



**ELTON JOHN
AIDS FOUNDATION**



Opportunity Announcement

RADIANT 2.0

INNOVATION CHALLENGE FUND

DECEMBER 2024



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I. LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CSO – civil society organisation
EECA – Eastern Europe and Central Asia
HTS – HIV testing services
KPs – key populations
MSM – men who have sex with men
PLHIV – people living with HIV
PWUD – people who use drugs
STI – sexually transmitted infections
SW – sex workers
TB – tuberculosis
TG – transgender people



II. ABOUT RADIAN 2.0

Elton John AIDS Foundation (“the Foundation”), in partnership with Gilead Sciences, launched the groundbreaking initiative “RADIAN” in September 2019 to meaningfully address new HIV infections and deaths from AIDS-related illnesses in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA). RADIAN focuses on action, investment, and resources to improve the quality of life, prevention, and care for people at risk of or living with HIV in the region. The Elton John AIDS Foundation and Gilead have an established presence in EECA and extensive experience working effectively with key local stakeholders in the region, including through the EECA Key Populations Fund that was active in 2017–2020.

Since the launch of RADIAN in 2019, the initiative has already had an impressive impact on communities throughout the EECA region. By November 2024, we have:

- Reached over 290,000 individuals from vulnerable communities with high-quality services;
- Tested almost 150,000 individuals for HIV;
- Newly identified almost 10,700 PLHIV;
- (Re)initiated on ART over 32,200 people living with HIV (PLHIV), including thousands of people previously lost to follow-up;
- Reduced stigma and discrimination towards key populations (KPs) and PLHIV by training almost 17,000 healthcare practitioners, law enforcement officers, and other specialists;
- Strengthened health and community systems by introducing high-impact service models, such as index testing and remote HIV self-testing; rolling out enhanced outreach strategies to expand hard-to-reach communities’ access to services; and shortening ART initiation times for newly identified and lost to follow-up PLHIV.

RADIAN 2.0 implemented in 2024-2028 is an opportunity to build on these achievements while tackling recently emerged challenges to end the HIV epidemic in the EECA region.

RADIAN 2.0 continues to focus on 25 countries of the EECA region: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovenia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

Funding is provided through grants, which are assessed and administered by the Elton John AIDS Foundation. Gilead has no involvement in the selection and assessment of award applicants and winners.

III. OPPORTUNITY ANNOUNCEMENT

CURRENT OPPORTUNITY

The **Innovation Challenge Fund** operating within the RADIAN 2.0 program, is designed to foster innovations that have the potential to transform approaches **along the HIV care cascade** or create an



enabling environment that make HIV services more effective. Focused on EECA, this Fund addresses HIV as a significant and ongoing public health issue requiring novel solutions and community-driven support.

The purpose of the Innovation Challenge Fund is to create opportunities for **novel ideas** addressing the HIV epidemic in EECA **to be piloted, evaluated, documented, and if successful, disseminated and replicated**. We are inspired by successful examples of healthcare innovation worldwide and are eager to foster similar achievements in the EECA region. We are looking for innovative projects that will improve the quality of life, access to services and their quality for people living with HIV and key populations (KPs) affected by HIV. The Innovation Challenge Fund encourages potentially **scalable projects** that have a **plausible theory of change** yet **lack evidence of effectiveness** in EECA or elsewhere.

This opportunity is open when announced and will remain open until June 30, 2027.

Further details, including applicable budget ceilings and how to apply, are outlined in this announcement.

IV. WHAT WE WILL FUND

The Foundation is inviting **Concept Notes** from non-governmental organizations for innovative projects that aim to develop transformative solutions in the field of HIV. We seek groundbreaking approaches improving **outreach and service demand, linkage to services, HIV service delivery, client retention for PLHIV and KPs**, as well as **creating an enabling environment** for these services. Projects should address critical needs of KPs and PLHIV, promote access to quality care, and have the potential for lasting impact through sustainable, scalable solutions.

What should projects do?

