



ERSTE Stiftung

Access to ideas and people

**ERSTE
Foundation**

Who We Are
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General Funding

www.erstestiftung.org

Who we are

Long before we became a foundation and a strong partner of Non Governmental Organisations, that was only in 2003, we have been a ‘NGO’ by ourselves - if this word would have already existed at that time, because this happened to be in the early 19th century in Vienna.

In 1819, some citizens founded a private association to enable access to common people to make provisions for the future and to provide a secure and independent livelihood for themselves and their families. It was run by engaged volunteers in a poor neighbourhood. It was innovative and obviously sustainable. It was called ‘Erste oestereichische Spar-Casse’, it was the ‘first Austrian savings bank’.

Today, after nearly 190 years of successful development, this former ‘NGO’ has two successors: the operational one is Erste Group. The savings bank that opened in a parsonage in Vienna’s 2nd district turned into an internationally operating retail bank with subsidiaries not only in Austria but also in seven other countries in Central and South Eastern Europe with around 16 Million customers. The legal successor is ERSTE Stiftung (ERSTE Foundation). We inherited the private association that was once the 100% owner and founder of the savings bank. In 1997, the bank went public, growing in Austria and expanding to Czech Republic, Croatia, Hungary, Slovak Republic, Serbia, Romania, and Ukraine. Now we own a 31% stake in the capital of Erste Group. This makes ERSTE Foundation one of the largest institutions of its kind in Europe.

We are not a foundation owned by a bank.
We are a foundation that owns a bank.

Our two commitments are based on these historical roots: ERSTE Foundation safeguards the future of Erste Group as an independent company and reinvests into the common good through the activities we develop.

What we want and how we work

Like the bee of its logo, the old *‘heraldic animal’* of the savings banks, ERSTE Foundation is part of a hive of activity for social good.

We recognise that society faces huge challenges and that for a new and united Europe to work, integration is key - and that means uniting the economic, cultural and social capital of our region. We want to play an active role in giving people opportunities to increase their understanding of each other.

Committed to its tradition, ERSTE Foundation focuses on reinventing the old idea of the savings banks by creating access through alternative financial services for those people who are unbanked or unbankable. This major effort reflects our strong belief that by upgrading individuals communities can be stabilised.

For us, the foundation is a creative factory for ideas and innovation, a laboratory to explore the topics of the future. Creating strong networks is key to this, so we started to develop three strategies of action that became the three programmes of the Foundation: **Social Affairs, Culture, and Europe.**

We provide the means for people to shape their own lives and contribute to building an active life and a fairer society.

We believe in culture as a driving force for an open society, and in its ability to forge links between diverse linguistic and geographical regions.

We promote the process of European integration by providing a platform for exchanging ideas, knowledge and initiatives.

The three programmes

Social Affairs

From our best-known project in Austria, ‘Die Zweite Sparkasse’, or the “Bank for the Unbankable”, which enables increasing numbers of people without access to a bank account to regain financial independence; to the ERSTE Foundation Award for Social Integration, a competition which awards efforts to strengthen diverse communities across Central and South Eastern Europe, we develop ideas and concepts to increase social participation and ensure that no-one is left out, whatever their circumstances - which in turn creates more stable, effective and fairer societies.

Culture

We research and document the culture of Central and South Eastern Europe, because we believe that promoting knowledge and understanding helps to create a positive, shared future. We initiate and support contemporary cultural production. Projects include the Igor Zabel Award for Culture and Theory that honours the work of those who internationally broaden the knowledge of visual culture in the region. The transnational programme PATTERNS contains a multitude of production, research and education focusing on the visual arts and culture of the 1960s until today.

Europe

Since the political, economic and social turning points of 1989, multiple new experiences and findings about Central and Eastern Europe have emerged; yet these haven’t been brought together in a comprehensive way. We want to work against prejudice and nationalism, to integrate thinking and living across borders, and make these experiences accessible, particularly to the young generation. Initiatives such as the Balkan Fellowship for Journalistic Excellence or the Academy of Central European Schools are just two of the ways we are working to achieve this.

Share your ideas

ERSTE Foundation only supports non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or non-profit organizations (NPOs). We do not fund individuals, political parties or their affiliates.

We want to change people’s lives for the better by setting up our own initiatives and cooperating in a living network. At the same time we offer to support your project working towards the same goals, particularly if it promotes sustainable development and strengthens local initiatives.

Let’s meet the challenges of Central and South Eastern Europe’s past, present and future on a local, national, and regional level.

With our General Funding we want to reward practical action!

So, please, share your innovative ideas with us if they fit within the scope of ERSTE Foundation’s programmatic areas tackling social, cultural or European topics and if they are located in one or several countries of the region in which we are active (Central and South Eastern Europe including Austria).

For more information see
www.erstestiftung.org

ERSTE Stiftung
Graben 21
1010 Vienna, Austria
+43 50100-15100
office@erstestiftung.org
www.erstestiftung.org



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Social Affairs / Culture / Europe