

CALL FOR PROPOSALS FOR SUB-GRANTS FOR LOCAL CSO'S AND MEDIA FROM MONTENEGRO & KOSOVO

Project:	Society Against Corruption in Montenegro and Western Balkans Region
Project Partners:	Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) and Civic Alliance (CA)
Funded by:	U.S Department of State
Reference number:	SAQMIP22GR0367
Submit electronically to:	grants@birnnetwork.org
Call for Proposals issued:	27 January 2026
Deadline for Submission of Applications:	21 February 2026 at 23:59 CET

1. BACKGROUND

Corruption remains one of the main obstacles to strengthening the rule of law across the Western Balkans, undermining democratic governance, public trust, and fair access to public services. Politicised decision-making, weak oversight, and limited accountability mechanisms continue to create space for abuse of power, particularly where public resources and appointments intersect with narrow political or private interests.

In Montenegro, corruption continues to affect public confidence in institutions and the credibility of reforms. Progress on transparency and accountability remains uneven, and civil society and independent media have repeatedly flagged gaps between formal commitments and practice. For example, reporting has highlighted how the state still lacks key transparency tools in areas like public procurement and access to data that would enable meaningful scrutiny and oversight.¹ Reporting has also underlined the importance of ensuring that anti-corruption bodies have the independence and resources needed to function effectively.²

In Kosovo, corruption and clientelism remain persistent challenges, particularly in areas such as public contracting and institutional governance, where accountability mechanisms are often perceived as weak or inconsistently applied. Balkan Insight's country governance profiling similarly points to ongoing issues linked to corruption risks and the need for stronger transparency and oversight in public decision-making.³

Across both contexts, education, healthcare, and the environment remain sectors vulnerable to politicisation, conflicts of interest, and misuse of public funds. Addressing these risks requires stronger cooperation between citizens, civil society, and local media, so that

¹ <https://balkaninsight.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/DRVAR-2024.pdf> .

² <https://balkaninsight.com/2026/01/12/montenegro-court-dismisses-djukanovic-lawsuit-against-anti-corruption-agency/>.

³ https://balkaninsight.com/birn_source/birn/page/1041/.

community concerns translate into credible evidence, public scrutiny, and pressure for institutional follow-up.

This initiative in a broader sense aims to contribute to free speech, open debate and free sharing of information, reducing corruption, all forms of organised crime including drug and human trafficking, influence from hostile entities and countries, creating a more favourable democratic and business environment.

2. AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The small-scale projects will focus on critical corruption challenges in Montenegro and Kosovo, brought together under an overarching theme addressing systemic problems, particularly in healthcare, education, and the environment, among other areas. Through this approach, the project aims to bring citizens, civil society, and local media closer together in both countries, empowering them to collaboratively identify and report corruption, hold institutions accountable, and demand concrete results, while raising public awareness of the damage corruption causes, especially in the strategic sectors of healthcare, environment and education.

The objectives for this round of grants include:

- Increase capacities of local media, civil society and citizens to identify corruption in their communities, report it to responsible authorities and hold institutions accountable;
- Empower civil society and media to report and counter corruption at national and local level and influence changes with special emphasis on environment, education and healthcare;
- Improve constructive engagement among civil society, government(s) and/or private sector and policies, laws and/or anti-corruption practices.

3. OUTPUTS AND ACTIVITIES

The expected outputs (Op) and activities (A) depending on your application type, whether as a Media Outlet or a CSO, may include:

For Media Outlets:

- Output 1.1 Cases of corruption in Montenegro and Kosovo identified and revealed
Activity 1.1 Developing factual and objective in-depth articles based on the needs of local communities
- Output 1.2 Increased public awareness in Montenegro and Kosovo regarding the importance of anti-corruption efforts and available mechanisms for citizen engagement and public oversight
Activity 1.2 Enforcing anti-corruption campaign via mainstream and social media

For CSO's:

- Output 2.1 Recommendations developed and delivered to improve anti-corruption policies, laws, and practices
Activity 2.1 Developing anti-corruption policy papers based on the needs of local communities

- Output 1.2** Increased public awareness in Montenegro and Kosovo regarding the importance of anti-corruption efforts and available mechanisms for citizen engagement and public oversight
- Activity 1.2** Enforcing anti-corruption campaign via mainstream and social media

Capacity Building, Networking and Promotional Activities:

Towards achieving the aforementioned results, individual support will be provided to grant recipients by BIRN and CA. Initially, each selected grant applicant will undergo a needs assessment which will be used to identify strengths, as well as opportunities for furthering their capacities. Based on this assessment and needs identified, support will be offered through tailor-made trainings (a minimum of 3 trainings for at least 10 representatives), workshops and mentoring sessions (a minimum of 3).

