



UCLG AFRICA
United Cities and Local Governments of Africa
Cités et Gouvernements Locaux Unis d'Afrique
CGLU AFRIQUE

AFRICAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE (ACoC) TERMS OF REFERENCE

Final Document.

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PREAMBLE

This document presents the Terms of Reference for the selection of the next African Capitals of Culture (ACoC) from 2028 onwards, i.e. after Rabat (2022-2023) and Brazzaville (2026-2027).

This document was written as part of the "Capitals of Culture Working Together" programme, coordinated by the Committee on Culture of the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) global network, with the support of the European Commission (INTPA).

The leadership of this document belongs to the Presidency Bureau of the UCLG Africa Committee on Culture, chaired by the Mayor of Brazzaville, Dieudonné Bantsimba, since its creation in July 2025, and coordinated by Hugues Gervais Odaye. The Presidency Bureau of the UCLG Africa Committee on Culture also includes the cities of Rabat and Dakar.

This document is presented for approval at the^{2nd} meeting of the UCLG Africa Committee on Culture (9-10 March 2026, in Nouakchott).

The drafting of this document was coordinated by the teams of UCLG Africa (with Rahmatouca Sow) and the UCLG World Committee on Culture (with Jordi Pascual, Marta Llobet, Agnès Ruiz and Sarah Vieux). An initial version of this document was written by Antoine Guibert and developed with the teams of UCLG Africa and its Secretary General, Jean Pierre Elong Mbassi (July 2023). This version was reviewed and enriched with the support of Culture et Développement (Valeria Marcolin) in February 2026. External support from experts (Alessandro Lamonica, Cristina Farinha, Jordi Baltà and U-seok Seo) was important in framing this initiative within the broader context of global initiatives on "Capitals of Culture".

A supplementary technical document, "Summary Note" on these Terms of Reference, presents some of the debates and explains the choices made in drafting this.



A programme by:



With the support of:



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1. INTRODUCTION

The African Capital of Culture (ACoC) programme, initiated by UCLG Africa in collaboration with African civil society and the African Union, is part of the African Union's commitments, including:

- the African Charter on Cultural Renaissance (2006), Agenda 2063 (Aspiration 5), the Action Plan for Cultural and Creative Industries in Africa and the Decade of African Heritage (2021-2031), among others;
- as well as the promotion of inclusive and dynamic urban and territorial areas through culture, in line with the African Common Position on the New Urban Agenda (Habitat III, 2016), the Marrakesh Declaration on Local Governance (2018) and the work of the African Union's Sub-Committee on Decentralisation and Local Governance

It aims to support local and pan-African ambitions, as well as international cooperation for inclusive sustainable development centred on people and communities, in all their diversity, by promoting intercultural and intergenerational dialogue within the continent and beyond. It recognises both traditional practices and the extraordinary creativity of African youth, with a view to enabling diversified creative economies that respect local identities and know-how and are resolutely focused on a shared future for the world.

It promotes gender equality, youth inclusion, citizen and community participation, and territorial equity in access to culture, heritage and traditions, as well as creative opportunities.

As part of UCLG Africa's activities within the global UCLG network, the programme also supports the advocacy and cultural policy development tools produced by the Committee on Culture and the campaign to localise the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) led by UCLG. In this regard, it reaffirms its commitment to the global Culture 2030 Goal campaign for the inclusion of a Culture SDG in the revision of the Post-2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE AFRICAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE (ACoC) PROGRAMME

The African Capital of Culture (ACoC) programme has the following objectives (Working document of 23 June 2020 "African Capitals of Culture Programme Vision 2020/2030"):

1. To promote and celebrate the rich diversity of African cultures, their cultural expressions, languages, knowledge, traditions and cultural and natural heritage, by ensuring access to culture for all, from an early age, through the construction of plural and dynamic African identities;
2. At the same time, promote an Africa with a **strong cultural identity**, a common heritage, and shared values and ethics in line with the aspirational goals of Agenda 2063 and the principles of the African Charter on Cultural Renaissance;

3. Strengthen the capacity of all actors involved in cultural governance at the continental, national, city and territorial levels to achieve the SDGs through the definition and implementation of multi-level cultural policies, particularly at the territorial level, taking into account peripheral areas and the actors in these areas;
4. Support creativity and innovation by promoting encounters and bringing together public and private, formal and informal cultural and creative actors, in particular to improve conditions for training, creation, production and dissemination for strong national and continental markets that are open to trade and international exchange;
5. Strengthen intercultural and intergenerational dialogue, promoting a culture of peace and coexistence within territories and between continents, by fostering mutual understanding and knowledge between actors and cooperation capacities between African countries, cities and actors, and international partners.

3. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA AND PHASES

3.1. Formal criteria

Candidate cities must provide the following documents to submit their applications before the deadline specified in each call for applications:

PRE-SELECTION

The pre-selection stage consists of candidate cities demonstrating their ability to successfully carry out the ACoC project. This pre-selection stage will enable the selection of cities that meet the minimum operational and financial capacity criteria to aspire to the title.

