

MediaLit

Support to projects of local media outlets and civil society organizations (CSOs) in Western Balkan within the project

MEdIA – Lit
(Media Enhancement and Information Literacy for Democratic Engagement)

GUIDELINES FOR GRANT APPLICANTS

Deadline for submission of applications:

2 February 2026 until 12:00

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1. BACKGROUND

The project **MEDIA – Lit (Media Enhancement and Information Literacy for Democratic Engagement)**, within which framework this Call for Proposals for local media outlets and CSOs was published, is implemented by the Centre for Civic Education (CCE/CGO), in partnership with Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia (HCHRS), Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in North Macedonia (MHC), Tirana Centre for Journalistic Excellence in Albania (TCJE) and Atlantic Initiative in Bosnia and Herzegovina (AI).

The project is financed by the European Union, through the *EU Civil Society Facility and Media Programme in favour of the Western Balkans and Turkey for 2021-2023 (IPA III)* and *Multi-country annual action plan in favour of the Western Balkans and Türkiye for 2024 (IPA III) - Support to regional thematic networks of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs); Regional networks promoting independent pluralistic media and freedom of expression; and EU Award for Roma Integration*. It is cofinanced by the Ministry of Regional and Investment Development and Cooperation with Non-Governmental Organizations of the Government of Montenegro.

The overall objective of the project is to contribute to enhanced professional capacity of journalists, media outlets and media institutions to exercise the right to freedom of expression and access to information and to promote media pluralism.

The target groups of the project are 20 local media outlets and CSOs that deal with media at the local level in five Western Balkans countries – Montenegro, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Serbia, staff members of CSOs and local media outlets who will be included in the capacity building activities related to the sub-granting. The final beneficiaries are local media communities and citizens of the five WB countries who will benefit from the strengthened role of independent media on local level, as they will gain benefit from more precise and varied information.

The Western Balkans has a long track record of insufficiently independent and professional media, with clear lack of media pluralism. Media and reporters, especially those covering corruption and organized crime, face various threats, including verbal and physical intimidation, often stemming from state authorities. While there has been some progress, investigations into attacks on journalists have proven ineffective, fostering increased self-censorship. Instances of hate speech and discriminatory language in the media in WB often go unaddressed by regulatory bodies or legal authorities.

Media literacy remains lacking, with minimal regular activities to enhance citizen (and youth) capacities, except for certain EU-funded initiatives. Hate speech based on ethnicity is strengthening existing polarizations and limiting space for argument and solution-based dialogue. Gender-focused reporting is problematic, particularly during elections and in portraying women in politics. Gender stereotypes and hate speech are prevalent in online media.

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Media outlets' economic vulnerability compromises their daily operations, eroding citizens' trust and leading to lower reporting quality and staff attrition. This vulnerability makes them susceptible to external influence, fostering disinformation, negative campaigns, and media manipulation.

While there is limited regional media cooperation, it is mostly confined to states with similar languages, cultural backgrounds, and public broadcasters with national frequencies. Collaboration between local media across borders is virtually non-existent. Cooperation between media and governments remains low, and the influence of foreign capital, mainly through spreading disinformation, negatively impacts media freedom and freedom of expression. Authorities seem powerless to check and stop misinformation or fake news.

Having regard to the foregoing, the project **MEdIA – Lit** will provide financial support to third parties, strengthening their capacity to successfully implement activities in accordance with EU rules and continuous mentoring throughout projects.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE CALL FOR PROPOSALS

The overall objective is to contribute to enhanced professional capacity of journalists, media outlets and media institutions to exercise the right to freedom of expression and access to information and to promote media pluralism.

The specific objectives of this Call for Proposals are:

- To empower local media outlets and CSOs to produce solution-based and constructive stories at the local level.

3. PRIORITIES, THEMES AND ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES

The topics or themes may include production of free-of-charge news and media products that are of relevance to their local communities. The sub-grantees will have the freedom to explore and implement projects and initiatives that address the needs of their communities.

Within this framework, project proposals should be thematically focused on the following areas:

- *Democratisation;*
- *Safety of journalists;*
- *Media and information literacy;*
- *Resilience of society;*
- *Disinformation;*
- *Hate speech based on ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation;*
- *Trust in media;*
- *Rights-based regulation of digital platforms and social media;*

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Note: Mainstreaming of gender equality and youth issues within the projects is strongly recommended.

