas. Technical criteria mentioned in the section above will be used for this phase. The list of selected applicants will be published on http://www.rcc.int/balkathon.

Phase II

After mentoring sessions, candidates will submit their final concept note and video presentation (more info will be provided at www.rcc.int/balkathon). Members of the jury will evaluate final concept notes, and up to 6 selected applicants from each topic will present their ideas at the final event. Up to 18 applicants will be selected for the final competition. Criteria used for this phase are listed in section 2.3. The shortlist of applicants will be published at www.rcc.int/balkathon.

Phase III

Applicants selected for the final competition will present their ideas before the members of jury in the following concept:

- 3 minutes for the presentation
- 2 minutes for the jury questions

Applicants with the highest score will be awarded, and the winners will be announced at the end of the Awards event in October 2023.

2.3. Evaluation criteria

Criteria for the first phase:

- Quality
- Originality
- Feasibility
- Sustainability

Additional criteria for the second phase:

- Quality of business plan
- Quality of the team
- Quality of marketing plan
- Quality of financial plan
- Other (implementation plan, impact of the solution, etc.)

Additional criteria for the third phase:

- Quality of the presentation of a business plan

NOTE: More information on the criteria will be published on the website www.rcc.int/balkathon.

2.4. Mentorship programme

The shortlisted applicants will have two-day mentorship sessions, with mentors that are experienced in their respective area. The RCC will prepare the list of mentors with different background and experience in different areas. Each team will have an opportunity to choose mentors with whom they want to work based on their needs for further development of the idea.

The mentorship programme will be focused on upgrading the relevant ideas.

Applicants are encouraged to work on their ideas from the very beginning of Balkathon, from 13 July.

Shortlisted applicants are encouraged to prepare a list of questions, needed information, etc. in order to focus mentorship sessions on upgrading their ideas as much as possible.

Mentorship sessions are not conceptualised in a way to get ideas for development, but to further develop and upgrade the existing idea.

2.5. Jury of the competition

The jury will be composed of different members for each phase of the competition, coming from the following representative institutions:

- First phase: RCC and consultants engaged by RCC for the organisation of competition
- Second phase: RCC and representatives of the business and ICT sector from the WB
- Third phase: representatives from WB economies nominated by Digital Component Contact Points and RCC

2.6. Winners of the competition

Six winning awards will be given based on the jury evaluation and criteria defined in section 2.3. The 6 winning ideas, two per category, will be awarded 10.000€ each, including additional mentoring support to implement their idea.

The winners will conclude the Agreement/Statement with the RCC in order to regulate their rights and obligations. In case that the winner with the first awarded idea withdraws from the follow-up procedures or is disqualified, the next candidate with the highest score for the given topic will be awarded.

The Agreement/Statement will define the procedure whereby the first instalment of the prize will be awarded immediately, while the second one after the development of the solution.

2.7. Appeal procedure

Each applicant has 7 days from the moment of receiving the results to send an appeal. The appeals should be sent to balkathon@rcc.int.

The RCC will provide written response within 7 days from the submission of the appeal.

2.8. Other relevant information

The entire competition will be held online via different platforms such as Zoom, Webex, or through some other tool(s). Zoom or Webex will be used for communication between participants and mentors. The final event will be held in physical mode.

In order to participate in full capacity, each participant needs to have:

- Laptop/PC

- Stable internet connection
- Audio and video integrated in the device or as separate equipment