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**Manual
for organizers of national round of
Regional Service-Learning Award
(RSLA)**

2025





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All masculine terms with gender connotations used in this document are used in a neutral manner and refer equally to men and women.

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Obsah

1	Introduction.....	4
2	Structure of RSLA partners	5
3	Timeline	6
4	Communication Methods.....	7
5	Before launching a new edition.....	7
5.1	Human resources.....	7
5.2	Preparing documentation	7
5.3	Financial planning	8
5.4	Partners on national level	9
6	Evaluation of applications	9
6.1	Contacting evaluators.....	9
6.2	Evaluators Training.....	10
6.3	Evaluation documentation	10
6.4	Evaluation process	11
6.5	Evaluation rules.....	11
7	Communication and promotion	12
7.1	Transparency	13
8	National award ceremony	13
9	Connection with regional round.....	14
9.1	Membership in RSLA Jury	15



1 Introduction

This manual serves as a practical guide for organizing the national round of the Regional Service-Learning Award (hereinafter RSLA) in a partner country.

RSLA is developed by civil society organizations gathered within the joint international initiative Central and Eastern Europe Service-Learning Network (hereinafter the Network), created in 2016 in cooperation with CLAYSS (Argentina), bringing together countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The members of Central and Eastern Service-Learning Network are eligible to participate in the organization of RSLA on national and regional level.

The Regional Service-Learning Award (RSLA) for Central and Eastern Europe honours schools and youth organizations that integrate academic learning with meaningful community service to promote active citizenship. Established in 2020 by the Network, the award recognizes innovative projects that combine curricular goals with social engagement, benefiting both students and communities. It highlights best practices from preschool to university education and non-formal youth work, encouraging replication and continuous improvement. Winners receive financial prizes, public recognition, and opportunities for visibility through ceremonies, case studies, and workshops. Beyond the awards, RSLA provides feedback, resources, and training to strengthen service-learning across the region.

The aim is to award projects that meet service-learning quality standards, connecting learning with service to the community and supporting active citizenship. National rounds nominate projects to the regional round, coordinated by the RSLA regional committee.

Information on partners, achievements and previous editions: www.rslaward.eu.

The manual ensures professionalism, transparency, and alignment with SL standards.

- **Aim:** Support for the quality and recognition of educational projects based on the principles of service-learning.
- **Target group:**
 - youth organizations, non-formal education providers
 - preschools, primary, secondary, and higher education institutions



2 Structure of RSLA partners

Partnership in RSLA is based on a shared interest in developing service-learning, strengthening its recognition, and promoting good practices.

Structure:

1. Each year, the Network members - the partners reach a consensus on which partner will serve as the coordinator for that RSLA edition. This partner is then responsible for convening and leading meetings, monitoring deadlines, and coordinating all processes.
2. The coordinator works closely with three selected partners appointed by the Network as the RSLA Committee for that year. Establishing this structure ensures faster decision-making and more efficient preparation of partner meetings.
3. The remaining partners provide cooperation and support to the fullest extent possible and have the final say in decisions related to specific aspects of the award process. They are responsible for fulfilling the commitments agreed upon by all partners.

How we work:

All partners have the right to comment on all aspects and processes of the RSLA and to propose improvements. Decisions are made by consensus; if this is not possible, partners proceed to a vote, and the outcome is respected.

All partners trust that the intentions of the others involved are in the best interest of service-learning and the partnership, and they refrain from acting in ways that could disrupt this partnership.

Roles and responsibilities of the RSLA partners at the national level:

- Promoting and disseminating the open call for RSLA at the national level through social and/or traditional media.
- Communicating with and supporting applicants during the RSLA open call, the evaluation process, and the RSLA Ceremony, such as organizing information sessions for applicants.
- Respecting the deadlines established by the RSLA Committee, including the deadlines for project evaluation phases at the national level.
- Participating in meetings that define the main issues and steps of RSLA.
- Committing to bring at least one representative of the projects that reach the finals to the RSLA Ceremony.
- Keeping and sharing administrative data of applications and other relevant materials/data of RSLA with the RSLA Committee.



- Organizing the national finalists for the Award Ceremony, ensuring their participation in the ceremony and providing support if they need to prepare any materials or presentations.

3 Timeline

The timeline for each year is agreed upon by the partners. The proposed schedule is indicative and based on previous experience with organizing the RSLA.

