



Strengthening
Media Freedom,
Professionalism
and Journalists'
Safety in Albania

OPEN CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Guidelines for sub-granting schemes

Contracting authority: Balkan Investigative reporting Network in Albania

TITLE: SUB-GRANTS TO SUPPORT LOCAL MEDIA OUTLETS IN ALBANIA (NGOs) WITH TECHNICAL EDITORIAL AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES IN ORDER TO REPORT INDEPENDENTLY, ETHICALLY AND IN A GENDER-BALANCED WAY

Budget Reference: BGUE-B2022-15.020101 & B2022-14.020211
European Development Fund

Support to Civil Society Organisations in Albania Civil Society Facility and Media Programme 2022 and Thematic Programme for Human Rights and Democracy Hr&D 2022 2023

Grant Contract: IPAI/2023/451-708

STRENGTHENING MEDIA FREEDOM, PROFESSIONALISM AND JOURNALISTS' SAFETY IN ALBANIA – MEDIA GRANT SCHEME

Deadline for submission of full application:

July 15th, 2024, at 17:00 (Albania, date and time)



NOTICE

- This is an open Call for Proposals, where all documents are submitted together. In the first instance, only eligibility will be checked. Eligibility will be checked on the basis of the supporting documents requested by the Contracting Authority and sent together with the application. Thereafter, for the applicants who have been pre-selected, the full proposal will be evaluated.
- **Please note** that the applicant(s) cannot apply for any other funding (i.e. from the partners of this project) for the same purpose as in this call. If the applicant is being financed by another EU project running in parallel, the objectives and the activities need to be different in each one of them. Indeed, the applicant(s) should immediately notify the Contracting Authority of any multiple applications and multiple grants relating to the same action.

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ACRONYMS

BIRN Albania	Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, Albania
CSO (s)	Civil Society Organisation(s)
EU	European Union
EUD	EU Delegation
NGO (s)	Non-governmental Organization(s)
PRAG	Procurement and Grants for European Union external actions – A Practical Guide, version 2021, ePRAG - EXACT External Wiki - EN - EC Public Wiki (europa.eu)
SCiDEV	Science for Innovation Development Centre

1. SUB-GRANTING SCHEME

1.1. BACKGROUND

Balkan Investigative Reporting Network in Albania (BIRN Albania), in cooperation with Science for Innovation Development Centre (SCiDEV) and Qendra Faktoje, is implementing the three-year project titled: “Strengthening Media Freedom, Professionalism and Journalists’ Safety in Albania”.

The project is awarded within the EU funded Call: “Civil Society Facility and Media Programme 2022 and Thematic Programme for Human Rights and Democracy 2022-2023” with a reference number: IPAIII/2023/451-708.

During the overall implementation period, the project aims to build the capacities through training and mentoring of local media and journalists to monitor Albania’s progress in relation to media freedom and flag freedom of expression violations and other issues related to the overall safety of journalists. The project contributes through to reinforce the codes of conduct of local media, its accuracy, impartiality and responsibility in reporting and standards of internal governance, but also builds strategic partnerships and promotes the protection of labour rights of media workers, aiming to create a free and safe environment for journalists, where qualitative investigative reporting thrives without any form of (self) censorship, in the benefit of citizens and their aspirations for EU integration.

The sub granting scheme for local media outlets in Albania (NGOs) aims to support local media, which are non-government organizations, with technical editorial and financial resources in order to report independently, ethically and in a gender-balanced way. This call for proposal refers to Outcome 2 of the intervention “Increased technical, editorial and financial resources of local media and journalists from different regions of Albania to report independently, ethically and in gender-balanced way”, in which the project will provide 6 (six) grants during the overall project implementation. Under this component, the project will launch two calls for applications, with 3 (three) expected grants awarded to local media (NGOs) in Albania for each call.

The objective of this call proposal is to increase the technical, editorial and financial resources of local media organizations (NGOs) to report independently, ethically and in a gender balanced way on human rights abuses, fundamental rights violations and underreported topics relevant to local communities. The coalition led by BIRN Albania is approaching this objective through developing and launching a sub grant scheme targeting local media outlets (NGOs) from different regions in Albania.

