

## **Annex 2**

Call Reference No: SMS BIH TOI 01/25

### **GUIDELINES FOR APPLICANTS**

#### **Small grants for technical/organizational interventions**

#### **1. BACKGROUND AND SUBJECT OF PUBLIC CALL**

The SMS Facility – Small Media Support in the Western Balkans project invites eligible small media outlets to apply for financial support under the Small Grants for Technical/Organizational Interventions scheme. This initiative aims to enhance the operational capacity, sustainability, and efficiency of small and local media organizations in the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Serbia) by providing targeted financial support for technical and organizational improvements.

These grants are intended to strengthen the internal structure of media outlets, improve management capacities, and enhance operational resilience in an evolving media landscape. The intervention is expected to contribute to the long-term viability and independence of small media organizations, ultimately fostering a more pluralistic and sustainable media environment in the region.

#### **Objectives of the Small Grants for Technical/Organizational Interventions**

The financial support provided through this public call aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. Enhance internal governance and management capacities of small media outlets by strengthening their financial, operational, and administrative structures.
2. Improve technological infrastructure through the acquisition of necessary equipment, software, or digital tools that enhance productivity and content distribution.
3. Strengthen financial sustainability by supporting initiatives that improve revenue generation, audience engagement, and business model development.
4. Foster innovation by enabling media outlets to adopt new workflows, improve content production quality, and increase adaptability to digital transformation.
5. Increase security and resilience of small media outlets through investments in cybersecurity, data protection, and other relevant measures.

## 2. FINANCIAL FRAME

The total financial allocation available under this Small Grants for Technical/Organizational Interventions public call is 49,000 EUR, which will be distributed among a minimum of 10 selected small media outlets operating in the Western Balkans.

The maximum amount per grant is 4,900 EUR.

The grant will cover up to 100% of the eligible costs of the proposed project, meaning that applicants are not required to provide co-funding. However, media outlets are encouraged to demonstrate additional funding sources or in-kind contributions to strengthen the sustainability of their initiatives. Co-funding cannot be larger than 40% of the overall budget needed for implementation of the project idea.

## 3. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

### 3.1. Eligibility of applicants

To be eligible for funding under this Small Grants for Technical/Organizational Interventions public call, applicants must meet **all** the following mandatory criteria:

#### 1. Legal Status

The applicant is a small media outlet legally registered as either:

- A company (e.g. company owning media, or a media company), **or**
- A civil society organization (CSO) owning a media outlet.

#### 2. Registration Date

The applicant is registered no later than December 31, 2023.

#### 3. Geographical Location

The applicant is based within the eligible countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, or Serbia), preferably outside of large urban centers.

#### 4. Impressum

The media outlet owned by the applicant has an Impressum, publicly available, containing at a minimum the following information: media owner, editor(s), address, and contact information.

#### 5. Membership in the SMS Facility platform:

The applicant is registered on the online [Journalift](#) platform and has completed the [Media Outlet Vulnerability Assessment Tool](#) (MOVAT) before applying (also available at the online platform).

### Not Eligible for Funding

The following are the subjects not eligible for funding:

- Political organizations;

- Majority foreign-owned and government institutions and religious groups;
- Private companies and non-governmental organizations whose objectives are not consistent with the broad and/or specific objectives of the SMS Facility project;
- CSOs and media companies or organizations with key individuals that appear on any of the following:

([www.sanctionmaps.eu](http://www.sanctionmaps.eu))

### **3.2. Eligible actions**

#### **3.2.1. Type of activities**

Applicants must propose activities that align with the objectives of the Small Grants for Technical/Organizational Interventions, including but not limited to:

- Procurement of technical equipment, software, or digital tools to improve operational efficiency.
- Strengthening financial and administrative management capacities.
- Enhancing cybersecurity and digital safety measures.
- Upgrading content distribution and audience engagement strategies.

Implementing internal governance improvements to increase media sustainability.

While primary project implementation must take place within a single eligible country, collaboration with partners, experts, or institutions from other Western Balkans countries is allowed, if the core activities benefit the local media outlet in its registered country of operation.

The following types of activities are ineligible:

- Conferences and similar events
- Activities linked with political parties or of political/partisan or religious nature
- Activities that are proven to generate or promote mis- or disinformation in society

#### **3.2.2. Duration**

All projects funded under this Small Grants for Technical/Organizational Interventions public call must be implemented within a maximum duration of 12 months from the date of contract signing.

#### **3.2.3. Visibility**

The applicants must take all steps to publicize the fact that the EU has financed their project.

#### **3.2.4. Number of applications per applicant**

The applicant cannot submit more than one application under this Call for Proposals. Applicants cannot be awarded more than one contract in the framework of the SMS Facility project, regardless of the type of grant scheme.