Activities that can be supported by this Call within the abovementioned priorities, themes and areas:

- Education
- Public awareness campaigns
- Research
- Baseline studies
- Activities aimed at ensuring outreach towards grassroots and other types of local non-governmental organisations
- Citizens and volunteers
- Monitoring of international commitments
- Publication of monitoring and shadow reports
- Promotion of the implementation of adopted laws and regulations
- Networking and coalition building, and experience/knowledge sharing activities
- Organisation of conferences, roundtables, workshops and seminars
- Cooperation with public bodies of relevance for the media sector
- Production of free-of-charge news and media products as far as they contain public media content
- Publication of online leaflets and manuals on best practice and testing of innovative approaches and pilots.

Note: the list of activities is not exhaustive but can serve as a possible guide for interested CSOs and media outlets in the context of the set objectives, priorities and themes of the call.

Activities that cannot be supported by this Call:

- actions concerned only or mainly with individual sponsorship for participation in workshops, seminars, conferences, etc;
- actions related to sub-granting to other parties;
- actions concerning only or mainly with individual scholarships for studies or trainings;
- 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 making a profit;
- actions related to charitable donations;
- actions discriminating individuals or groups of people on the ground of their gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs or lack of them, or ethnic origin;
- actions supporting individual political parties;
- actions already funded by other EU programmes.

4. FINANCIAL ASPECT OF THE CALL

A total of **EUR 400,000** will be allocated through this Call for Proposals.

The amount of funds that can be allocated for an individual project under this Call will range from a minimum of **EUR 15,000** to a maximum of **EUR 20,000**.

The requested amount of funds within this Call will cover **100% of eligible costs**. The difference between the total cost of the action and the approved amount within this Call, if not 100% supported, must come from funds that are not the budget of the European Union.

The maximum amount of funds provided for staff salaries/fees, office expenses and possible costs of purchasing equipment must not exceed 50% of the total costs of the entire project, whereas the maximum amount for staff salaries/fees is 45%.

Financial reports of the subgrants will be subject of an external audit. In the case of submission of partnership projects, only one organization - the project lead applicant – will be directly responsible for managing the financial resources of all partner organizations in the project.

This Call encourages cooperation with local institutions, but also with other CSOs so that even those organizations that are less developed could get a possibility to be supported through this Call¹.

5. RULES OF THE CALL

5.1. Who can apply?

In order to be eligible for participation in this call, local media outlets and CSOs must meet all criteria as follows:

- be a legal person;
- be non-profit-making;
- have media sector in their statute and legal association documents;
- be nationals of the 5 WB countries (Montenegro, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Serbia)
- be directly responsible for the preparation and management of the project.

CSOs and media which have been supported within the EU Civil Society Facility and Media Programme in favour of the Western Balkans and Turkey for 2021-2023 (IPA III), Multi-country

¹ The lead applicant and the co-applicants/partners are Beneficiaries of the contract and both must follow the same eligibility criteria (for instance, a municipality as a co-applicant is not eligible, but it can be an associate, see 5.3.)

annual action plan in favour of the Western Balkans and Türkiye for 2024 (IPA III); Budget line: 15.020101.01, Reference: EuropeAid/179703/DH/ACT/Multi are not eligible to apply for this Call.

5.2. Partnerships / Partners

Partnerships are not mandatory, but they are allowed and advisable. Partners participate in creating project proposals and its implementation. They **use financial resources under the same conditions that apply to the project applicant**. Therefore, partners must meet the **following criteria**:

- be a legal person;
- be non-profit-making;
- have media sector in their statute and legal association documents;
- be nationals of the 5 WB countries (Montenegro, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Serbia)
- be directly responsible for the preparation and management of the project.

Information about the project partners should be included in the document 'Partners', which is part of the Application Form.

5.3. Associates

Other organizations, besides the project applicant and the partner, can also be involved in the project implementation. They have the status of "associates". Associates play a role in the project implementation, but they may not receive funding from the grant, except for per diem and travel costs, when applicable.

Associates do not have to meet the eligibility criteria that apply to project applicants and partners, i.e. associates can be public institutions, local governments, representatives of the business community, etc.

Information about the associates should be included in the document 'Associates ', which is part of the Application Form.

5.4. Location of the project implementation

Projects have to be implemented in one of the five WB countries (Montenegro, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Serbia).

CSOs are encouraged to cover less developed areas of the respective countries.

5.5. Number of applications per project applicant

Each CSO or media outlet can participate in this Call only once, i.e., either as a project applicant or as a partner.

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5.6. Duration of the project implementation

Funds will be allocated for projects implemented between **5 and 10 months (minimum and maximum allowed)**.

5.7. How to apply?

Project proposals should be written in English.

Applicants are required to submit a filled **application package**, which consists of:

1. Application form
2. Logical framework matrix
3. Budget proposal

and **documentation** (scanned):

1. Registration of the organization;
2. Statute of the organization;
3. Financial report for 2025 (alternatively for 2024) submitted to the relevant tax or related authority of the respective country in which applicant/s are registered;
4. Signed and certified statement that more than half of the members of the governing body of the organization are not members of the political party bodies, public officials, executives, civil servants or state employees.