At this stage, candidate cities must provide the following documents:

- Letter from the Mayor
- Pre-selection form, accompanied by relevant letters of support;
- Proposal (draft) for a cultural programme and planned areas of development for local cultural action for the year of the title;
- Involvement of civil society, traditional chiefdoms and communities, in all their diversity, planned at all stages of the process.

FINAL SELECTION

The final selection stage is the application stage itself, during which candidate cities must present their project to become an African Capital of Culture. At this stage, each candidate city must organise a "Seven Keys" workshop or "Culture 21 Plus" workshop in order to benefit from a working methodology and support in preparing its programme proposal and long-term cultural strategy. Only one application will be selected as ACoC at the end of this stage.

At this stage, candidate cities must provide the following documents:

- Letter from the Mayor.
- Detailed application form, accompanied by relevant letters of support.
- Complete programme for the year of the title.

- Report from the "Seven Keys" or "Culture 21 Plus" workshop.
- Long-term local cultural strategy.

Candidate cities undertake to comply with the timetable and deadlines set out in each call for applications.

3.2. Eligibility criteria

To be eligible, candidate cities must meet a set of minimum criteria:

- Be located in a member state of the African Union.
- Be a member of UCLG Africa.
- Represent a local or regional government (with the necessary support for the application from a city or metropolitan area that assumes its leadership). The application must be submitted on behalf of a defined territory.
- The title may be held by a single city or by a consortium of cities (main city + associated cities) with territorial continuity (metropolitan or regional), and with the possibility of including the name of the wider territory in the official title.
- A candidate city or territory may only be designated as an ACoC once.

4. CRITERIA FOR PRESELECTING A CITY

The pre-selection stage will enable the selection of applications that meet the minimum criteria demonstrating their operational and financial capacity to carry out an ACoC project. All applications that demonstrate their operational and financial capacity will be eligible for the selection stage.

The management capacity and viability of the application must be demonstrated in the application. A clear governance and management structure as well as for the artistic direction of the cultural programme must be described in the pre-selection form, in order to ensure their proper implementation and to facilitate cooperation with the various partners at local and international levels.

The pre-selection stage only aims to analyse applicants' ability to successfully carry out an ACoC programme, and will not focus on the content of the programme, which will be examined in the next stage. However, at this stage, applicants are required to provide a draft programme proposal (cultural, institutional, capacity building, etc.) for the year of the title to demonstrate the strengths of their project.

The application must be submitted by a city, but it may also involve a larger territorial area, bringing together other local authorities in the form of a consortium, and/or two cross-border cities.

In the pre-selection phase, applications will be evaluated on the basis of the following criteria:

1. **Political support and commitment from all relevant local, regional and national authorities.** The application must guarantee and provide evidence of cross-party

political commitment and consensus, technical and financial commitment over the long term, as well as a commitment from all relevant local, regional and national authorities to become ACoC, in order to ensure the sustainability of the project if the application is successful.

2. **Draft cultural programme proposal.** The draft cultural and professional programme proposal for the year of the title must demonstrate (a) a clear vision of the objectives and expected results, clearly identifying the obstacles and potential for cultural development in the territory that will be addressed by the programme, as well as the expected changes; and (b) the consultations carried out to identify these areas of work.
3. **Adequate infrastructure.** The application must demonstrate that the candidate city/territory has or will develop, by the year of the title, the infrastructure necessary to carry out the programme, such as appropriate cultural facilities (performance venues, exhibition spaces, heritage sites), formal and informal training venues for cultural professions and practices, cultural markets, including through the promotion of traditional and/or community cultural spaces and public spaces, sufficient accommodation capacity, existing or planned transport infrastructure (public and/or private) as part of the application, and accessibility measures for all audiences, including vulnerable groups. The development of digital spaces, the use (rehabilitation) of existing spaces and the enhancement of community living spaces are encouraged.
4. **Governance structure.** In order to ensure the proper implementation of the programme and to facilitate cooperation with the various partners at local and international level, the application must present a clear governance structure capable of ensuring effective coordination between local governments, regional and national partners, cultural actors and civil society organisations. The applicant must identify the legal entity responsible for implementation (association, public interest group, dedicated structure, or other appropriate form), specifying its composition, operating methods and decision-making mechanisms. This structure must also establish arrangements for cooperation with international partners, in particular with other cultural capitals, in order to promote the exchange of experiences and capacity building. Mechanisms for transparency, accountability and financial management must be clearly defined to ensure the confidence of all stakeholders.
5. **Stakeholder involvement (cultural sectors, civil society, communities).** The application must demonstrate the city's organisational capacity to develop and implement the proposed programme, and in particular: The application must demonstrate that the city or group has or will put in place an adequate organisational structure adapted to the local context and actors, including: a competent management team and/or one that has been upgraded through a detailed capacity-building programme, which must be included in the final application in the form of an implementation report; clear governance involving local governments and the artistic team; an active and well-connected cultural sector bringing together public institutions and civil society organisations, local communities, and municipal and

public services mobilised to support the project. The involvement of the private sector from the pre-selection phase onwards will be considered an added value. Sufficient human resources, skills and experience to plan, manage, implement and support the evaluation of the proposed programme must be presented (including job profiles to be recruited) and justified.