Additionally, all grantees will be granted the access to BIRN's digital tools for citizens' reporting corruption⁴. Each grantee will also have the opportunity to organize a community event, fostering public debate and highlighting key points from published articles or policy papers. An annual anti-corruption forum will be convened to collectively formulate recommendations and advocate for their adoption.

4. ELIGIBILITY OF COSTS AND SIZE OF GRANT

The table below summarises the grants to be given within this Call for Proposals.

Maximum Amount per Grant	Country	Grants (Media / CSOs) ⁵	Total Grants	Estimated Amount
\$12,430.00	Kosovo	4 / 4	8	\$99,440
\$12,430.00	Montenegro	4 / 4	8	\$99,440
Total			16	\$198,880

BIRN reserves the right to fund any or none of the applications submitted, as well as to discuss allocating actions with applicants as needed within the aforementioned categories towards achieving the overall goal of the programme. No co-financing from the applicant's side is expected within this Call for Proposals.

5. APPLICATION

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

⁴ CER Platform - Crowdsourcing Evidence, Engaging Citizens, Reporting Facts is a platform designed to support journalists and CSOs to engage with their communities and empower individuals to actively participate in combating pressing issues, including corruption, within their communities. This tool enables journalists and activists to crowdsource insights and evidence from citizens (by reaching out to the citizens directly through the media they already use), allowing them to submit various forms of multimedia content, including photos, videos, and testimonies related to corrupt practices they encounter or witness.

⁵ Eight grants are planned to be awarded in Montenegro and eight in Kosovo. In each country, four grants are foreseen for media organisations and four for civil society organisations.

5.1. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

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

For Media Outlets	For CSOs
Demonstrate a commitment to develop factual and objective in-depth articles on the damage corruption causes, especially in the strategic sectors of healthcare, environment and education, grounded on the needs and concerns of local communities	Demonstrate a commitment to producing high-quality, independent policy papers that serve the public interest by examining the damage caused by corruption, particularly in the strategic sectors of healthcare, the environment, and education.
Propose (at least 5) community impactful anti-corruption stories especially in the strategic sectors of environment, education and healthcare;	Propose (at least 3) community impactful anti-corruption policy especially in the strategic sectors of environment, education and healthcare;
Express clear intention and means of including under-represented communities in stories and policy papers. These may include marginalised groups, such as minorities, youth, women and other underreported communities.	
Be a legally registered entity in Montenegro or Kosovo.	
Be able to provide supporting documentation as listed in 5.4.1 Application Form Content .	

While previous grantees from Montenegro under this project are eligible to apply, preference may be given to new applicants in order to expand support to a wider range of local media outlets and civil society organisations.

5.2. ACTIVITIES ELIGIBILITY

The following types of activities are eligible for support within this Call for Proposals:

For Media Outlets	For CSOs
Activity 1.1.: Developing anti-corruption stories especially in the strategic sectors of environment, education and healthcare, based on inputs from citizens;	Activity 2.1.: Developing anti-corruption policy papers especially in the strategic sectors of environment, education and healthcare, based on the needs of local communities;
Activity 1.2.: Conducting an awareness-raising anti-corruption campaign through mainstream and social media channels.	

IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD AND LOCATION

The planned duration of a project should be 6 months, starting from April 2026. Activities should take place in Montenegro or Kosovo.

5.3. COSTS ELIGIBILITY

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

Eligible Costs	
Category	Explanation
Personnel Costs	Costs of organisation's staff and experts directly involved in implementing the proposed activities, proportionate to their level of involvement.
Travel Costs	Travel costs needed to produce the story / policy paper, especially if it's a story / policy paper covering citizens' experiences in some local or more remote area of the country
Other Costs	PR costs related to <i>Activity 1.2...: Conduct an awareness-raising anti-corruption campaign through mainstream and social media channels.</i> or any other costs related to the production of the stories / policy papers, including communication with stakeholders, research costs.
Ineligible Costs	
Include costs of office equipment, construction costs, entertainment and excessive transport and event costs.	