1. Open call for the edition of RSLA in eligible countries

Beginning of May

2. Acceptance of the applications

May – July

3. Evaluation and selection of service-learning practices at the national level

Selection of semi-finalists service-learning practices for regional evaluation

July – August

4. Evaluation and selection of service-learning practices at the regional level

Selection of winners for current edition of RSLA

August – September

5. The RSLA Award Ceremony

Onsite or online

October - November

To ensure high-quality preparation of each edition with sufficient advance planning and in consideration of partners' capacities, the first partner meeting is usually held about three months



before the launch of the new call, typically in February. The meeting is held online and is convened by the RSLA Committee appointed in the previous period.

4 Communication Methods

For each edition, the coordinator creates a shared folder on Google Drive to store and share all documents related to that year.

Partners communicate primarily via email or WhatsApp. Contact details of representatives from each partner organization are included in the documents stored in the shared folder.

The RSLA coordinator shares the link to the drive with partners after the first meeting.

General information and updates about the RSLA are communicated through the website www.rslaward.eu, which is managed by the RSLA coordinator or a designated partner. Each partner is responsible for translating the texts into their own language and ensuring the accuracy of the information published in that language.

5 Before launching a new edition

5.1 Human resources

Each partner appoints one person responsible for coordinating the entire process and communicating with the other partners. This person acts as the Awards Coordinator and serves as the main contact for questions regarding the national round and its connection to the international round.

The implementation of RSLA is a complex process with numerous tasks that can be delegated within the team. However, the National Awards Coordinator must be informed about all these aspects and is responsible for ensuring compliance with quality standards.

The Coordinator also communicates on behalf of the organization with partners, participates in online meetings, and represents the national organizer in discussions on existing proposals.

The partnership may also entail certain financial obligations. The Coordinator should have the authority to make decisions on these matters or have access to the necessary information to address financial questions.

5.2 Preparing documentation

Before launching new call, these documents are needed:

- Terms and conditions for school category
- Terms and conditions for non-formal category
- Application form for formal category



- Application form for non-formal category

• **Review/Translation of Required Documentation**

Before launching each edition of the awards, it is necessary to review the existing documentation for accuracy, update it with any changes, and verify the functionality of the tool being used. Records from the evaluation of previous editions are used for potential updates. A summary of the previous edition’s evaluation is available to the organization that coordinated RSLA that year, which ensures that these suggestions are discussed before finalizing the documentation. Before launching the call, it is necessary to translate or review as needed:

- The terms and conditions for the categories in which the national organizer participates (which may be one or both categories)
- The application form for the categories in which the organizer participates (which may be one or both categories)

• **Publication and Functionality Check of the Application Tool**

Choose the tool your organization typically uses for data collection and use it to receive applications. This will make preparation easier and help avoid potential issues during the application process.

Verify whether the selected tool can accept attachments and check the maximum file size allowed. Adjust the instructions regarding evidence submission in the application according to the type of tool and its technical capabilities.

TIP: If possible, customize the tool’s appearance to make it visually appealing and consistent with the overall awards branding.

Send a working and verified link through which applicants in your country will submit their applications to the website administrator at www.rslaward.eu by the agreed deadline before the launch of the new edition, so it can be published. Upload all translated documents (terms and conditions and applications) to the shared drive in the appropriate folder in DOC format, allowing the RSLA Coordinator to access and work with them as needed.

5.3 Financial planning

Prepare a budget for the current edition of the awards. The costs to consider include:

- Work of the Awards Coordinator
- Fees for evaluators of submitted applications
- Promotion expenses (e.g., print materials, paid online advertising, video production)



- Costs for the awards ceremony (e.g., venue rental, catering, host services, photographer services, expenses related to online streaming)
- Costs of prizes for national round winners (e.g., certificates, tangible gifts)
- Financial contribution for prizes for international round winners
- Contribution to the operation of the website www.rslaward.eu

5.4 Partners on national level

Identify partners who can help disseminate information about the awards and strengthen RSLA promotion. These may include:

- Collaborating organizations with the same target group
- Public institutions involved in education and innovation in education
- Public figures whose values align with your organization and the RSLA concept
- Private donors inclined to support education projects (e.g., private foundations, entrepreneurs, etc.)

Agree in advance on the forms of collaboration and how the partnership will be communicated.

TIP: During other activities you carry out, you may meet many interesting and influential people. Take the opportunity to talk about RSLA and its significance, and propose partnerships. With public institutions, it is advisable to formalize the collaboration through a memorandum of understanding or another form of joint declaration of interest.