6. **Budget and feasibility.** The candidate city must document the **sources of funding** that can be mobilised for the project, including, but not limited to, the municipal cultural budget, grants or transfers from regional and national authorities, potential contributions from technical and financial partners, and commitments from the private sector and foundations. An **indicative history** (2 to 3 years if available) may be provided to contextualise the **capacity to mobilise additional resources, as well as a commitment to gradually increase** funding for culture in the run-up to the title year.

5. FINAL SELECTION CRITERIA

The selection stage is the application stage itself, during which candidate cities must present their programmes to become an ACoC. At the end of this stage, a single city (or consortium) will be designated as African Capital of Culture.

Applications will be assessed on the following criteria:

1. Long-term local cultural strategy

To be assessed using the "Form" and "Cultural strategy" documents

In parallel with its programme, the city applying for the title of ACoC should have a local or regional cultural vision that constitutes a long-term cultural strategy in line with local sustainable development and the promotion of active citizenship. The existence of such a long-term strategy enables the title of ACoC to be positioned as a strategic and structuring element, contributing to the achievement of long-term objectives in the local or regional area, taking into account the diversity of its stakeholders, with particular attention paid to women and young people, and groups facing exclusion (people with disabilities, migrants, ethnic minorities, etc.).

In particular, the project must present a vision for the future as well as strategic priorities and comprehensive actions covering a long-term period extending beyond the year in which the ACoC title is awarded (10 years after the title is awarded). The activities of the proposed programme must be explicitly in line with the strategic priorities of the long-term cultural project for the local or regional area. It must be accompanied by provisional management, implementation and resource (human, technical and financial) arrangements.

Applications will be evaluated on the basis of the following criteria:

- a) The cultural strategy explicitly defines a vision for the future and a strategy for the long-term cultural development and sustainable development of the city or region in all its dimensions; it will be based on a detailed analysis of the existing situation,

strengths and weaknesses, challenges and potential, and the search for solutions through action and cultural development in the broadest sense.

- b) The cultural strategy adopts a sustainable and cross-cutting approach and explicitly defines strategic areas linking culture and other dimensions of development, for example between culture and social and economic issues, urban or regional planning, human development, environmental protection, inclusion and the protection of women, in line with broader local or regional strategy documents, the participation of young people in the design and implementation of the strategy (including through the creation of income-generating opportunities and cultural expressions for young people through urban cultures), the fight against the digital divide, etc..
- c) The cultural strategy and the final application give pride of place to residents (F/M), communities (including cultural and artistic communities), cultural rights, the democratisation of culture and cultural democracy, women's and minority rights, and cultural and linguistic diversity. They consider the preservation and dissemination of traditional knowledge and African languages. the recognition and support of informal cultural expressions and community creative economies over the long term; and intergenerational dialogue.
- d) The cultural strategy is in line with the African Union's Agenda 2063, the continent's strategic framework for achieving its goal of inclusive and sustainable development, and other framework documents such as the African Charter on Cultural Renaissance, the African Youth Charter, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and its Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, and the Dakar Plan of Action on Creative Industries.
- e) The cultural strategy incorporates the localisation of the SDGs and the local implementation of the "Culture 21 Plus" guide on cultural rights and development; it also incorporates other principles from international agreements on culture and sustainable development, notably the Rome Charter on Cultural Rights and the UCLG Pact for the Future.
- f) Applications must explicitly identify in their application form the links and consistency between their cultural strategy and the proposed programme for the year of the ACoC title, emphasising the sustainability of the expected results of the planned programme in the medium and long term, and how this programme will contribute to the long-term development of the cultural strategy.
- g) Existing cultural policies in the territory or those implemented by the city in the past will demonstrate the city's structural commitment in this area and the coherence of the project. Updating these policies to incorporate new challenges such as the ecological and digital transition, the link between urban and rural areas, gender equality and the preservation of endangered cultural knowledge and expressions may be included in the programme of celebrations and will represent added value for the application.

2. Local, community and international cultural and artistic content

To be assessed with the 'programme' document

The city applying for the title of ACoC will propose a cultural and artistic programme involving the population, professionals and the local public and private sectors, to be carried out during

the period in which the city holds the title. Particular attention will be paid to the role of civil society in the implementation of activities and their accessibility to the general public, especially young people, older people and women.

The cultural and artistic content of this programme must be consistent with the other criteria of the programme: in particular, it must contribute in a coherent and explicit manner to the city's long-term cultural strategy, seek to achieve cross-cutting and local impacts, promote intra-continental and international cooperation, and include measures to engage the population and civil society. To this end, the cultural and artistic programming must have a clear, explicit and coherent artistic vision and strategy.

Candidate cities are not required to follow a standard programme model or to plan a minimum number of activities. Each candidate city/grouping may develop its programme in line with its objectives, cultural strategy and governance and management capacities. Particular attention will be paid to applications from medium-sized and secondary cities. Candidates are also not required to create an entirely new cultural programme for the title. Ongoing or planned cultural activities may be included in the programme, provided they meet the requirements and objectives of the project. The evaluation of the application will focus on the coherence and consistency of the programme, the clarity of the objectives set and the applicant's documented capacity to achieve them, as well as the quality of the impacts generated in the territory. When applying, the proposal must include a general overview of the programme's deployment throughout the year, demonstrating a strategic approach and an overall vision.

