

**MEDIA INNOVATION EUROPE:  
ENERGIZING THE EUROPEAN MEDIA ECOSYSTEM**

**CALL FOR APPLICATIONS**

**AUDIENCE-ENGAGED JOURNALISM GRANTS**

**Deadline for application:**  
30 June 2023 (CET)



Funded by the  
European Union

## 1. BACKGROUND

[Media Innovation Europe \(MIE\)](#) is a two-year programme funded by the [European Commission](#) with the goal of helping European newsrooms tackle challenges they face, such as reaching new consumers and achieving financial sustainability.

MIE is delivered by a consortium of organisations led by the Vienna-based [International Press Institute](#) (IPI), along with [Thomson Media](#) (TM) in Berlin, the [Media Development Foundation](#) (MDF) in Kyiv and the [Balkan Investigative Reporting Network](#) (BIRN) in Sarajevo.

As part of MIE, BIRN manages Audience-Engaged Journalism Grants aiming at empowering media outlets to engage their audience in investigative reporting. Grants are available to newsrooms in the following European countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czech Republic, Hungary, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Poland, Serbia and Slovakia.

## 2. SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES

**Audience-engaged journalism** breaks down the barriers between newsrooms and audiences by actively engaging communities in reporting. From proposing story topics to contributing evidence or expertise, communities play an essential role in shaping media content. Through this approach, audience-engaged journalism aims to amplify diverse voices, including those of women, young people, marginalised groups and ethnic minorities, and create a more representative and inclusive media landscape.

To help newsrooms reach their audience, **BIRN has developed an audience-engaged tool.** Based on similar internationally successful platforms for engaging citizens, such as Bureau Local in the UK, ProPublica in the US, or Correctiv in Germany, the cutting-edge digital platform enables journalists to leverage the collective knowledge and insight of citizens, and harnesses the power of crowdsourcing to uncover crucial information and untold stories.

**Grants are designed to achieve following outcomes with project-supported media outlets:**

- Access to audience-engaged tool, which will be actively used to involve communities in story development
- Training and on the job mentoring in engagement journalism and audience-engaged tool usage
- Production of investigative and engaging stories of local and regional interest that are based on the feedback received from the communities
- Support to join forces and collaborate, sharing their knowledge and expertise with one another
- Support to continue using the audience-engaged tool, fostering a sustained culture of community engagement



### 3. TYPE, SIZE AND DURATION OF GRANTS

Two following types of grants are available under this Call for Applications:

- **Individual Grants** for media outlets wishing to cover national / regional / local topics using their own newsroom resources
- **Crossborder Grants** for media outlets interested in investigating cross-border topics in partnership with the other media outlet. Partnership can be:
  - Pre-established, in situations where a media outlet already has a media partner for a cross-border story, they may apply together for a grant of €10,000 to cover expenses for both parties
  - Teamed up with BIRN's support, in situation where a media outlet proposes a crossborder story and does not have a pre-established partnership, BIRN can assist in finding a possible match partner for collaboration. In this matter, individual applicants may be considered for pairing depending on their expertise and story proposal. The Audience-Engaged Journalism Grants foster a collaborative environment where media outlets can come together to share their proficiency and expertise. By working together media outlets not only enhance their reporting capabilities but also increase their reach and impact.

Media outlets are expected to begin implementing their project's activities on **1 September 2023** and can last up to a **maximum of eight (8) months** from the date of contract signature, thus all activities **must conclude** no later than **30 April 2023**.

### 4. AVAILABLE FUNDING AND ALLOCATIONS

The overall indicative amount expected to be distributed under this Call for Applications is €48,000. The table summarises grants foreseen to be given.

Type of Grants	Maximum Amount per Grant	Number of Grants Foreseen	Estimated Amount
<b>Individual Grants</b>	€4,000	2	€8,000
<b>Crossborder Grants</b>	€5,000	8	€40,000

BIRN reserves the right to fund any or none of the applications submitted, as well as to discuss with applicants allocating actions as needed within the aforementioned categories towards achieving the overall goal of the programme.

No co-financing from the applicant's side is expected or is obligatory within this Call for Applications.



The **Audience-Engaged Journalism** grants process starts with this Call that will be open until **30 June 2023**. To provide more accurate information and directions for applicants, the BIRN team will organise **two info sessions, on 15 May 2023 and 13 June 2023**. Please see [5.4.3. Clarifications, Question & Answers](#).

## 5. APPLICATION

This section includes the important information on the rules for application, including: eligibility criteria, activities and costs eligibility, application and evaluation procedures, among others.