### **3.3. Eligibility of costs**

#### **Eligible Costs**



- Staff salaries and operating costs – up to 20%
- Procurement of equipment (e.g., computers, software, recording devices, editing tools, cybersecurity solutions).
- Training and capacity-building expenses.
- Development or upgrade of digital infrastructure (e.g., website improvements, database systems).
- Professional consulting services for internal governance enhancement.
- Any other eligible costs that align with the project objectives.

#### **Non-eligible costs**

- Debts and debt service charges (interest)
- Provision for losses or potential future liability
- Double financing
- Currency exchange losses
- In-kind contributions
- Bonuses included in the cost of staff
- Negative interest charged by banks or other financial institutions
- Credit to third parties

### **3.4. Ethics clauses and code of conduct**

#### **a) Absence of conflict of interest**

The applicant must not be affected by any conflict of interest and must have no equivalent relation in that respect with other applicants or parties involved in the actions. Any attempt by an applicant to obtain confidential information, enter into unlawful agreements with competitors, or influence the evaluation committee or the contracting authority during the process of examining, clarifying, evaluating, and comparing applications will lead to the rejection of its application and may result in administrative penalties according to the Financial Regulation in force.

#### **b) Respect for human rights, as well as environmental legislation and core labor standards**

The applicant and its staff must comply with human rights. In particular and in accordance with the applicable act, applicants who have been awarded contracts must comply with the environmental legislation including multilateral environmental agreements, and with the core labour standards as applicable and as defined in the relevant International Labour Organization conventions (such as the conventions on freedom of association and collective bargaining; elimination of forced and compulsory labour; abolition of child labour).

#### **c) Zero tolerance for sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment:**

The European Commission applies a policy of 'zero tolerance' in relation to all wrongful conduct that has an impact on the professional credibility of the applicant.

Physical abuse or punishment, or threats of physical abuse, sexual abuse or exploitation, harassment and verbal abuse, as well as other forms of intimidation, shall be prohibited.

#### **d) Anti-corruption and anti-bribery**

The applicant shall comply with all applicable laws and regulations, and codes relating to anti-bribery and anti-corruption. The CPCD reserves the right to suspend or cancel project financing if corrupt practices of any kind are discovered at any stage of the award process or during the execution of a contract, and if the contracting authority fails to take all appropriate measures to remedy the situation. For the purposes of

this provision, corrupt practices are the offer of a bribe, gift, gratuity, or commission to any person as an inducement or reward for performing or refraining from any act relating to the award of a contract or execution of a contract already concluded with the contracting authority.

e) Unusual commercial expenses

Applications will be rejected or contracts terminated if it emerges that the award or execution of a contract has given rise to unusual commercial expenses. Such unusual commercial expenses are commissions not mentioned in the main contract or not stemming from a properly concluded contract referring to the main contract, commissions not paid in return for any actual and legitimate service, commissions remitted to a tax haven, commissions paid to a payee who is not clearly identified or commissions paid to a company which has every appearance of being a front company.

Grant beneficiaries found to have paid unusual commercial expenses on projects funded by the European Union are liable, depending on the seriousness of the facts observed, to have their contracts terminated or to be permanently excluded from receiving EU/EDF funds.

f) Breach of obligations, irregularities, or fraud

The contracting authority reserves the right to suspend or cancel the procedure, where the award procedure proves to have been subject to substantial breach of obligations, irregularities or fraud. If substantial breach of obligations, irregularities, or fraud are discovered after the award of the contract, the contracting authority may refrain from concluding the contract.

## 4. HOW TO APPLY

### 4.1. Required documentation for application

1. Application form
2. Project budget
3. Supporting documents:
  - Scanned the Registration document of the applicant.
  - Scanned the founding act or statute where the statutory goals of the applicant are visible, if they are not evident from the Registration document. If evident from the registration document, the founding act/statute should not be sent.
  - Scanned Balance Sheet and Income Statement for the latest fiscal year, certified by a certified accountant and tax authority.
  - Scanned certificates/awards (if any – optional)

Public Call documentation can be downloaded from the Journalift website from the following [link](#).

### 4.2. Where and how to send applications

The application is submitted exclusively via e-mail to [sms.bih@cped.ba](mailto:sms.bih@cped.ba)

All documents from Section 4.1. should be converted to PDF format and sent as a PDF attachment in the e-mail in which the application is sent.

The e-mail in which the application is sent should look like this:

From: the application should be sent from the e-mail address of the person designated to contact the applicant

To: [sms.bih@cpcd.ba](mailto:sms.bih@cpcd.ba)

Subject: SMS BIH TOI 01/25, name of the applicant (i.e., SMS BIH TOI 01/25, Prima d.o.o)

Body of e-mail:

- It is necessary to list all documents that are sent in the attachment in the form of a numerical list
- It is necessary to state the name of the contact person for the project and the contact phone number.