5.4. APPLICATION SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

To ensure a fair and competitive application process, applicants should complete and submit **only one application / proposal** under this Call for Proposals. Multiple applications by individual CSO's or media outlets are not eligible.

5.4.1. APPLICATION FORM CONTENT

To apply for grants, local CSOs and media outlets should:

- **Fill out the Application Form** (download the template – [HERE](#)) which should:
 - Be completed in the English language.
 - Outline general information, current audience data, and your proposal, based on your application type, whether as a Media Outlet or as a CSO.
- **Fill out the Financial Proposal.** Download the budget template [HERE](#)
- **Submit the following supporting documents** together with the application form and financial proposal:
 - Registration Certificate or any other document certifying that the applicant is registered as a legal entity in Montenegro or Kosovo.
 - Financial Statements for the 2023 and 2024 fiscal years, if applicable.
 - Certificate from relevant tax authority that the CSO/media outlet is a regular taxpayer.
 - Editorial policy, (for media outlets) if applicable.

The complete application, including the Application Form, Budget Proposal, and the mentioned supporting documents, must be submitted to: grants@birnnetwork.org.

5.4.2 APPLICATION DEADLINE

The applicant must submit the application by **23:59 CET, February 21, 2026 CET.**

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

5.4.3. CLARIFICATIONS, QUESTION & ANSWERS

The Information session is an integral part of this Call for Proposals and will be conducted online in English. During the Info session, the Call for Proposals, including the application forms, will be explained and questions answered.

The Info sessions will be held on Zoom, on **Monday, February 2, 2026, at 11:00 CET.**

Meeting link: [Click HERE](#)

Meeting 842 6512 3028

Passcode: 213984

Questions about the Call for Proposals may be sent in English to the email address: grants@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 the applicants have followed the application procedure set out in the Application Form and Financial Proposal, according to [eligibility criteria](#), and have submitted all required documents by the [deadline](#).
2. [Evaluation by the project jury](#).
3. [Notification of the application outcome](#).

STEP 1: BIRN ADMINISTRATIVE AND ELIGIBILITY CHECK

BIRN will undertake administrative checks to ensure the applicants have followed the 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. A 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 Proposals.

Applications that pass the administrative check will be assessed further as part of the [evaluation by the project jury](#).

STEP 2: EVALUATION BY THE PROJECT JURY

After the call is closed, all applications that meet the administrative requirement and eligibility criteria will be evaluated by the project jury. The jury will assess proposals based on the Relevance of the Proposed Story / Policy Paper, Capacity, Financial Proposal and Potential, including Social Impact. Please refer to the criteria list for further information on quality assessment.

CRITERIA	MAXIMUM SCORE
<p>1. RELEVANCE OF THE PROPOSED STORY / POLICY PAPER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed story / policy paper tackles a local or national issue relevant to the community. • The proposed story / policy paper contains specific cross-cutting issues, such as the promotion of gender equality, respect of human rights, and marginalised groups. 	25 points

2. CAPACITY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applicant demonstrates experience / capacity to implement activities. Applicant demonstrates significant reach in its community. 	25 points
3. FINANCIAL PROPOSAL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Budget demonstrates value for money – applicant clearly shows it can implement activities according to the proposed amount. 	25 points
4. POTENTIAL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Story / policy paper proposal addresses problems in communities. 	25 points
MAXIMUM TOTAL SCORE	100 points

STEP 3: NOTIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION OUTCOME

Applicants will be notified of the outcome, whether it was successful or not, by email. Applicants may ask for clarifications. 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.

6. TIMELINE OF CALL ACTIVITIES

The following table presents the indicative timeline of this Call for Proposals.

ACTIVITY	DATE
Call for Proposals Issued	January 27, 2026
Information Session CLICK HERE	February 2, 2026 at 11:00 CET
Deadline for Requesting Clarifications	February 8, 2026 at 17:00 CET
Deadline for Submission of Applications	February 21, 2026 at 23:59 CET
Notification to Applicants of the Results of the Administrative Check and the Qualitative Assessment (tentative)	Mid-March 2026
Tentative Contract Signature & Orientation Session	Last week of March, 2026