The sub granting scheme for supporting local media (NGOs) with technical editorial and financial resources will be coordinated by contracting authority of this call, BIRN Albania.

1.2. OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAMME AND PRIORITY ISSUES

Sub-grants to support local media outlets (NGOs) with technical editorial and financial resources in order to report independently, ethically and in a gender-balanced way	
Description	The overall objective of this call for proposals is: Strengthen overall media professionalism, including internal codes of conduct and accuracy, by increasing technical, editorial and financial resources to report independently, ethically and in a gender-balanced way on human rights abuses, fundamental rights violations and underreported topics relevant to local communities.
The specific objective of this call for proposal are:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enhancing local media outlets (NGOs) production, targeting specific audiences, particularly youth, women and minority/ vulnerable groups, through technical, editorial and financial support.

Type of activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production and publication of articles and multimedia content on human rights abuses, fundamental rights violations, local government accountability and underreported topics relevant to local communities, targeting specific audiences, particularly youth women and minority/ vulnerable groups. • Submission Freedom of Information requests to relevant public bodies, exercising the right to implementation of the FoI laws, for articles on central and local government accountability. • Joint meetings of local media with representatives of local CSOs and community members in order to increase collaboration between civil society organizations/ community members and journalists in prioritising the content production in the up mentioned fields. • Involvement in capacity building activities (trainings and mentoring) provided by Project partners. <p>During the implementation of the project the awarded sub grant is obligated to be part of network exchange meetings, training and mentoring activities supported and provided by contracting authority (BIRN Albania) and its partner.</p>
Expected results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stories, fact checking and other multimedia content (video, visualizations, podcasts, etc) on human rights abuses, fundamental rights violations, local government accountability and underreported topics relevant to local communities, will be produced and published by the grant beneficiaries. • Freedom of Information requests to relevant public bodies will be submitted by the grant beneficiaries • Joint meetings with local representatives (CSOs and community member) conducted by the grant beneficiaries. • Active participation of the grant beneficiaries on networking and exchange meetings, training and mentoring activities, organised by the contracting authority.
Performance indicators for each grant awarded	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Twelve to twenty (12-20) stories, fact checking and other multimedia content. • 5-10 Freedom of Information requests addressed to local institutions. • Two joint meetings with at least 15 representatives of local CSOs organized by the grant beneficiaries for each grant. • Number of representatives of community members reached by the local production and project activities.
Min/max amount contribution	<p>Minimum amount: EUR 8,000</p> <p>Maximum amount: EUR 15,000</p>
Indicative Budget available for this call of proposal	<p>EUR 40,000</p>
Duration of the Action	<p>Minimum: 10 months</p> <p>Maximum: 12 months</p>
Modality of application	<p>Full application</p>
Other relevant information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expected number of sub-grants will be awarded for this call is 3 (Three). • The second call will follow next year for other sub grants. • The local media outlets (NGOs) are encouraged to cooperate with other local journalists on production of stories and multimedia contents. • In addition to fulfilling the activities proposed by the sub grant on this call, the awarded sub grants will be supported by project partners through training and mentoring activities.

1.3. FINANCIAL ALLOCATION PROVIDED BY THE CONTRACTING AUTHORITY

The overall indicative amount made available under this call for proposals is EUR 40,000. The contracting authority reserves the right not to award all available funds.

Size of Grants: As it is mentioned table under section 1.2, any grant requested under this call for proposals must fall between the following minimum and maximum amounts:

- Minimum amount: EUR 8,000
- Maximum amount: EUR 15,000

Any grant requested under this call for proposals must cover 100% of total eligible costs of the action.

All costs incurred by the local media outlets (NGOs) during the implementation of the action will be subject of the Expenditure Verification Report conducted by the approved external auditor at the end of the overall project. All costs should be justified with proper documentation and easily identifiable and verifiable in the accounting records of the local media outlets (NGOs).

2. RULES FOR THIS CALL FOR PROPOSALS

These guidelines set out the rules for the submission, selection and implementation of the actions financed under this call, in conformity with the practical guide, which is applicable to the present call (available on the internet at this address <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/ExactExternalWiki/ePRAG>).

