

BALKATHON 5.0

COMPETITION GUIDELINES

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1. GENERAL INFORMATION

1.1. Background

The Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) is organising Balkathon – “Where you turn your ideas into masterpieces”, a regional online competition that encourages Western Balkans (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 in digital smart solutions Balkathon, as an agile solution to support the region to recover from the effects of COVID-19 pandemic. So far, four Balkathon editions have been successfully organised, and reached over 300 registrations since the beginning of the competition.

The winners of each Balkathon edition were obliged to further develop their digital and business (herein: digital/business) solutions six months after the competition. The focus was also on development and improvement of their business.

Following the good practise, RCC is organising the fifth edition of Balkathon competition that will focus on fresh innovative digital ideas and solutions in different thematic areas that will mark this year's competition.

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 for the region. The six most innovative proposals will be awarded 7.000€ each. This year's Balkathon aims also to promote youth age up to 35 years and recognise ideas coming from high school's teams through two special awards, each 4.000€ 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. Suggested topics

Balkathon 5.0 is looking for fresh and innovative ideas and solutions that will focus on emerging digital and software solutions to optimize the performance of digital transformation of businesses with innovative and secure technologies. 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, and to be business oriented.

Ideas for digital solutions could be proposed in any of the below mentioned areas, and even beyond. Below are some suggestions and examples of ideas for a digital solution related to some of the areas:

- Technology of services - Ideas for a solution under this area may be related, but not limited, to AI-based entrepreneurial business ideas (customer services, predictive analysis, automated Data Entry, etc.), e-services & digital tools, blockchain, cybersecurity, etc.;
- Green and Energy - Ideas for a solution under this area may be related, but not limited, to food waste reduction, plastic-free actions, energy-saving actions, re-use of materials, reduced water usage, solar energy, wind energy, hydro energy, waste segregation, etc.;
- Transport - Ideas for a solution under this area may be related, but not limited, to transport technology and data transmission from one to another digital device and data, transportation of goods at lowest possible cost, optimised transport, etc.;
- Tourism – Ideas for a solution under this area may be related, but not limited, to marine and coastal, mountain and adventure, health, promotional tourism, food, sustainable mobility (on land and water), etc., which would result in a reduced environmental impact of the tourism industry;
- Agriculture - Ideas for a solution under this area may be related, but not limited, to agri-food industry, farm/food products, production process, delivery, etc.
- Other - Ideas for a solution that addresses any need or challenge of communities, business, cities, etc.

1.4. Who can apply?

Geographical 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, preferably but not exclusively within the context of suggested topics from the point 1.3 of this document.

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

Applicant limitations:

- Eligible criteria for the main award

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

- Teams should be composed exclusively of the citizens of the WB economies¹, aged up to 35 years old;
- Teams are encouraged to be composed of members residing in more than one Western Balkan economy;
- Teams competing for the main award are encouraged to be composed of qualified individuals including students; legal entity including start-ups; non-governmental and educational institutions;
- Eligible criteria for the special award
 - Teams from high schools can be composed as a group of high school students from the same or different high schools, with the maximum of 7 members²;
- General rules³ (more information could 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 (team leader) can submit the team's solution;
 - Proven experience in projects relevant to the priority areas of the competition will be taken as advantage;
 - Registered applicants or teams can be disqualified and excluded from Balkathon for breaching one of the rules defined in the Rules of Balkathon 5.0, Statement of Honour or Balkathon Guidelines.

1.5. When and where?

Registration process starts on 21 May 2024 and ends on 5 July 2024 at 12:00 (CET+1).

The Award Ceremony will be held in hybrid form in early September 2024.

1.6. How to apply?

All applicants need to prepare the documents elaborated in the section “Application documents” and submit them by 5 July 2024, by 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

¹ This refers to people who have the citizenship of one or more of WB economies and live in the WB region.

² The teams are encouraged to be composed of members from high schools from more than one Western Balkan economy

³ In addition to being published on the website, Rules of Balkathon 5.0 and Balkathon Guidelines 5.0 will be automatically sent to applicants upon registration.