If the application documents are “too heavy” to send in one e-mail, which assumes that the application is sent in several parts, i.e., in multiple e-mails, it is necessary to write in the Subject:

- SMS BiH TOI 01/25 - 1/X - applicant's name, where number 1 represents the first email, and X represents the total number of emails that are sent as applications (eg, 1/3, which represents the first of three emails),
- SMS BiH TOI 01/25 - 2/X - applicant's name, where number 2 represents the second email from the total number of emails, etc.

It is necessary to send as many emails as indicated in the Subject (number X).

Attachments to the email must be numbered as listed in the body of the email.

Applications will be considered valid if the date and time of receipt are in accordance with the deadline. All applications received after the specified deadline will not be taken into consideration.

Applications received by any other means (regular mail, or if sent to some other email) will not be taken into consideration.

#### **4.3. Deadline for submission of applications**

The deadline for submitting applications is 17.10.2025.

Applicants are strongly advised not to wait until the last day to submit their full applications, since heavy Internet traffic or a fault with the Internet connection (including electricity failure, etc.) could lead to difficulties in submission. The SMS Facility project cannot be held responsible for any delay due to such difficulties.

#### **4.4. Questions related to the application process**

Questions may be sent by e-mail no later than 21 days before the deadline for the submission of applications (26.09.2025) to the addresses listed below, indicating clearly the reference of the call for proposals:

E-mail address: [sms.bih@cpcd.ba](mailto:sms.bih@cpcd.ba)

There is no obligation to provide clarifications to questions received after this date.

Replies will be provided on October 3, 2025

To ensure equal treatment of applicants, the SMS Facility project cannot give a prior opinion on the eligibility of applicants or activities.

No individual replies will be given to questions. All questions and answers, as well as other important notices to applicants during the course of the evaluation procedure, will be published on the website

www.journalift.org. It is therefore advisable to consult the above-mentioned website regularly in order to be informed of the questions and answers published.

## 5. PROJECT ASSESSMENT CRITERIA AND METHODS

The project proposal's assessment table is divided into 5 sections, which contain criteria that are rated at 1 to 5. The lowest mark is 1 and the highest is 5.

<b>1</b>	<b>RELEVANCE</b>	
<b>1.1.</b>	Project proposal is relevant to the goals and priorities of the Public Call*	
<b>1.2.</b>	The applicant is based outside of big cities.	
<b>1.3.</b>	The project proposal addresses specific gaps in the technical, organizational, and operational work of the media outlet owned by the applicant.	
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>/20</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>PROJECT DESIGN</b>	<b>Mark</b>
<b>2.1.</b>	General and specific objectives are clearly defined. Expected project results are clearly defined and measurable.	
<b>2.2.</b>	There are consistency and a logical connection between goals, expected results, and proposed activities.	
<b>2.3.</b>	The activities are clearly described in detail. The plan of activities is clear and realistic.	
<b>2.4.</b>	The external risks and the mitigation measures are clearly defined.	
<b>2.5.</b>	Project results are sustainable after project completion.	
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>/25</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>BUDGET</b>	<b>Mark</b>
<b>3.1.</b>	Budget is clearly presented both in an Excel table and a narrative description of the items.	
<b>3.2.</b>	Costs are realistic and necessary for the activities' implementation.	
<b>3.3.</b>	Cost efficiency is high (ratio of cost and expected project results) *	
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>/20</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>ADDED VALUES</b>	<b>Mark</b>
<b>4.1.</b>	The project contributes to the equality of men and women, the inclusion of particularly vulnerable categories of population, and equality on a variety of grounds.	
<b>4.2.</b>	The project induces and brings new and innovative elements, and/or useful examples of good practice. The project does not endanger the environment.	
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>/10</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>CAPACITIES</b>	<b>Mark</b>
<b>5.1.</b>	The applicant possesses experience in the implementation of similar projects within the given thematic area and managing projects of a similar size.	
<b>5.2.</b>	The organization (applicant) is transparent in its work, as well as the media outlet owned by the Applicant.	
<b>5.3.</b>	People who are professionally engaged in project implementation have the necessary knowledge and experience. The organization has enough staff who have	





	experience and knowledge in the thematic area, or it provides a realistic plan to ensure capacities during project implementation.	
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>/15</b>
<b>TOTAL NUMBER OF POINTS</b>		<b>90</b>

\*Double counting of scores

## 6. PUBLIC CALL CALENDAR

Key steps in the project selection process	Date	Time
1. Launching a Public Call	Sep 9, 2025	12:00
2. Info session on the English language	Sep 16, 2025	13:00
3. Deadline for questions regarding the Call for Application	Sep 26, 2025	12:00
4. Answers to questions regarding the Call for Application posted on the website <a href="http://www.journalift.org">www.journalift.org</a>	Oct 3, 2025	17:00
5. Deadline for submission of applications	Oct 17, 2025	23:59
6. Information to applicants on the evaluation of the applications	Nov 17, 2025	-
7. Notification of award	Nov 24, 2025	-
8. Contract signature	Dec 1, 2025	-