2.1. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

There are three sets of eligibility criteria, relating to:

- (1) the actors (2.1.1.):
 - the **'applicant'**, i.e. the entity submitting the application form.
- (2) the actions (2.1.2.):
 - actions for which a sub-grant may be awarded;
- (3) the costs (2.1.3.):
 - types of cost that may be taken into account in setting the amount of the grant.

2.1.1. Eligibility of applicants (i.e. lead applicant and co-applicant(s))

Applicant

In order to be eligible for a grant, the applicant must:

- be a non-governmental organization registered and acting in the territory of Albania for more than 12 months from the date of application;
- have an active media outlet;
- be non-profit making;
- be directly responsible for the preparation and management of the action;
- have previous experience (during the last 12 months) in implementing grants on media sector.

Potential applicants may not participate in calls for proposals or be awarded grants if they are in any of the situations listed in Section 2.6.10.1 of the practical guide. (available online: <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/ExactExternalWiki/ePRAG>).

If awarded the sub-grant contract, the applicant will become the beneficiary identified as the coordinator in the Special Conditions (part of the standard Grant Contract). The coordinator is the sole interlocutor of the contracting authority. It represents and coordinates the design and implementation of the action.

The applicants should be able to provide evidence of the above by presenting the following documents:

- a) Court Registration Act;
- b) Statute;
- c) Fiscal registration Certification/NGO Registration Certification (NUIS);
- d) Financial statement for the last fiscal year (2023) of the organization in accordance with the legislation in force;
- e) CVs of key personnel implicated in the implementation of the project;
- f) The applicants must sign and stamp:
 - Declaration on Honour – Annex A
 - Declaration by the Lead Applicant – Annex B
 - Self-evaluation questionnaire on SEA-H – Annex C
 - Legal entity form – Annex D
 - Financial identification form – Annex E

Documents a), b), c), d) and e) may be submitted in national language scanned from the original. The documents found in Annexes A, B, C, D and E should be sent scanned from original through USB or CD.

The full list of documents that needs to be completed and submitted can be found in Annex 4: Checklist for the application.

2.1.2. Eligible actions: actions for which an application may be made

Duration

- The initial planned duration of an action may not be lower than 10 months nor exceed 12 months.

The proposals need to focus on delivering results based on the main and specific objectives set forth in section 1.2.

Location

- Actions must take place in different regions of Albania.

Types of action

- **Types of action which may be financed under this call for proposal must be in line with a) the overall/ specific objectives; b) expected results; and c) type of activities, and d) performance indicators set forth in section 1.2.**

The following types of action **are ineligible**:

- Actions concerned only or mainly with individual sponsorships for participation in workshops, seminars, conferences and congresses;
- Actions concerned only or mainly with individual scholarships for studies or training courses;
- Actions concerned only or mainly with study visits or participation in international forums;
- Infrastructure projects or projects essentially focused on the purchase of equipment;
- Purchase and/or renovation of buildings or offices;
- Activities undertaken before signature of the contract;
- Actions aimed at profit making activities;
- Actions related to charitable donations;
- Actions already funded by other Community programmes;
- Actions discriminating against individuals or groups of people on grounds of their gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs or lack of them, or their ethnical origin;
- Actions supporting individual political parties.

Visibility

The applicants must take all necessary steps to publicise the fact that the European Union is financing the action through “Strengthening Media Freedom, Professionalism and Journalists’ Safety in Albania” a project implemented by a consortium led by BIRN Albania. Unless the European Commission agrees otherwise, actions that are wholly or partially funded by the European Union must ensure the visibility of EU financing by displaying the EU emblem in accordance with the guidelines set out in the Operational guidelines for recipients of EU funding, published by the European Commission. If applicable, communication activities may be undertaken to raise the awareness of specific or general audiences of the reasons for the action and the EU support for the action in the country or region concerned, as well as the results and the impact of this support.

All measures and activities relating to visibility and, if applicable, communication, must comply with the latest Communication and Visibility Requirements for EU-funded external action, laid down and published by the European Commission ([Communication and Visibility Requirements for EU External Actions | International Partnerships \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/communication/visibility-requirements)).