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

Teams have to submit the following documents, based on the award they are applying for, and they should be submitted by the team leader:

The teams applying for the main awards:

- A Concept Note – Please download the [document](#) from the [Balkathon](#) webpage, complete it and submit it with the other related documents through the registration form on the web.
- Statement of Honour – Please download the [document](#) from [Balkathon](#) website, sign it and submit it with the other related documents through the registration form on the web.
- Authorisation for the team leader (note: this applies to a team of individuals) - Please download the [document](#) from the [Balkathon](#) webpage, complete it and submit it with the other related documents through the registration form on the web.
- In case of applying as a legal entity you need to submit:
 - legal entity 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
 - copy of the legal entity's Registration Certificate

The teams applying for the special awards:

- A Concept Note for applicants applying for consideration under special awards - Please download dedicated [document for the teams coming from high schools](#) from the [Balkathon](#) webpage, complete it and submit it through the registration form on the web.

Key dates

Dates:	Activities:
21 May 2024	Beginning of registration process
5 July 2024, 12:00 (CET+1)	End of registration process

5-29 July 2024	Evaluation of applications (Phase I, up to 18 teams per topic selected)
2 August 2024	Preselection and publishing the list of qualified teams for the work with mentors and for the final event (up to 18 teams selected)
Early September 2024	Mentors working with teams for the second phase
Early September 2024	Submission of final presentations
Early September 2024	Final competition Announcement of the winners and Award Ceremony

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.

The selection/evaluation process will be performed in two 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 5.0 vision. After evaluation, the qualified applicants (up to 18 teams) will be offered a mentorship assistance to help them upgrade their ideas/solutions and their business plan for the second phase.

Technical criteria used for this phase are listed in section 2.3. The list of qualified applicants will be published on <http://www.rcc.int/balkathon>.

Phase II

After mentoring sessions, qualified applicants will submit their final concept note and video pitch (more information will be provided during the mentorship sessions).

Applicants will present their ideas at the final event in the following concept:

- 3 minutes for the video pitch or live presentation
- 2 minutes for the jury questions

Criteria used for this phase are listed in section 2.3.

Qualified applicants with the highest score will be awarded, and the winners will be announced at the Award Ceremony in early September 2024.

2.3. Evaluation criteria

Criteria for the first phase:

- Quality
- Originality
- Relevance
- Team composition

Additional criteria for the second phase:

- Feasibility
- Quality of business plan (which will include marketing and finance)
- Quality of the presentation of a business plan

Criteria for the special recognition awards⁴:

- For special awards, both teams have to be best ranked among the qualified applicants coming from high schools
- Quality
- Relevance
- Teams composed of members from high schools from more than one Western Balkan economy will have additional points

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 21 May 2024.

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.

⁴ Application, evaluation, and selection of special recognition awards are not part of the main competition process

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
- Second phase: representatives of the private/public ICT sector from the Western Balkan economies and RCC

Note: The evaluation of the special recognition awards will be done by the jury appointed for the second phase.

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, one per Western Balkan economy, will be awarded 7.000€ each.

The winners will sign the Agreement/Statement with the RCC in order to regulate their rights and obligations. With this Agreement/Statement, the RCC and the winners will regulate the manner and obligation of the winners to use RCC logo (enclosed as Schedule A) and EC logo (enclosed as Schedule B) in all future communication regarding the idea or developed end product that is based on the idea.

In case that the winner with the first awarded idea withdraws from the follow-up procedures, rejects to sign the Agreement/Statement or is disqualified, the next candidate with the highest score for the given topic will be awarded.

The winners will receive full award after signing the Agreement/Statement with the RCC.

2.7. Special awards of the competition

The RCC will give two special awards to the best ranked high school teams (if any) in the amount of 4,000€ each. In case jury is of the opinion that there are more than 2 good applications that came from high school teams, RCC reserves the right to grant additional special awards.

The qualified applicants receiving the special award will sign the Agreement/Statement with the RCC in order to regulate their rights and obligations. In case that the qualified applicants receiving the special award withdraw from the follow-up procedures or are disqualified, the next qualified applicant on the list that meets the criteria for special award will be awarded.

The winners will receive full award after signing the Agreement/Statement with RCC.

2.8. Appeals 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.

2.9. 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 Award Ceremony 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

Schedule A and Schedule B