### 5.1. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

In order to apply, applicants must fulfil the following criteria:

1. Demonstrate a commitment to producing high-quality, independent journalism that serves the public interest
2. Propose a story with investigative and in-depth angle, impactful for community:
  - If applying for an individual grant, the proposed story must address and issue relevant to the national / regional / local audience;
  - If applying for a cross-border grant, the proposed story must address and issue relevant to audience in Balkan and Visegrad countries, and reflect collaborative effort
3. Express clear intention and means of including underrepresented communities in stories. These communities may include marginalised group such as minorities, youth, women, and other underreported communities.
4. Be legally register entity within the country of application on or before January 1, 2022.
5. Be able to provide supporting documentation as listed in [5.4.1 Application Form Content](#).

### 5.2. ACTIVITIES ELIGIBILITY

The types of activities eligible for support will include but not necessarily be limited to:

1. Producing the content based on information and data obtained via the audience-engaged tool. Grantees will receive individual access to the audience-engaged tool, along with the appropriate [training and mentoring](#). Content may comprise news, analysis, investigations, different news formats: audio, text, video or multimedia.
2. Promoting content through social media channels of the respective outlets.
3. Promoting engagement journalism and the audience-engaged tool by introducing dedicated sections on the website, additional information in the 'about' and 'contact' section, banners, and other relevant means.



4. Encouraging citizens to use the audience-engaged tool as a platform to suggest topics, indicate interest in future reporting and participate in various investigations. These activities may be facilitated through social media channels and innovations on the website described above.

Applicants may propose additional activities beyond those listed above, ensuring their alignment with the project’s vision and goal. These activities should complement the existing ones and may include any relevant investigative engagement stories.

The most successful investigative engagement stories will be considered for publication on the [Balkan Insight](#). The BIRN team and mentors will oversee the selection process to ensure the stories align with the project’s objectives and BI’s publishing standards.

### 5.3. COSTS ELIGIBILITY

While developing the budget for the proposal under this Call for Applications (*budget form enclosed in [5.4.1 Application Form Content](#)*) the following eligible and ineligible costs should be:

Eligible Costs	
Category	Explanation
<b>Human Resources Costs</b>	Costs of organisation’s staff and experts directly involved in implementing the proposed activities and proportionate to their level of involvement.
<b>Production / Research / Communication Costs</b>	Costs related to the production of the stories, including communication with stakeholders, research costs, as well as costs of promotion of the stories on social media.
<b>Travel Costs</b>	Any travel costs needed to produce the story, especially if it’s a cross-border story or story covering citizen’s experiences in some local or more remote areas in the country
Ineligible Costs	
Include costs of office equipment, construction costs, entertainment and excessive transport and event costs.	

### 5.4. APPLICATION SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

In order to ensure a fair and competitive application process, applicants should complete and submit **only one application / proposal** under this Call for Applications. Multiple applications by individual media outlet or in partnership are not eligible.



#### 5.4.1. APPLICATION FORM CONTENT

In order to apply for the Audience-Engaged Journalism Grants, media outlets should:

- **Fill out an [online application form](#)** which should:
  - Be completed in the [English language](#).
  - Outline general information, current audience data, and a story proposal.
- **Submit the following supporting documents** within the embedded application form:
  - [Financial Proposal](#). Download the budget template [HERE](#).
  - [Business Registry Certificate](#) or any other document certifying that the applicant is registered as a legal entity in (country) as of January 2022.
  - [Financial Statements for the 2021 and 2022](#) fiscal years, if applicable.
  - [Certificate](#) from relevant tax authority that the media outlet is a [regular taxpayer](#).
  - [A Court Certificate](#) that the media outlet does not have ongoing legal proceedings nor is awaiting the final judgment of cases against the organization.
  - [Editorial policy](#), if applicable.

#### 5.4.2 APPLICATION DEADLINE

The applicant must submit the application until **30 June 2023, midnight, CET**.

Applications submitted after the deadline will not be considered for funding. The deadline applies to all parts of your application, including supporting documentation.

#### 5.4.3. CLARIFICATIONS, QUESTION & ANSWERS

Info sessions are the integral part of this Call for Application and will be conducted online in English language. During the info sessions, the Call for Applications and Application Form will be explained and questions answered. The schedule of the planned info sessions is as follows:

- **Information session 15 May 2023 at 15:00 (CET), register [HERE](#).**
- **Information session 13 June 2023 at 10:00 (CET), register [HERE](#).**

Questions about the Call for Application and Application Form may be sent in English language to the email address: [karla.junicic@birnnetwork.org](mailto:karla.junicic@birnnetwork.org) until the [deadline for clarifications](#) has passed.



## 5.5. EVALUATION AND SELECTION PROCESS

All received proposals will go through the following three steps:

1. [Administrative and eligibility check by BIRN](#) to ensure applicants followed application procedure set in the [Application Form](#), according to [eligibility criteria](#) and submitted all required documents by the [deadline](#).
2. [Evaluation by the international independent jury](#).
3. [Notification of the application outcome](#).