Number of applications and grants per applicants:

- The applicant may not submit more than one application under this call for proposals.
- The applicant may not be awarded more than one grant under this call for proposals.

2.1.3. Eligibility of costs: costs that can be included

Only ‘eligible costs’ can be covered by a sub-grant. The categories of costs that are eligible and non-eligible are indicated below. The budget is both a cost estimate and an overall ceiling for “eligible costs”.

The reimbursement of eligible costs may be based on actual costs incurred by the beneficiary(ies) in accordance with the indicative budget form, specified in indicative units, as per Budget Form Annex 2 of these Guidelines.

Simplified cost options (SCOs) may take the form of:

- **unit costs:** covering all or certain specific categories of eligible costs which are clearly identified in advance by reference to an amount per unit.

Annex 2, in the second column of worksheet no.2, ‘Justification of the estimated costs’ per each of the corresponding budget item or heading applicants must:

- describe the information and methods used to establish the amounts of unit costs, to which costs they refer, etc for output or result based SCO;
- clearly explain the formulas for calculation of the final eligible amount for output or result based SCO.

Where SCOs are proposed the evaluation committee and the contracting authority decide whether to accept the proposed amounts or rates on the basis of the provisional budget submitted by the applicants, by analysing factual data of grants carried out by the applicants or of similar actions. In case the evaluation committee and the contracting authority are not satisfied with the quality of the justification provided reimbursement on the basis of actually incurred costs is always possible.

No threshold is set ex-ante for the total amount of financing that can be authorised by the contracting authority on the basis of simplified cost options.

Recommendations to award a grant are always subject to the condition that the checks preceding the signing of the grant contract do not reveal problems requiring changes to the budget (such as arithmetical errors, inaccuracies, unrealistic costs and ineligible costs). The checks may give rise to requests for clarification and may lead the contracting authority to impose modifications or reductions to address such mistakes or inaccuracies. It is not possible to increase the grant or the percentage of EU co-financing as a result of these corrections.

It is therefore in the applicants' interest to provide a **realistic and cost-effective budget**.

Eligible direct costs are actual costs incurred by the Applicants which meet all the following criteria:

- they are incurred during the implementation of the action.
- costs relating to services and works shall relate to activities performed during the implementation period. Signature of a contract, placing of an order, or entering into any commitment for expenditure within the implementation period for future delivery of services, works or supplies after expiry of the implementation period do not meet this requirement.
- costs incurred should be paid before the project closing date;
- they are indicated in the estimated overall budget for the Action.
- they are necessary for the implementation of the Action.
- they are identifiable and verifiable, in particular being recorded in the accounting records of the beneficiary(ies) and determined according to the accounting standards and the usual cost accounting practices applicable to the beneficiary(ies);
- cash payment will be allowed for small amounts only up to a ceiling of 100 EUR maximum.
- they comply with the requirements of applicable tax and social legislation.
- they are reasonable, justified and comply with the requirements of sound financial management, in particular regarding economy and efficiency.

Subject to the above and where relevant to the provisions related to contract award procedures being respected, the following **direct costs** of the beneficiary shall be **eligible**:

- cost of staff assigned to the Action, corresponding to actual salaries including statutory deductions and other remuneration-related costs; salaries and costs must not exceed those normally borne by the beneficiary, as the case may be, unless it is justified by showing that it is essential to carry out the Action.
- travel and subsistence costs for staff and other persons taking part in the Action, provided they do not exceed those normally borne by the beneficiary, as the case may be;
- costs of consumables specifically dedicated to the action;
- costs entailed by contracts awarded by the beneficiary(ies) for the purposes of the Action;
- costs deriving directly from the requirements of the Contract (dissemination of information, translation, reproduction, insurance, etc.), including financial service costs;
- project office costs: costs actually incurred in relation to a project office used for the action;
- any other cost necessary for the implementation of the Action, in line with the national legislations and the Budget of the Action (Annex 2).

Eligible indirect costs

The indirect costs incurred in carrying out the action may be eligible for flat rate funding, but the total must not exceed 7% of the estimated total eligible direct costs. Indirect costs are eligible provided that they do not include costs assigned to another budget heading in the standard grant contract. The lead applicant may be asked to justify the percentage requested before the grant contract is signed. However, once the flat rate has been fixed in the special conditions of the grant contract, no supporting documents need to be provided.