With regard to the proposed activities, applicants should refer to the definition of culture adopted by UNESCO in 1982 at the World Conference on Cultural Policies in Mexico City: "In its widest sense, culture may now be said to be the whole set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group. It includes not only the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs."

Applications will be evaluated on the basis of the following elements (general criteria)

- a) The **cultural and artistic programme** must be clear, explicit and realistic, and cover the duration of the ACoC title. It must have a coherent and explicit vision and strategy.
 - The cultural and artistic programme must include public spaces in the city and the region.
 - The cultural and artistic programme must include a programme of work with five partner cities (each belonging to other African regions, four from the African continent and one from the diaspora) (see criterion "African dimension and cooperation"); each city will host a week of events focusing on the culture of the country hosting the Cultural Capital; the inclusion of diaspora projects may be considered.
 - African cooperation will also be at the heart of the programme (cultural twinning, cross-artistic residencies, artistic mobility programmes, co-productions, etc.).
 - International cooperation will also be key to promoting openness to the world and dialogue between cultures, as well as the exchange of experiences, knowledge and expertise.

- b) The activities of the cultural and artistic programme must be explicitly in line with the **strategic priorities** of the long-term cultural strategy for the city or region.
- The cultural and artistic programme must contain detailed and explicit measures to promote access and inclusion for local inhabitants, particularly for disadvantaged or vulnerable individuals and groups, women, people with disabilities, individuals or groups facing exclusion or discrimination, etc. Activities or actions taking place in neighbourhoods or parts of the region experiencing poverty or vulnerability will also be promoted (see criterion "Commitment and participation of civil society and citizens").
 - All guidelines for developing the programme must aim, as a priority, to manage structural and long-term impacts, integrating capacity building for stakeholders, dialogue and networking, beyond major events and cultural activities.
- c) They must demonstrate a strategic approach to the **participation of local artists and cultural and community organisations**, as well as key actors in training and formal and informal access to a diversity of local, regional and international cultural expressions (such as schools, academies, training centres, but also groups of traditional masters or craft cooperatives, etc.), and civil society in general, in its design and implementation.
- The programme should promote local creativity, whether it be based around artistic excellence, amateur or community-led activities, and encourage the active participation of the population in the creative process.
- d) **Diversity of programming.** The programme should ensure a balance and dialogue between traditional and contemporary cultural expressions in all their diversity, particularly those of young people, such as urban and digital arts, and community arts.
- Linking local cultural heritage and traditional art forms with new, innovative, contemporary and experimental cultural expressions.
 - Integration of multicultural aspects, and in connection with the diversity of identities and languages.
 - In particular, each Capital must plan to celebrate the World Day for African and Afro-descendant Culture.
- e) The programme must demonstrate how it will promote **gender equality** in governance, juries and artistic activities.
- f) Definition of **criteria** and a procedure for appointing the general and artistic management.
- g) It will also include the preparation and hosting of a Forum of Ministers of Culture, a Forum of Mayors and a meeting of cultural actors and professionals from the continent (and beyond), also involving the diaspora; these actions will be co-led with UCLG-Africa, the UCLG World Committee on Culture, and in collaboration with the African Union.

3. Cross-cutting and local impacts

To be assessed with the documents "Form", "Programme" and "Local Cultural Strategy".

The city applying for the ACoC title will submit a programme aligned with its local priorities and reflecting the local context and challenges, regional and international integration. It will seek to position the proposed activities as drivers of change and sustainable development in the city or region. The programme should seek as far as possible to generate positive local and cross-cutting impacts on the territory. To this end, it will be necessary to identify the needs of the population and the cultural and creative sector, as well as the challenges and issues experienced in the region, and to explicitly highlight how the programme will seek to address them. The consideration of Agenda 2030 and the localisation of the SDGs through the activities proposed in the programme will also be evaluated.

Applications will be evaluated on the basis of the following criteria:

- a) The cultural, human, social, economic and environmental impacts (for sustainable urban development) sought in the short and long term through the title are clearly identified and consistent with the local cultural strategy;
- b) The short- and long-term impacts on capacity building in the cultural and creative sectors are clearly identified, which may include the creation of collaborative links and partnerships between stakeholders in the cultural, social, environmental and economic sectors, education and research, health, etc.;
- c) The programme responds clearly and explicitly to local issues and the needs of the local population, as well as the cultural and creative sectors in all their diversity; it must promote activities that have a positive qualitative impact on the community. Rather than the amount of activities, it is primarily the qualitative nature of the proposed activities in terms of their impact on the community that will be taken into account;
- d) The localisation of the SDGs through the activities proposed in the programme is made explicit.

4. African dimension and international cooperation

To be assessed using the "Form" and "Programme" documents.

The programme content must also incorporate an African dimension to broaden residents' understanding and awareness of the richness and diversity of African cultures, as well as the aspects shared between these cultures, heritages and histories.