Applicants should identify **the most significant HIV-related problem(s) faced by one or more of the KPs** most affected by HIV/AIDS: people who use drugs (PWUD), sex workers (SW), men who have sex with men (MSM), transgender people (TG); people living with HIV (PLHIV); and particularly vulnerable subgroups of these KPs, such as migrants and prisoners. Sexual partners of individuals from these populations are also a priority. Alternatively, Applicants may identify **the most significant contextual challenges** that foster HIV-related problems, such as lack of community engagement, low capacity and poor sustainability of CSOs, few economic opportunities for KPs and PLHIV, stigma and discrimination, and others.

Applicants should propose innovative solutions addressing **direct HIV needs** and/or **contextual challenges**, and which would respond to the **overall Goal** for the Innovation Challenge Fund: **Measurably improve HIV-related health outcomes in KPs and PLHIV in the EECA region through innovative solutions that address specific challenges towards the '95-95-95' global targets and strengthening the capacity of KP and PLHIV communities.**

Each project should address **at least one of Objectives 1-4** of the RADIANT 2.0 program below, and **Objective 5**:



1. **Deliver high-quality community-based services** to address the unmet HIV-related needs of KPs and PLHIV
2. **Address structural drivers of the HIV epidemic** to improve the quality of life of KPs and PLHIV and ultimately improve HIV-related health outcomes
3. **Strengthen health systems** to sustainably improve care for KPs and PLHIV
4. **Strengthen community systems** to deliver community-led HIV care effectively and increase access to sustainable funding
5. **Study and document project interventions, learnings and results** to help other cities and countries across EECA to end their HIV epidemics.

For the purpose of this call, the Foundation considers as “**innovation**” a solution that **has a plausible theory of change behind it, but lacks evidence of effectiveness**. That is, an innovation is **an original intervention that has not yet been tried before elsewhere** in a similar context. Through this call, the Foundation will support truly creative ideas that will result in new models and new learnings. The Foundation supports adaptations or replications of models with effectiveness demonstrated elsewhere through other opportunities.

Innovative solutions may fall into one or more of the following illustrative categories, but are not limited to them:

- **Direct service innovations**
 - **Digital innovations:** Technological solutions that utilize artificial intelligence and machine learning for providing HIV services along the cascade. We welcome ideas involving mobile applications, telemedicine platforms, and technologies that allow for remote health services.
 - **Non-digital innovations:** Creative interventions that rely on advances in biomedical research, social and behavioral sciences, marketing and other technologies to provide improved HIV services to KPs and PLHIV.
- **Innovations for the enabling environment**
 - **Digital innovations:** Technological solutions to improve community engagement, CSO funding, sustainability and governance. These may include cryptocurrency-related fundraising solutions, decentralized CSO management and service delivery with the use of block-chain technologies, or the use of artificial intelligence for needs assessment or other evaluation purposes.
 - **Non-digital innovations:** Creative solutions integrating HIV with other health and social services through various modalities, addressing stigma and discrimination, aiming at regulatory changes at different levels, and addressing other structural drivers of the HIV epidemic.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the innovation, Applicants should plan an **implementation study** as part of their project design. If feasible, the implementation study should be included into the project budget, or it may be funded by the Foundation with additional resources.

Where can projects implement?

Projects must be implemented in one of the 25 RADIANT countries within the EECA region: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovenia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. Applicants



are encouraged to design solutions that address specific needs and challenges unique to a specific country, with the potential for broader regional impact and adaptability.

How long can projects last?

Applicants can apply for projects lasting **up to 24 months**.

What is the maximum amount that projects can apply for?

The maximum budget that projects can apply for is **\$300,000**.

X DON'T apply for the full amount of the maximum budget ceiling if you don't need that much to achieve the results that you plan to achieve

✓ DO apply for the amount that you need (up to the maximum budget ceiling) to achieve the results that you plan to achieve

V. ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

All Concept Notes will be reviewed for eligibility before they are assessed against the evaluation criteria. The eligibility review is a pass/fail test and covers both organizational and financial considerations. Once eligible, Concept Note selection will be based on our selection criteria listed below.