If any of the applicants is in receipt of an operating grant financed by the EU, it may not claim indirect costs on its incurred costs within the proposed budget for the action.

Contributions in kind

Contributions in kind mean the provision of goods or services to beneficiaries free of charge by a third party. As contributions in kind do not involve any expenditure for beneficiaries, they are not eligible costs.

Ineligible costs

The following costs are not eligible:

- debts and debt service charges (interest);
- provisions for losses or potential future liabilities;

- interest owed (loss from banking account);
- costs declared by the beneficiary(ies) and financed by another action or work programme receiving a European Union (including through EDF) grant;
- purchases of land or buildings;
- currency exchange losses;
- fines, financial penalties and expenses of litigation;
- in kind contributions;
- bonuses included in costs of staff;
- negative interest charged by banks or other financial institutions;
- credit to third parties
- Value Added Tax (VAT), excise duties and other special consumption taxes or any other similar tax, duties or charges having equivalent effect.

2.1.4. 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 labour 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 Organisation conventions (such as the conventions on freedom of association and collective bargaining; elimination of forced and compulsory labour; abolition of child labour).

Zero tolerance for sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment

The European Commission applies a policy of 'zero tolerance' in relation to all wrongful conduct which 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.

Applicants (and affiliated entities) other than (i) natural persons, (ii) pillar-assessed entities and (iii) governments and other public bodies, whose application has been provisionally selected or placed in a reserve list shall assess their internal policy against sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEA-H) through a self-evaluation questionnaire (Annex L). For grants of EUR 60 000 or less no self-evaluation is required. Such self-evaluation questionnaire is not part of the evaluation of the full application by the contracting authority, but is an administrative requirement. See Section 2.5.6 of the PRAG.

c) Anti-corruption and anti-bribery

The applicant shall comply with all applicable laws, regulations and codes relating to anti-bribery and anti-corruption. The contracting authority 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.

d) 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.

e) 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 breach of obligations, irregularities or fraud. If breach of obligations, irregularities or fraud are discovered after the award of the contract, the contracting authority may refrain from concluding the contract.

2.2. HOW TO APPLY AND THE PROCEDURES TO FOLLOW

2.2.1. Application Form

Applications must be submitted in accordance with the instructions on the full application in the grant application form annexed to these guidelines (Annex 1). Lead applicants should then keep strictly to the format of the grant application form and fill in the paragraphs and pages in order.

Annexes to be submitted together with the Full Application.

- Applications must be prepared in English language;
 - Applications must be typed. Hand-written applications will not be accepted;
 - Any error or major inconsistency related to the documents may lead to the rejection of the application;
 - Currency used in the application form (Annex 1) and budget form (Annex 2) should be in **EUR**;
- a) Please note that the application form and the annexes which have to be filled in will be transmitted to the evaluators. It is therefore of utmost importance that these documents contain ALL the relevant information concerning the action.
- b) Please complete the application form carefully and as clearly as possible so that it can be assessed properly.
- c) Clarifications will only be requested when the information provided is unclear and thus prevents the Contracting Authority from conducting an objective assessment.

2.2.2. Where and how to send full applications

Applications **must be submitted** in one envelope which should contain the following documents:

- Administrative documents as per list in section 2.1.1. must be sent *only in electronic format* (USB or CD).
- Full Application Form (Annex 1), Budget (Annex 2) and Log-frame (Annex 3) must be sent in *hardcopy, signed and sealed by the legal representative, and in the electronic version.*

On the outer envelope must be written: *The name of the applicant organization and title of the project proposal.*

Applications must be submitted at the address below:

Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, Albania (BIRN Albania)

Address: Rruga Nikolla Jorga, Pallati 8/8, Tiranë, Shqipëri

Applications sent by any other means (e.g. by fax or by e-mail) or delivered to other addresses will be rejected. Incomplete applications may be rejected.

2.2.3. Deadline for submission of full applications

The deadline for the submission of applications is July 15, 2024, 17.00 hours.