In addition to cooperation with cities willing to celebrate the culture of the Capital's country, as indicated, the proposed cultural and artistic programme must include activities aimed at promoting intercultural dialogue, better mutual understanding, and African integration. The programme will showcase artists and participants from the African continent and encourage African and international cooperation and partnerships in order to attract the interest of a wide African and global audience.

Applications will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- a) The scope and quality of the activities in the work programme with the five partner cities (each belonging to the other five African regions, four from the African continent and one foreign city, selected on the basis of proposals from the diaspora present in that city).
- b) The scope and quality of activities involving artists and culture professionals, youth groups from other African countries and around the world, and cooperation with other stakeholders or cities in the African continent or elsewhere.
- c) The scope and quality of activities aimed at promoting Africa's cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue, cooperation and mutual understanding, and highlighting the common aspects of African cultures, heritage and history.
- d) The balance between local objectives with a strong African vision and the implementation of exchange and dialogue activities between local artists and international and national artists.

5. Engagement and participation of civil society and residents

To be assessed using the "Form" and "Programme" documents

The programme must offer a wide range of residents the opportunity to attend, co-create, and actively participate in activities. Applicants must develop inclusion measures to ensure that activities are accessible to all sections of society, including young people, older people and women, vulnerable groups (migrants, displaced persons, refugees, minorities, people living in poverty, etc.). The participation of civil society and citizens in the design of the programme and in its implementation, as well as partnerships with civil society organisations, are strongly recommended and will be one of the key criteria for evaluation.

Applications will be evaluated on the basis of the following criteria:

- a) The meaningful participation and involvement of the local population, civil society and communities in the design and implementation of the programme must be documented and proven.
 - The creation of partnerships between public authorities, local and/or national civil society organisations, traditional authorities and community leaders is an added value for the application.
 - The inclusion of for-profit cultural organisations and informal groups or artists/operators, formal and informal cultural and creative enterprises is an essential condition of the application, the strategy for which must be clearly explained in order to promote diverse and inclusive cultural and creative industries in line with the aspirations of the population and young people, as well as to support and accompany social cohesion, coexistence and conflict resolution (where applicable, depending on the realities of the candidate territories).
- b) The gender perspective is integrated in a comprehensive manner and covers all areas of the programme and its management.
- c) The programme must include activities related to formal and informal education, including traditional education, and to research; involve educational institutions, think tanks and specialised research centres, as well as holders of traditional knowledge (F/M) within communities involved in dissemination activities.

- d) The programme needs to include detailed and explicit measures to promote access and inclusion for local inhabitants, particularly young people, older people, women and people with disabilities.
- Activities or actions with local networks and organisations.
 - Activities or actions taking place in neighbourhoods or local / regional areas experiencing poverty or vulnerability.

6. Implementation and financing capacity

To be assessed using the "Form" document

Applicants must be able to implement and finance the programme proposed in their application. Financial support from national, international and/or private sector donors may be considered.

Applications will be assessed on the basis of the following criteria:

- a) The candidate city must provide a balanced and realistic budget for its programme, including a breakdown of operating and investment expenses, and details of funding from the public sector (city, region, state) and the private sector (sponsorships and public-private partnerships).
- b) The candidate city may specify its fundraising or partnership strategy, if applicable.

A budget is considered realistic when it is:

- Proportionate to the financial capacity of the candidate city or consortium;
- Based on formal commitments or letters of intent from the main contributors for at least 70% of the budget;
- Includes a margin of 5 to 10% to cover unforeseen circumstances;
- Supports a programming schedule linked to the gradual mobilisation of resources, adapted to the cycle of obtaining co-financing and its disbursement; and
- Based on estimates established prior to the budget (their inclusion in the application will add value).

7. Communication

To be assessed using the "Form" document

Applications must include a communication and dissemination plan to ensure broad accessibility and visibility at the local, national, regional and international levels.

Applications will be assessed on the basis of the following elements:

- a. The candidate city must provide a comprehensive communication strategy and a detailed plan to ensure accessibility, visibility and dissemination at the regional and international levels.

A communication plan is considered realistic when it is:

- Multichannel and inclusive: combining traditional and local media, community media and digital media; and multilingual, also incorporating local languages;

- Accessible: combining physical, economic (including free access to information), geographical (including for decentralised programme activities) and digital media;
- Considers the pan-African reach of the initiative, through media partnerships, institutional relays, etc., and mobilisation of the diaspora;
- Explicitly includes expected international visibility (e.g. through possible subtitling); and
- Foresees a system for planning, monitoring and evaluating the communication plan with its stakeholders.

8. Environmental impact

To be assessed using the "Form" document

Applicants are encouraged to incorporate environmentally friendly practices from the programme design stage onwards and undertake to minimise any environmental impact that may result from the programme's implementation.

Applications will be assessed on the basis of the following criteria:

- a) The candidate city identifies the risks of negative environmental impact and plans management and mitigation measures.
- b) Identification of solutions for resource management (waste reduction, energy savings, water management, etc.).
- c) Promotion of sustainable means of transport (public transport – possibly to be strengthened during and after the programme – accessibility on foot, carbon offsetting, particularly for air transport, etc.).
- d) Awareness-raising and partnership initiatives.