Eligibility criteria for Concept Notes are:

- **Implementation Location:** Projects must be implemented in any one of the 25 countries within the EECA region. Applicants are encouraged to design solutions that address specific needs and challenges unique to these countries, with the potential for broader regional impact and adaptability.
 - Applicant must be based in the country of implementation but may partner with organizations in another country or outside of the EECA region for specific technical assistance.
 - Applicant may implement their project in one or more cities or regions in the country of implementation.
 - Project may only implement in multiple countries if the Applicant provides a compelling argument for why a multi-country approach is optimal.
- **Type of Applicant:** We encourage Concept Notes from non-profit, academic and research organisations. We will consider Concept Notes from commercial entities if their participation is justified and there is no profit included into the project budget. Ineligible entities include individuals and governments.
- **Consortia:** Applications are welcomed from consortia – or groups of partners working together to achieve the objectives – where each consortium partner brings unique strengths to achieve the expected results. Consortia should designate a lead applicant organisation to submit the Application. Applications are equally welcomed from solo applicant organisations.
- **Registration and Bank Account:** The Applicant must be a registered entity and must have an active separate organisational bank account. Unregistered community groups with a strong track record of achieving results are welcome to apply, but must apply in consortium with a fiscal agent, which must be an officially registered entity.



- **Project Timetable:** The proposed project should be implemented, and all funds disbursed within **24 months** from the date the Letter of Agreement is signed with the Applicant or **by December 1, 2028**, whichever is earlier.
- **Completeness and Language:** All Concept Notes and supporting documentation must be submitted in English or Russian; any other language will be considered ineligible. Submission forms must be completed in full to be considered eligible for review; incomplete submissions will be considered ineligible.
- **Number of Applications:** Applicants with more than one project idea may submit multiple Concept Notes. Please note each idea requires a separate Concept Note. Applicants may submit Concept Notes under the Innovation Challenge Fund until the call is closed.
- **Budget and Eligible Costs:** The Foundation will assess each concept's budget in relation to the proposed objectives and results. Grants are open to supporting all costs that are justified in relation to achieving project objectives. Grant funds cannot be used to procure essential medicines (e.g. antiretroviral therapy) or purchase real estate property. The maximum budget that projects can apply is up to \$300,000.

VI. SELECTION AND EVALUATION CRITERIA

After eligibility review, the Foundation will select Concept Notes using the selection criteria below. Applicants should reflect on the below questions when considering the competitiveness of their concepts.

CONCEPT NOTE SELECTION CRITERIA

1. Strategic Alignment

- How does the concept respond to strategic objectives of RADIAN 2.0 and the Innovations Challenge Fund?
- How unique is the concept, and what are the novel approaches or technologies?
- How does the concept differ from current practices, and does it have the potential to significantly improve existing methods in HIV care?

2. Practical Feasibility and Impact

- What are the real needs of PLHIV and/or KPs, or what are the contextual challenges addressed by the concept?
- What is the concept's theory of change? Does it demonstrate potential for meaningful positive impact on health outcomes, access to treatment, quality of life for PLHIV and/or KPs either through direct services or by creating an enabling environment?

3. Scalability and Adaptability Potential

- How suitable is the concept for replication or adaptation in other locations?
- Can the concept be scaled effectively while accounting for the unique needs and characteristics of different communities?

4. Budget Efficiency

- How justified and realistic is the proposed budget?
- How efficiently will resources be used to achieve the stated objectives, and does the budget align with the proposed methods and resources?
- How open is the project team to sharing experiences, results, and insights with others, fostering a network for knowledge and resource sharing?



The Foundation will invite the Applicants of selected Concept Notes to submit full Applications. **Only Applicants with selected Concept Notes will be contacted.** The Foundation is not able to provide review and feedback on Concept Notes that have not been selected.

The Foundation will wholistically evaluate full Applications using the evaluation criteria below. Applicants should reflect on the evaluation questions when drafting their full Applications.