Lead applicants are strongly advised not to wait until the last day to submit their applications.

The applicants' attention is drawn to the fact that there are two different systems for sending applications: one is by post or private courier service, the other is by hand delivery.

- In the case of delivery by post or private courier, the full application must be sent before the date for submission, as evidenced by the postmark or deposit slip.
- In the case of hand-deliveries the deadline for receipts is at 17:00 hours as it will be evidenced in the signed and dated certificate of receipt.

Any applications submitted after the deadline will be rejected.

The contracting authority may, for reasons of administrative efficiency, reject any application submitted on time to the postal service but received, for any reason beyond the contracting authority's control, after the effective date of approval of the full application evaluation, if accepting applications that were submitted on time but arrived late would considerably delay the award procedure or jeopardise decisions already taken and notified (see indicative calendar under Section 2.4.2).

2.2.4. Further information about full applications

An **information session** on this call for proposals is planned to be held on **June 21st, 2024**. You will be notified on our website and social media accounts, in the coming days regarding the place and agenda.

Questions may be sent by e-mail no later than **July 4th, 2024** to the addresses listed below, indicating clearly the title of the call for proposal.

E-mail address: office.albania@birn.eu.com

The contracting authority has no obligation to provide clarifications to questions received after this date.

Replies will be given no later than **July 8th, 2024** via email.

To ensure equal treatment of applicants, the contracting authority cannot give a prior opinion on the eligibility of lead applicants or an action.

Questions that may be relevant to other applicants, together with the answers, will be published on the website <https://birn.eu.com/network/birn-albania/>. It is therefore advisable to consult the above-mentioned website regularly in order to be informed of the questions and answers published.

2.3.EVALUATION AND SELECTION OF APPLICATIONS

Applications will be examined and evaluated by the contracting authority with the possible assistance of external assessors. All applications will be assessed according to the following steps and criteria. If the examination of the application reveals that the proposed action does not meet the eligibility criteria stated in Section 2.1, the application will be rejected on this sole basis.

All applications will be assessed according to the following steps and criteria.

STEP 1 – Opening and Administrative check

STEP 2 – Evaluation of the application

STEP 3 – Final evaluation and decision

2.3.1. STEP 1: OPENING, ADMINISTRATIVE CHECKS & ELIGIBILITY CHECKS

During the opening and administrative check, the following will be assessed:

- If the submission deadline has been met. Otherwise, the applications will be automatically rejected.
- If the application satisfies all the criteria specified in the section 2.1.1. and it also includes Full Application Form (Annex 1) and Budget (Annex 2). This includes also an assessment of the eligibility of the action. If any of the requested information is missing or is incorrect, the application may be rejected on that sole basis and the application will not be evaluated further.

The answer to each of the questions in the ADMINISTRATIVE GRID must be YES to make e proposal eligible for further assessment!

Administrative Criteria:	Yes	No	Comments
PART 1 (ADMINISTRATIVE)			
1. The Application Form (Annex 1) published in this Call for Proposals has been used and it has been sent in hardcopy, signed and sealed by the legal representative, and in the electronic version.			
2. The Budget Form (Annex 2) has been sent in hardcopy, signed and sealed by the legal representative, and in the electronic version.			
3. The Logical Framework (Annex 3) has been sent in hardcopy, signed and sealed by the legal representative, and in the electronic version.			
4. Declaration in honour (Annex A) is signed and stamped by the Lead Applicant.			
5. Declaration by the Lead Applicant (Annex B) is signed and stamped by the Lead Applicant.			
6. Self-evaluation questionnaire on SEA-H (Annex C) is signed and stamped by Lead Applicant.			
7. Legal entity form (Annex D) is signed and stamped by Lead Applicant.			
8. Financial identification form (Annex E) is signed and stamped by Lead Applicant.			
PART 2 (ELIGIBILITY)			