6 Evaluation of applications

6.1 Contacting evaluators

For the evaluation of submitted applications, approach individuals well in advance who meet the following profile:

- Experience working with schools, youth, and the community.
- Experience in evaluating SL practices/projects in previous editions of RSLA or similar initiatives.
- Experience in application of S-L methodology and have successfully implemented at least one S-L practice/ project before - it's an asset.

The role of evaluators is to:

- Assess all the projects based on the criteria and complete the centralized documents.
- Prepare relevant feedback for each project.



- Provide feedback to applicants about their projects and draft passing and not passing letters.
- Prepare a summary letter about projects to the international jury committee, if needed.
- Request additional information and clarification from the applicants, if needed.
- Respect the timeline of the evaluation.

TIP: It is recommended that each application is assessed by at least two evaluators. This ensures greater objectivity, enhances transparency, and provides applicants with more feedback that can help them improve. The final quantitative score is then the average of these evaluations.

6.2 Evaluators Training

If you involve individuals in the evaluation who have not participated in previous editions, organize a training for evaluators. The training syllabus is prepared, field-tested, and included in the RSLA documentation. The training consists of two sessions, with practical evaluation exercises on examples from previous editions conducted between them.

In the first session, evaluators receive information about the evaluation process and familiarize themselves with the documentation. The second session focuses on the test evaluations they conducted, providing an opportunity to verify their understanding of the process and criteria, and to discuss any uncertainties. It is recommended to use two examples for testing—one that is not a service-learning project, and one that meets the service-learning criteria but leaves room for improvement.

Evaluators with prior RSLA experience should be invited to an information session, where you present the document workflow and the communication process among evaluators and with you as the coordinator. This allows you to communicate any changes between editions and address potential obstacles to meeting deadlines. The session also provides an opportunity for evaluators to get to know each other, which can be useful for future collaboration.

6.3 Evaluation documentation

While applications are being submitted, prepare the necessary documentation for their evaluation. Verify whether the documents need updating and decide which shared workspace you will use for handling applications so that evaluators also have access.

Do NOT use the official RSLA partner folder for working with evaluators at the national level. This prevents any unintentional interference with critical documentation. Create your own storage space for national-level evaluation work and establish a communication method with evaluators.

Ensure that you have all necessary documents available in your language:



- Evaluation sheet (one for all categories)
- Instructions for evaluators
- Summary sheet
- No-pass letter template for applicants who did not meet the basic service-learning criteria or scored below the minimum threshold in quality evaluation
- Pass letter template for applicants advancing to the international round
- Summary letter for projects advancing to the international round

TIP: Before sending applications to evaluators, check that the links to photo documentation attached by applicants are functional. Often, applicants do not set the correct access permissions, preventing evaluators from reviewing the documentation.

TIP: Verify well in advance that all evaluators have access to all the documents they need. Evaluation typically takes place during the summer months, when communication can take longer than usual. It would be unfortunate if evaluators could not access certain documents or information due to oversight.

6.4 Evaluation process

1. After the deadline for receiving the applications, fill in the number of received applications into overview sheet (in the official drive folder shared with all partners each year).
2. Service-learning projects/practices that pass 5 eliminatory conditions will be further evaluated.
3. Service-learning projects/practices that gather a minimum agreed points are eligible to be considered for the final round, but each country can choose 25% of all projects to be sent to the regional evaluation phase.
4. Download summary excel sheet for evaluators to fill the score in. Collect the scores and copy-paste them into overview excel.
5. Send pass/no-pass letters to applicants.
6. Prepare summary letters for the international Jury and upload them on drive.

6.5 Evaluation rules

The decision-making at the national level should adhere to the following principles:

- Ensure a fair, objective, and transparent evaluation process.
- Avoid conflicts of interest between the evaluators and applicants.



- Seek consensus among the national team of evaluators regarding the projects that will advance to the finale.
- Retain all evaluation documents and notes in case they are required by the applicants or the Leading Committee.
- Safeguard the data of applicants or institutions.

If evaluators determine that additional information is needed for their assessment, contact the applicant by email. Do not leave this task to the evaluators, as this prevents the sharing of information you do not wish to disclose and allows you to stay informed.

Ask evaluators, in addition to assigning scores for each criterion, to provide recommendations for applicants on how to improve their projects or explanations for lower scores. This is particularly important for unsuccessful applicants.

7 Communication and promotion

The Regional Service-Learning Award (RSLA) has a visual identity (logo, colours, templates) consistently used by all partners. If you plan to build a separate brand for the national awards, it is recommended to base it on RSLA visuals or use them alongside your own, making it clear that the national awards are part of RSLA.