APPLICATION EVALUATION CRITERIA

Strategic Alignment and Impact

- **Alignment:** How is the Applicant addressing the Strategic Objectives of RADIAN 2.0 and the Innovation Challenge Fund?
- **RADIAN Priorities:** Is the project focused on territories and populations with high demonstrated HIV-related needs and where few other donor resources are available?
- **Theory of Change:** Is there a clear idea of what the Applicant is looking to change? What is a clear strategy for how the project would have significant impact on the HIV epidemic in the location of implementation?
- **Data-informed Design & Desired Impact:** How well does the Applicant understand the HIV epidemic in the location of implementation? What are the data showing that the desired impact is likely through the suggested intervention?
- **Proof of Concept:** How likely is the project to create lessons for, and improve HIV programming in the wider EECA region? Is there a clear strategy to produce and disseminate learnings and findings to a wide set of stakeholders?
- **Incremental Value:** Are additional funds for the specific type of activity, population, city and country needed? Will the proposed activity complement rather than duplicate existing activities? Do the proposed activities differ substantially from those that other actors, such as the local government and health system, or international donors and CSOs are already undertaking?
- **Risks:** How high are the risks of the proposed project? Are appropriate risk mitigation measures identified?

Effectiveness

- **History of Performance:** What is the Applicant's history in previous projects of successfully delivering results that it has promised to achieve?
- **Expertise & Relationships:** What is the Applicant's domain expertise and knowledge in the necessary and relevant areas? What are the Applicant's relationships required for success (e.g. partnerships with communities, government, healthcare organisations)?
- **Cost Effectiveness:** How cost-effective is the project in delivering its outcomes?
- **Budget:** How reasonably estimated is the budget, and are actual costs likely to be close to budgeted costs?
- **Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Strategy:** How appropriate are the outcomes/metrics identified and are they ready to be tracked? Will there be any reporting issues?
- **Organisational & Financial Capacity:** What are the Applicant's resources to deliver outcomes on time and on budget? Does the grantee have strong financial and management systems? *(This criterion will be assessed in the Foundation's due diligence process if your proposal is preliminarily selected.)*



- **Transparency:** How strong is the Applicant’s history of transparency and accountability? *This criterion will be assessed in the Foundation’s due diligence process if your proposal is preliminarily selected.*)

Sustainability

- **Sustainability:** What is a strategy to make a lasting impact beyond the life of the grant? Will the project have a significant lasting impact on the HIV epidemic in the location of implementation?

REVIEWERS

A review panel will assess full Applications. In addition to subject matter experts, Applications may be reviewed by a panel with broad expertise and a track record in working with key populations. Some of these reviewers may not be deep domain experts in an Application’s particular field; as such, Applicants should describe their solution in clear language without the use of professional jargon.

VII.HOW TO APPLY

TIMELINE

The application process under the Innovation Challenge Fund is two-step: (1) Concepts notes; and (2) Full Applications by invitation based on successful concepts.

Concept Notes for the Innovation Challenge Fund are accepted on a rolling basis throughout the year, allowing Applicants to submit their concepts at any time. This open submission process provides flexibility, enabling Applicants to apply when their concepts are ready and ensuring that innovative solutions can be supported as they emerge. All Applications should be submitted through our online portal, where detailed guidelines and instructions are available. An estimated timeline is below.

Preliminary timeline (subject to change)

Opportunity announcement	Dec 2024
Webinars for Applicants (require registration):	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Russian Register through this link	19 Dec 2024 11:00-12:00 London
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In English Register through this link	20 Dec 2024 11:00-12:00 London
Concept notes accepted	Jan 2025 – Jun 2027
Full Application invited (estimate)	1-2 month after Concept Note accepted
Full Application submitted	1 month after the Application invited
Letter of Agreement signed (estimate)	3 months after the full Application is approved



CONCEPT NOTES

All Concept Notes must be submitted at our [Application Portal](#). It is the sole responsibility of the Applicant to update or correct information provided through the application portal on the website. The Foundation is not responsible for human error, theft, destruction, or damage to Concept Notes or Applications, or other factors beyond its control. Applications will be invited from those organisations submitting the most relevant Concept Notes, as defined by the eligibility and selection criteria.