1. The applicant is a CSO/NGO registered and acting in the territory of Albania.			
2. The applicant is non-profitmaking.			
3. The applicant is a local media outlet			
4. The applicant is directly responsible for the preparation and management of the action			
5. Supporting documents are submitted (in Albanian or English, original or certified copies as per Guidelines): a) Court Registration Act; b) Statute; c) Fiscal registration Certification/NGO Registration Certification (NIUS); d) Financial statement for the last fiscal year (2023) of the organization in accordance with the legislation in force; e) CV of the key staff.			
6. The action will be implemented in Albania.			
7. The duration of the action is not lower than 10 months nor exceed 12 months			
8. The grant requested complies with the set thresholds from EUR 8,000 – up to EUR 15,000.			
9. The full proposal addresses an eligible target group as mentioned in section 1.2			
10. The proposal is eligible with the overall objective of this call for proposals “Enhancing local media outlets (NGOs) production, targeting specific audiences, particularly youth, women and minority/ vulnerable groups, through technical, editorial and financial support.”			

2.3.2. STEP 2: EVALUATION OF THE APPLICATION

If the applications pass the opening and administrative checks along the instructions of the Step 1: they will be further evaluated on their quality, including the proposed budget and capacity of the applicants. During this step the Evaluation Committee will negotiate the provisional budget proposed by the applicants. They will be evaluated using the evaluation criteria in the evaluation grid below. There are two types of evaluation criteria:

The selection criteria help to evaluate the applicant(s)'s and affiliated entity(ies)'s operational capacity and the lead applicant's financial capacity and are used to verify that they:

- have stable and sufficient sources of finance to maintain their activity throughout the proposed action and, where appropriate, to participate in its funding (this only applies to lead applicants);
- have the management capacity, professional competencies and qualifications required to successfully complete the proposed action. This applies to applicants and any affiliated entity(ies).

The award criteria help to evaluate the quality of the applications in relation to the objectives and priorities set forth in the guidelines, and to award grants to projects which maximise the overall effectiveness of the call for proposals. They help to select applications which the contracting authority can be confident will comply with its objectives and priorities. They cover the relevance of the action, its consistency with the objectives of the call for proposals, quality, expected impact, sustainability and cost-effectiveness.

Scoring:

The evaluation grid is divided into Sections and subsections.

Evaluation grid

Section	Maximum Score
1. Financial and operational capacity	20
1.1 Do the applicants have sufficient in-house experience of project management (Including staff, equipment and ability to handle the budget for the action)?	10
1.2 Do the applicants have sufficient in-house technical expertise? (especially knowledge of the issues to be addressed)	10
2. Relevance	20
2.1 How relevant is the proposal to the objectives of the call for proposals?	10
2.2 How clearly defined and strategically chosen are those involved (final beneficiaries, target groups)? How relevant is the proposal to the particular needs and constraints of the target groups (local journalists, youth, women, minorities/ vulnerable people, local communities)?	10
3. Design of the action	20
3.1 Does the proposal indicate the expected results to be achieved by the action?	10
3.2 Does the proposal include indicators/ targets and sources of verification?	5
3.3 Does the design reflect a robust analysis of the problems involved, and the capacities of the relevant stakeholders?	5
4. Implementation approach and sustainability	20
4.1 Is the action plan for implementing the action clear and feasible? Is the timeline realistic?	5
4.2 Does the proposal include a participatory approach?	5
4.3 Is the action likely to have a tangible impact on its target groups?	5
4.4 Are the expected results of the proposed action sustainable?	5
5. Budget and cost-effectiveness of the action	20
5.1 Are the activities appropriately reflected in the budget?	10
5.2 Is the ratio between the estimated costs and the results satisfactory?	10
Maximum total score	100

If the total score for Section 1 (financial and operational capacity) is less than 12 points, the application will be rejected. If the score for at least one of the subsections under Section 1 is 1, the application will also be rejected.

Provisional selection

After the evaluation, a table will be drawn up listing the applications ranked according to their score. The highest scoring applications will be provisionally selected until the available budget for this call for proposals is reached. In addition, a reserve list will be drawn up following the same criteria. This list will be used if more funds become available during the validity period of the reserve list.

2.3.3. STEP 3: FINAL EVALUATION AND DECISION

The Evaluation Committee will take the final decision after negotiations have been concluded.

During this stage the results of the evaluation process will be communicated officially to the applicants.