6. PROCEDURE FOR DESIGNATING A CITY AS ACoC

6.1. The panel of experts

A jury will be responsible for selecting and monitoring the procedure. Its role is to evaluate the applications received, draw up a shortlist of cities and recommend one of them for the title of African Capital of Culture.

The jury will be composed of seven experts representing all sub-regions of Africa, as defined by the African Union, namely North, East, West, Central, South and the Diaspora, respecting gender parity and complementary expertise.

The jury's secretariat will be provided by the UCLG Africa culture team.

Representatives of the UCLG Africa Committee on Culture and the UCLG World Committee on Culture will observe the jury's work. Qualified individuals and/or technical partners may be consulted for advice.

Jury members must be independent and not involved in any conflict of interest with any of the candidate cities or consortia, nor be currently engaged in any mission for any of the states to which these cities belong. They must also have extensive experience and knowledge in the cultural sector and in the cultural development of cities in Africa.

The members of the Jury will be selected by:

- The Committee on Culture of UCLG Africa: 2 members.
- The UCLG Africa Secretariat: 3 members.
- The African Union: 2 members.

6.2. Stages of the procedure

The selection phase will be divided into two stages:

a. Pre-selection phase

The jury will evaluate all applications submitted against the minimum requirements and criteria specified for the pre-selection stage. The analysis report for each application will contain an evaluation based on the pre-selection criteria, providing feedback and suggestions for improvement.

The jury will draw up a list of candidates invited to submit their applications for the final phase. There is no maximum or minimum number of pre-selected applications; all cities meeting the minimum pre-selection criteria would proceed to the next stage. The jury must draw up a report containing the overall assessment of the applications, the list of pre-selected cities and recommendations for them to improve their final application.

All candidates selected for the final selection will benefit from an information webinar to assist them in completing the application form.

Candidates which are not selected will benefit from a webinar and support from the UCLG Africa Committee on Culture in order to build on the application process to strengthen local cultural development in their territories.

b. Final selection phase

Once pre-selected, candidate cities have nine months to prepare and submit their final application. However, it is advisable to begin preparations well before the pre-selection stage. Support activities are planned to help candidate cities prepare their applications.

Holding a "Seven Keys" or Culture 21 Plus workshop

Shortlisted cities will be required to organise a "Seven Keys" workshop (<https://www.agenda21culture.net/our-cities/seven-keys>) or "Culture 21 Plus" (<https://www.agenda21culture.net/documents/culture-21-plus-2025>) workshop, which will be funded by each shortlisted candidate, in order to improve their application project by

incorporating the perspective of the cross-cutting nature of cultural action and the localisation of the SDGs through culture. The workshop is also an opportunity to involve civil society and communities in order to strengthen the participatory nature of the application.

This is an exercise to support candidates in their applications, but the results will contribute more broadly to improving the management of sustainable development in the city or region through culture; it will in no way constitute an evaluation of the application.

"Seven Keys" and "Culture 21 Plus" are participatory workshops designed to enable participants to learn, discuss and design a series of specific actions to link culture to the sustainable development of their city or region. In addition, depending on their specific objectives and tools, the workshops are based on the main dimensions of good local governance of culture and on the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes 17 SDGs and 169 Targets.

A report with recommendations will be provided to the city and the jury by the workshop facilitator concerning the key actions defined during the workshop and recommendations for improving the application.

Preparation of the application

Shortlisted cities may draft their final application by strengthening the selection criteria and/or including the recommendations contained in the pre-selection report or in the "Seven Keys" or "Culture 21 Plus" workshop reports. Each shortlisted city will submit its application in accordance with the planned schedule.

Evaluation and decision by the jury

The jury may organise video conferences with the leaders of the shortlisted applications and/or send written questions in order to better understand the actions, the level of ownership by the local government, and the participation of cultural organisations, neighbourhood organisations and other relevant actors in the city's cultural ecosystem. The consultations carried out will be published to ensure the transparency of the process.

The jury will evaluate all applications according to the criteria specified above during the final selection stage.

The jury's deliberations will mainly take place via videoconference and will conclude with the recommendation of a single application for the title. If no candidate city meets all the criteria, the jury may recommend that the title be declared void.

The jury will publish a report containing the overall assessment of the applications and the justification for the city/consortium recommended for the title. The report must also contain recommendations for the successful application and its stakeholders to progress during the year preceding the year of holding the title.

6.3 Preparation of the Capital

City preparation process

Between the time the city is designated and the time it begins to exercise its role as ACoC, it must:

1. Improve the cultural and artistic programme for the ACoC year in accordance with any recommendations made by the Jury, particularly in terms of outreach to other African cities and internationally.
2. If necessary, update the budget.
3. If necessary, update the detailed communication plans to take into account the recommendations of the jury, in coordination with the UCLG-A Secretariat General.
4. Ensure dialogue with the artistic community, local civil society and communities through information and participation workshops.
5. Develop a specific and detailed programme with other cultural capital initiatives around the world.
6. Follow all follow-up procedures suggested by the jury.