The RSLA Committee prepares an annual package of promotional materials available to partners for editing. Use this material to create a communication plan covering the entire period from the launch of the call to the announcement of results.

Consider where your target group gathers, how they access information, and which communication channels they use. Don't hesitate to reach out directly to schools and organizations if you know their work could be a good example of service-learning. Personal contact is always the most effective.

Some partners organize information **seminars or webinars** to introduce potential applicants to the application form and the evaluation process.

All information about RSLA, including its history and current updates, is published on www.rslaward.eu. The **website** is managed by the RSLA Committee, and its content is edited in agreement with all partners.

To support RSLA promotion, a **Facebook** profile is also maintained at www.facebook.com/RegionalAward by the partner organization MIOS. Each partner is



encouraged to use all their usual communication channels — social media, websites, newsletters — to promote RSLA.

Feel free to use the **press release** template provided by the RSLA Coordinator or create your own, reaching out to local and national media. Support your communication with examples of successful projects from previous years that may attract attention.

TIP: You can start communication even before the new edition launches. Use teasers such as photos from the previous year or statistics collected by you and other partners.

7.1 Transparency

Communicate clearly which stage of RSLA the process is currently in. Publish the names and profiles of the evaluators. Also, communicate who the RSLA partners are and acknowledge their contributions.

Publish results only after agreement with the partners. It is important that you can defend the evaluation results and explain them clearly. When communicating with unsuccessful applicants, base your feedback on the information provided by the evaluators.

TIP: Applicants may sometimes be dissatisfied with the evaluation results. For unsuccessful applicants, have prepared explanations and recommendations for improvement. Encourage them not to give up and to reapply next year after incorporating the evaluators' suggestions.

8 National award ceremony

The event is a celebration of good examples of linking education and community service. It recognizes young people who are engaged and develop not only themselves but also their surroundings through their activities. At the same time, it acknowledges the adults who provide these young people with space to grow and guide them through the process.

Depending on your capacities and available resources, organize the event in a way that preserves its celebratory character. Keep in mind that only a portion of the applications can advance to the international round, so for many applicants, the national awards are the only opportunity to gain recognition for their efforts.

Invite all applicants, including those whose projects did not pass the initial evaluation filter and were therefore not service-learning projects. This provides them with an opportunity to be inspired.

When preparing the program, consider the age composition of your participants. If possible, adapt the program to be engaging and useful for both adults and children or young people.



Use interactive methods to share good practices, such as “living library” formats or world café sessions.

If possible, enhance the significance of your event by inviting relevant stakeholders from the fields of education and youth work. They may become future partners in developing service-learning.

After the event, collect written feedback on the entire process. The insights gained will help improve the next edition.

9 Connection with regional round

For successful collaboration at the international level, it is essential to follow the agreed rules and deadlines. Intensive work with time management begins particularly after the application period closes, when the evaluation and assessment phase becomes most active.

Please adhere to the following rules:

- A. Respect the application submission deadline.

Only the pre-agreed number of applications can advance to the international round. The final number depends on the total applications received for the national awards and the overall nominations.

- B. The day after the deadline, report the number of valid applications received by your deadline to the RSLA Coordinator in the agreed format.

Once the RSLA Coordinator has received information from all partners, the number of projects each partner can submit to the international round will be determined according to the pre-agreed key.

- C. Inform evaluators of the total number of applications received in your country and the number eligible for the international round.
- D. Set national-level evaluation deadlines to allow sufficient time to select the projects advancing to the international round and to prepare summary letters for the international jury on time.
- E. Prepare a summary letter for each project advancing to the international round. Keep in mind that international evaluators will only have this letter and not the full project description. Pay attention to detail and include all essential information, including the evaluator’s comments and justification for why the project deserves recognition.
- F. Submit all summary letters on time to ensure the smooth work of the international committee.



- G. Inform your applicants that they have advanced to the international round—this can be done during the national awards event.
- H. Ensure the participation of all your nominees in the international awards event, either in person or online. Send invitations also to those who did not advance that year but may be interested in attending.

9.1 Membership in RSLA Jury

Each partner has the right to nominate a representative from their country to the international committee.

The nominated representative should meet criteria similar to those of a national-level evaluator:

- Experience working with schools, youth, and the community.
- Experience in evaluating service-learning practices/projects in previous editions of RSLA or similar initiatives.
- Experience with service-learning methodology.

Additionally, the nominated representative must have the capacity to dedicate at least 8 hours to evaluating submitted projects.

All participation conditions must be communicated to the partner before nominating the individual to the international Jury.