2.4. NOTIFICATION OF THE CONTRACTING AUTHORITY'S DECISION

2.4.1. Content of the decision

The lead applicants will be informed via e-mail of the contracting authority's decision concerning their full application evaluation and, if rejected, the reasons for the negative decision. Please note that the lead applicant is the intermediary for all communications between applicants and the contracting authority during the procedure.

Appeals

Without prejudice, where an applicant believes he has been adversely affected by an error or irregularity allegedly committed as part of the selection procedure, or that the procedure was vitiated by any maladministration, may file a complaint within 5 (*five*) working days from the day when the rejection email has been sent at office.albania@birn.eu.com.

In order to be considered, a complaint must:

- be submitted only by the Applicant
- be submitted by email to office.albania@birn.eu.com within 5 days from the date when the notification email announcing the result of an evaluation step is sent.
- be written in English;
- clearly describe the nature of the infringement considered as being made by the Evaluation Committee and make clear references to the corresponding provisions of the Guidelines for Applicants with pertinent substantiation.

The appeals that do not respect these criteria may not be taken into consideration. The reply to the appeal represents the final decision regarding the application.

2.4.2 Indicative timetable

	DATE	TIME (24h)
1. Online information meeting Please send a request for link at office.albania@birn.eu.com	June 21 st , 2024	11.00
2. Deadline for requesting any clarifications from the contracting authority	July 4 th , 2024	17.00
3. Last date on which clarifications are issued by the contracting authority	July 8 th , 2024	17.00
4. Deadline for submission of full application	July 15 th , 2024	17.00
5. Information to lead applicants on opening, administrative and eligibility checks	July 19 th , 2024*	17.00
6. Information to lead applicants on the evaluation of the full application and decision	July 26 th , 2024*	17.00
7. Notification of award	July 31 st , 2024*	17.00
8. Contract signature	August 15 th , 2024*	17.00
9. Indicative starting date of the proposed activities by the applicants	September 1 st , 2024	

*Provisional Dates: All times are in the time zone of the country of the contracting authority, Albania (CET).

The indicative timetable refers to provisional dates (except for dates 1, 2, 3, and 4) and may be updated by the contracting authority during the procedure. In such cases, the updated timetable will be published on the web site where the call was published: <https://birn.eu.com/network/birn-albania/>.

**a. CONDITIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION AFTER THE CONTRACTING AUTHORITY'S
DECISION TO AWARD A GRANT**

Following the decision to award a grant, the beneficiary(ies) will be offered a contract based on the standard grant contract. By signing the application form (Annex 1 of these guidelines), the applicants agree, if awarded a grant, to accept the contractual conditions of the standard grant contract.

Implementation contracts

Where implementation of the action requires the beneficiary(ies) to award procurement contracts, those contracts must be awarded in accordance with PRAG rules for external actions.

Final amount of the grant

The maximum amount of the sub-grant will be stipulated in the contract. As mentioned under section 1.2 as fore mentioned in the respective lot. This amount is based on the budget, which is only an estimation. Therefore, this amount only becomes final following completion of the project and presentation of the final accounts.

Failure to meet the objectives

If the Beneficiary(ies) fails to implement the project as undertaken and agreed in the sub-granting contract, the Contracting Authority reserves the right to interrupt payments, and/or to terminate the contract. The Contracting Authority may demand full or partial repayment of the sums already paid, if the beneficiary does not fulfil the terms of the contract.

Contract award procedures

Where implementation of the project requires awarding of a procurement contract, the beneficiary must award the contract to the economically most advantageous offer, i.e. the bid offering the best value for money, respecting the principles of transparency and equal treatment of potential contractors and ensuring that there is no conflict of interest.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation of the approved projects will be coordinated by the Contracting Authority (BIRN Albania).

10. LIST OF ANNEXES

DOCUMENTS TO BE COMPLETED

- Annex 1:** Application Form
- Annex 2:** Budget Form
- Annex 3:** Logical framework Form
- Annex 4:** Checklist for the Application
- Annex A:** Declaration in Honour
- Annex B:** Declaration by the Lead Applicant
- Annex C:** Self-evaluation questionnaire on SEA-H
- Annex D:** Legal entity form
- Annex E:** Financial identification form

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