Expected role of other UCLG-A member cities

If the local context allows, other UCLG Africa cities may cooperate with the ACoC city in the following ways:

- By exchanging cultural programmes involving professional and amateur cultural actors and the population (especially young people), and by supporting the mobility of artists, creators and cultural operators.
- By promoting exchange and learning activities between municipal teams responsible for cultural policy and other local and national public institutions involved in development through and for culture.
- By participating in capacity-building activities in various fields through peer-to-peer exchanges and/or by mobilising experts (M/F) on the continent and internationally with international experts.
- Through the documentation and exchange of good practices.
- By hosting a week of celebrations of the Capital City's activities

Expected role of UCLG-A

- Coordinate and finance the selection process, including forms, the jury and reports, as well as the participation of experts.
- Provide technical support for the organisation of "Seven Keys" or "Culture 21 Plus" workshops in the pre-selected cities.
- Facilitate cooperation activities between the ACoC and other African cities and local governments, as well as capacity-building and peer-learning activities between the city designated as ACoC and other cities preparing for designation.
- Lead and carry out international awareness-raising activities on the ACoC programme; support the winning city in its communication plan according to clearly established specifications and division of roles.

- Co-lead and co-manage with the winning city the organisation of the Forum of Ministers of Culture (organised with the AU), the Forum of Mayors and professional actors; contribute to the search for cross-financing for these pan-African actions.
- Coordinate the cooperation of the ACoC programme with other international cultural organisations and other cultural capital initiatives around the world.
- Define a monitoring and evaluation model for the ACoC programme and consolidate the monitoring and evaluation system proposed by the winning city once the application has been accepted, also taking into account any recommendations made by the jury.
- Compile good practices and relevant and accessible information for all local governments on the continent, drawn from each edition of the Capital, with the support of the UCLG Committee on Culture.
- Maintain the archives of each edition of the ACoC programme, in coordination with the title holders, facilitate the network of cities/territories that have applied, with the UCLG-A Committee on Culture, manage the data protection policy and the conditions of use of the information.
- Commission studies and other technical and scientific work related to the ACoC programme and its implementation.

Expected role of UCLG World

- Participate in capacity building with international experts.
- Facilitation of coordination with other Cultural Capitals initiatives around the world and possible joint actions.
- Contribute to the international promotion of the programme and each edition of the ACoC, including through the dissemination of information, calls for expressions of interest, etc.
- Raise awareness among members of the UCLG Committee on Culture of possible collaborations with the city that has been awarded the title of ACoC.
- Provision of training and documentation tools.
- Exchange of good practices.

7. SUBMISSION OF APPLICATIONS AND TIMETABLE

a) Call for applications

Based on a proposal from the UCLG Africa Secretariat, a call for applications shall be published no later than January of every second calendar year, starting in 2027. Specific information and/or requirements shall be included in each call, which shall be published online.

b) Applications

Each candidate city/consortium must submit a single (1) application before 30 June of every second calendar year. The application may only concern a single lead city/metropolis, but consortia involving other local governments (e.g. cross-border cities, regions) are possible. Applications must be completed in full; any missing documents will result in the application being rejected. The UCLG Africa Secretariat will acknowledge receipt of the application within 10 working days.

c) Preliminary assessment

The UCLG-A Secretariat will conduct a preliminary assessment of applications based on the formal criteria and eligibility criteria, as described in these terms of reference, and any specific criteria added in the annual calls.

d) Pre-selection

The jury will pre-select candidate cities in accordance with the steps described in these terms of reference. The jury will meet in September of every second calendar year. Once pre-selected, candidate cities will have nine months to prepare and submit their applications.

e) Final selection

The jury will select one city as the ACoC in accordance with the steps described in these terms of reference.

Example (draft) for the^{3rd}African Capital of Culture.

- January 2027. Call for applications.
- 30 June 2027. Deadline for pre-applications.
- Between 1 and 30 September 2027: Jury meeting and list of finalists.
- 30 June 2028: Deadline for applications.
- Between 1 and 30 September 2028: Jury meeting and decision.
- January 2029: New call for applications.
- Between January and June 2030: Start of activities of the^{3rd}CAC.

8. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The commitments made at the application stage, which enabled the city/consortium to be designated as an ACoC, cannot be substantially modified, except in exceptional and documented circumstances. In particular, it is very important that between the application phase and the years of the title, the programme and strategy, as well as the financial commitments, are maintained.

Compliance with these requirements will be assessed by the UCLG-A Secretariat, in accordance with the recommendations of the jury, from the designation of the city as an ACoC until the beginning of the year in which it holds the title.

To this end, the UCLG-A team and the secretariat of the UCLG-A Committee on Culture will hold at least three follow-up meetings per year during the city's preparation for the ACoC, in order to help the city develop an effective strategy and a high-quality cultural programme. UCLG-A and its Committee on Culture may establish an advisory board to assist it in this task, before, during and after the year of celebration, in order to facilitate the capitalisation of knowledge within the network.