CONCEPT NOTE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE INNOVATION CHALLENGE FUND

Concept Notes for the Innovation Challenge Fund will require the following information:

- **General information about your project:** Organisation (grant recipient) name; project country(ies); project cost; project geography (country, region, city); intended project start date; intended project end date; project duration.
- **Answers to the following questions:**
 1. **Executive Summary:** What are the main expected results and activities of your project? Please provide a brief summary of what your project will be achieving and how. **(150 words)**
 2. **HIV-related problem:** What is the problem related to HIV in key population(s) in your city/region/country that you are proposing to address? Please provide objective quantified information justifying the urgency and the scale of the problem. Why is it crucial to address this problem to end the HIV epidemic in your city/region/country? **(250 words)**
 3. **Theory of Change:** How you propose to address the problem(s) identified? What are the logical steps you are planning to take, what are the expected results at each of the steps, and how will you measure them? **(350 words)**
 4. **Innovation:** How is your approach unique? What are the novel methods or technologies? How does your concept differ from current practices? What are the elements in the Theory of Change that currently lack evidence of effectiveness? **(350 words)**
 5. **Scalability:** If successful, what will it take to scale up or replicate your approach? **(250 words)**
- **A provisional USD budget** (the Foundation will assess each Concept Note's budget in relation to the proposed results)
- **Applicant details:** contact details for the person submitting the proposal, and main contact person if different from the above; type of Applicant; CSO registration details; organisational income and number of employees; address.

SUPPORT WITH CONCEPT NOTES

All Applicants have the opportunity to ask clarification questions about this opportunity announcement and the selection criteria used to evaluate applications. All such requests must be made in writing via email to radian@eltonjohnaidsfoundation.org.



APPLICATIONS

Applicants whose Concept Notes are selected to move forward to the Application stage will be notified by the Foundation and will be requested to submit an Application with further details on their solution. Selection of your Concept Note does not obligate you to submit an Application. The Foundation may provide feedback to Applicants to help further hone their Applications. The Application will require information such as additional detail on the proposed project, monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) framework, and proposed implementing partners that will receive funding under this grant. A detailed budget will also be required, as well as references and financial documentation. We will provide further information on this in the invitation to apply.

VIII. TIPS FOR YOUR CONCEPT NOTE: DOS AND DON'TS

While preparing your Concept Note under the Innovation Challenge Fund, you may find it useful to note the following tips to avoid mistakes which increase the probability of your Concept Note being rejected. Please avoid these mistakes in your concept note!

X DON'T propose a concept that is an adaptation or replication of a model implemented elsewhere in a similar context: the Foundation provides other opportunities for such concepts.

✓ DO propose innovative ideas that have a plausible theory of change but lack evidence of effectiveness for some of its elements, their combination, or your specific context.

X DON'T claim your concept is unique and innovative just because you had this idea.

✓ DO a Web search of relevant literature for similar models and their results: this is what the Foundation's reviewers will do as well. If someone else has already implemented and studied this approach, use it for applications under opportunities other than the Innovation Challenge Fund.

X DON'T propose interventions that are implausibly going to lead to the stated results, nor interventions that target problems other than those you have identified.

✓ DO propose a logical Theory of Change that includes plausible connections between the identified unmet needs, proposed interventions and expected results.

X DON'T use general phrases to describe what you want to do in your project.

✓ DO describe concrete quantifiable activities that you plan to implement, with specific examples.

X DON'T use vague, unnecessarily complicated, or pseudo-scientific language.

✓ DO use practical, action-oriented language so that it is clear who will be doing what, where, how and when.

X DON'T describe the problems that you are trying to solve in your project in generic terms.

✓ DO provide objective quantified information, with reference to data sources where possible, to justify the urgency and the scale of the problems that you are trying to solve.



X DON'T apply for the full amount of the maximum budget ceiling if you don't need that much to achieve the results that you plan to achieve

✓ DO apply for the amount that you need (up to the maximum budget ceiling) to achieve the results that you plan to achieve

X DON'T plan surveys, studies and evaluations without including clear plans for how the data will be used in project implementation and/or for other strategic and sustainable purposes.

✓ DO plan an implementation study as part of your project to assess the elements of the Theory of Change that currently lack evidence, and to evaluate the overall effectiveness of your approach. This study may be part of your project's budget or supported by the Foundation separately.