### STEP 1: BIRN ADMINISTRATIVE AND ELIGIBILITY CHECK

BIRN will undergo administrative checks to ensure the applicants have followed application procedures and submitted all the required documents. If any requested information / document is missing or incorrect, the application may be rejected and will not be evaluated further. Any rejected application will be replaced by the next best-placed application on the reserve list that falls within the available budget for this Call for Applications.

The application that passes the administrative check will be assessed further as part of the [evaluation by the independent international jury](#).

### STEP 2: EVALUATION BY THE INTERNATIONAL INDEPENDENT JURY

After the call is closed, all applications that meet the administrative requirement and eligibility criteria will be subject to evaluation by an international jury. Furthermore, a jury consisting of media professionals, acting independently will assess the proposals based on their Relevance of the Proposed Story, Capacity, Financial Proposal and Potential, including the Social impact.

Please refer to the criteria list for further information on quality assessment.

CRITERIA	MAXIMUM SCORE
<p><b>1. RELEVANCE OF THE PROPOSED STORY</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The proposed story tackles an issue relevant to national / regional / local communities in the case of individual grants.</li> <li>• The proposed story tackles an issue relevant to communities in Balkan and Visegrad countries in the case of collaborative grants.</li> <li>• The proposed story has investigative and in-depth potential.</li> <li>• The proposed story contains specific cross-cutting issues, such as the promotion of gender equality, respect of human rights, and marginalised groups.</li> </ul>	10 points





<p><b>2. CAPACITY</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applicant demonstrates available capacity within the organisation to implement activities.</li> <li>• Applicant demonstrates significant reach in its community.</li> <li>• Applicant demonstrates previous experience in engaging communities.</li> <li>• Risks and challenges are clearly identified and are manageable.</li> </ul>	<p>10 points</p>
<p><b>3. FINANCIAL PROPOSAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Budget demonstrate value for money - organisation clearly shows it will manage to implement activities according to the proposed amount.</li> </ul>	<p>10 points</p>
<p><b>4. POTENTIAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Story reflects how will the audience-engaged tool be used to encourage audience to get involved.</li> <li>• Story proposal addresses problems in particular communities and demonstrates how will the community be engaged.</li> <li>• Media outlet is dedicated to producing meaningful and quality content.</li> <li>• The proposed story will engage new audiences strategically, focusing on underrepresented groups (such as women and girls, younger people, or ethnic, social, sexual, and other minorities).</li> </ul>	<p>10 points</p>
<p><b>MAXIMUM TOTAL SCORE</b></p>	<p><b>40 points</b></p>

### STEP 3: NOTIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION OUTCOME

Applicants will be notified of the outcome, whether it was successful or not by the e-mail. The applicants will be able to ask for clarifications.

BIRN will also notify applicants about suggestions for teaming up in the collaborative cross-border stories. Notification is conducted during two phases of the evaluation:

- Notification 1: Not passing the administrative and eligibility check
- Notification 2 (final): Selection or non-selection upon the qualitative assessment

Upon positive notification, successful applicants will sign the contract with BIRN and become a recipient of the grant. Successful applicants will receive notification on training dates and programmes.





## 6. TRAINING AND MENTORING

Following a signature of a contractual agreement by both parties, participants will undergo a comprehensive training and will be assigned a mentor.

### Training

**Four-day online training program** is mandatory for all project participants. Each media outlet will choose at least three participants to follow the training programme. The training curriculum, established by BIRN, will provide journalists and project participants with an in-depth understanding of the audience-engaged tool and its various features, as well as teach them how to effectively engage their audience in reporting and create high-quality and valuable journalistic reports. Towards the end of the training program, the participating journalists will be expected to plan and develop their proposed stories for implementation.

### Mentoring

After the training, media outlets will continue to collaborate with mentors to create a provisional **activity plan** that will be further confirmed in the following weeks after the audience-engaged tool has been integrated into their respective website. Throughout the project BIRN mentors will be available to provide **guidance and support** to the participating media outlets. While respecting editorial independence. Mentors will also visit each project country to have in-person meetings and mentoring sessions with participating media outlets.

## 7. TIMELINE OF CALL ACTIVITIES

The following is the indicative table of the application, evaluation, notification process and online training:

ACTIVITY	DATE
Call for Applications issued	03 May 2023
Information Sessions	15 May 2023 at 15:00 (CET) & 13 June 2023 at 10:00 (CET)
Deadline for Requesting Clarifications	30 June 2023
Deadline for Submission of Applications	30 June 2023
Notification to Rejected Applicants on the Results of the Administrative Check	15 - 30 July 2023
Notification to Applicants on the Results of the Qualitative Assessment	15 - 30 August 2023
Contract Signature & Online Training	04 - 08 September 2023