Once the year is over, the city that has been awarded the title of ACoC will produce an evaluation report using the UCLG-A guidelines. The evaluation report will be based, among

other things, on the selection criteria for the application, their follow-up and the results achieved.

ANNEX 1. APPLICATION EVALUATION TABLES

PRE-SELECTION PHASE

	Award criteria	Score
Governance, management and implementation capacities		
1	Political support and commitment from all relevant local, regional and national authorities	/ 25
2	Draft cultural programme proposal	/20
3	Adequate infrastructure	/10
4	Governance structure	/20
5	Stakeholder involvement (cultural sectors, civil society, communities)	/15
6	Budget and feasibility	/10
TOTAL		/100

FINAL SELECTION PHASE

	Award criteria	Score
<p>1. Local cultural strategy <i>To be assessed using the "Form" and "Regional cultural project" documents</i></p>		
a	Vision for the future and long-term sustainable development strategy for the region	/4
b	Strategic priorities linking culture and other areas of development	/4
c	The place of citizens, cultural rights, democratisation and cultural democracy, women's and minority rights, and cultural diversity	/4
d	Consistency between the local cultural strategy and the programme	/5
e	Link with the African Union's Agenda 2063	/1
f	Localisation of SDGs and local implementation of Agenda 21 for culture and other principles derived from international agreements	/1
g	Existing or previously implemented cultural policies	/1
Subtotal		/20
<p>2. Local, community and international cultural and artistic content <i>To be assessed with the "programme" document</i></p>		
a	Clear, explicit and realistic cultural and artistic programming covering the duration of the ACoC title, with a comprehensive vision and a coherent strategic approach	/5

b	The activities are explicitly in line with the strategic priorities of the long-term cultural strategy and consistent with the other criteria of the programme.	/4
c	Participation of artists, cultural professionals, cultural organisations and local communities in the design and implementation of activities.	/3
d	Diversity of programming (artistic excellence, openness to young artists, amateur practices, promotion of traditional practices, coverage of various fields of cultural action, etc.).	/3
e	Integration of gender equality (in governance, juries, artistic activities)	/3
f	Criteria and procedure for appointing the general and artistic management	/1
g	Preparation of the Forum of Ministers of Culture, a Forum of Mayors and the conference	/1
Subtotal		/20
<p>3. Cross-cutting and local impacts <i>To be assessed using the "Form", "Programme" and "Local Cultural Strategy" documents</i></p>		
a	Cultural, social, economic and environmental impacts (for sustainable urban development) sought in the short and long term through the title	/4
b	Impacts on capacity building in the formal and informal cultural and creative sectors in the short and long term	/4
c	Responses to local issues and the needs of the population, and planning of activities with positive qualitative impacts on the community	/4
d	Localisation of SDGs through the activities proposed in the programme.	/3

Subtotal		/15
<p>4. African dimension and international cooperation <i>To be assessed using the "Form" and "Programme" documents</i></p>		
a	Scope and quality of the activities in the work programme with the five partner cities (each belonging to the other five African regions, four on the African continent and one in the diaspora)	/3
b	Scope and quality of cooperation and activities involving artists/cultural operators and organisations, networks and local governments from other African countries; b) scope and quality of cooperation and activities involving artists/cultural operators and organisations, networks and local governments from outside Africa	/5
c	Scope and quality of activities aimed at promoting Africa's cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue, cooperation and mutual understanding, and highlighting the shared aspects of African cultures, heritage and history (within the continent and beyond).	/4
d	Combination of local objectives with a strong African vision and implementation of exchange and dialogue activities between local, continental and international artists.	/3
Subtotal		/15
<p>5. Engagement and participation of civil society and residents <i>To be assessed using the "Form" and "Programme" documents</i></p>		
a	Meaningful participation and involvement of the local population, civil society (cultural and beyond) and the private sector (cultural and beyond) in the design, monitoring and implementation of the programme	/5
b	Comprehensive gender perspective covering all areas of the programme and management	/4
c	Scope of activities related to formal and informal education, including traditional education, and research	/3

d	Detailed and explicit measures to promote access and inclusion for the inhabitants of the territory, particularly young people, older people, women and people with disabilities	/3
Subtotal		/15
6. Implementation and financing capacity <i>To be assessed using the "Form" document</i>		
a	Balanced and realistic programme budget	/4
b	Fundraising or partnership strategy	/1
Subtotal		/5
7. Communication <i>To be assessed using the "Form" document</i>		
a	Communication strategy and detailed plan to ensure accessibility, visibility and dissemination at regional and international level	/5
Subtotal		/5
8. Environmental impact <i>To be assessed using the "Form" document</i>		
a	Identification of risks of negative environmental impacts and management and mitigation measures	/2
b	Resource management solutions	/1
c	Promotion of sustainable means of transport	/1

d	Awareness-raising activities and partnerships	/1
Subtotal		/5
TOTAL		100

ANNEX 2. FORMS AND TIMETABLE

The forms for the pre-selection phase, the form for the final selection phase and the final timetable will be drawn up once the Terms of Reference have been approved by the UCLG Africa Committee on Culture.