In the case of a partnership project, it is necessary to submit the same supporting documentation for both the partners and the lead project applicant. For all partners, it is necessary to submit a "Partnership Statement" (*which is part VI of the Application Form*), stamped and signed by an authorized person of the organization with the status of a partner in the project.

The electronic version shall be sent exclusively to the email media@cgo-cce.org with a subject - "CfP for local media outlets and CSOs in WB - MEdIA – Lit".

IMPORTANT NOTE: The documentation is sent as an email attachment or via a link from which it can be downloaded over an extended period of time, and which is not password-protected (e.g. via the platform <https://www.swisstransfer.com/>)

Incomplete project proposals, project proposals submitted in any other way not prescribed by this Guidelines, as well as proposals submitted in inappropriate forms shall not be considered.

5.8. Deadline for submission of applications

The deadline for submitting applications is 2 February 2026 until 12h00 (noon).

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Applications submitted after the deadline will not be considered.

The time of sending the email with application will be used as confirmation of the date and hour of submission of project proposals.

All applicants will receive a confirmation from the CCE/CGO on the receipt of the email with a project proposal.

5.9. Further information about submission of applications

If needed, further information can be obtained by sending questions to media@cgo-cce.org, no later than **20 January 2026**, with email subject reference: “CfP for local media outlets and CSOs in WB - MEdIA – Lit question”. Answers to individual questions will be sent exclusively by e-mail.

Note: To ensure equal treatment of applicants, the CCE/CGO cannot give an opinion on the objectives, expected results and activities of the proposed projects, as well as on other elements of the application.

Questions that may be relevant to other project applicants, together with answers and important notes for project applicants, will be published on the CCE/CGO website www.cgo-cce.org, as well as website of the project partners, after the deadline for their submission and the latest seven days before the deadline for sending applications to the Call for Proposal.

6. EVALUATION AND SELECTION OF APPLICATIONS

The evaluation of applications will be conducted in **two phases**.

The *first phase* will include an administrative check of the received documentation and the eligibility criteria. Projects that pass administration phase will go to the second phase.

The *second phase* involves the evaluation of the applications by the Evaluation Committee, according to the Evaluation Grid presented in the Guidelines for grant applicants.

The proposals that pass this administrative check will be evaluated according to the Evaluation Grid presented below.

Evaluation Grid

Section	Maximum points
1. Relevance of the action	12
1.1 How relevant is the proposal to the objectives and priorities of the Call? Are the objectives and results of the project aligned with the Call?	5

1.2 How clearly are the target groups and final beneficiaries defined? To what extent is the project in line with the needs of the target groups, country(ies), region(s) and/or relevant sectors (including synergy with other development initiatives and avoidance of duplication)??	5
1.3 Does the proposal contain particular added-value elements?	2
2. Design of the action	8
2.1 How coherent is the overall design of the action? Are the objectives and results of the project clearly defined? Does the proposal indicate the expected results to be achieved by the action? Does the intervention logic explain the rationale to achieve the expected results?	4
2.2. Is the project based on a robust assessment and analysis of the problem it addresses?	2
2.3 Does the design take into account external factors (risks and assumptions)?	2
3. Feasibility of the action and involvement of partners	10
3.1 Are the activities feasible and consistent in relation to the expected results? Are results realistic?	4
3.2 Is the action plan for implementing the action clear and feasible? Is the timeline realistic?	2
3.3 Does the proposal include an effective and efficient monitoring system/Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) plan? Is there an evaluation planned (previous, during or/and at the end of the implementation)?	2
3.4 Are the roles of the project partners and associates clearly defined in terms of responsibility for implementation of activities?	2
4. Technical and operational capacities of the organization	5
4.1 Does the organization have the capacity for technical and financial project management?	3
4.2 Does the organization have relevant previous experience in the field addressed by the proposed project?	2
5. Sustainability of the project	5
5.1 Does the project have financial, institutional and political sustainability?	2
5.2 Is the action likely to have multiplier effects, including scope for replication, extension capitalisation on experience and knowledge sharing?	3
6. Budget	10
6.1 Are the activities appropriately reflected in the budget?	4
6.2 Is the ratio between estimated costs and estimated results satisfactory?	6

Maximum total score	50
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Once all the proposals have been assessed, a list will be drawn up with the proposed actions ranked according to their total score. The highest scoring applications will be provisionally selected until the available budget for this CFP is reached, with the respect that all countries covered by the project are included.

The list of supported projects will be published on the website www.cgo-cce.org, as well as on the websites of partner organizations.

7. INDICATIVE TIMETABLE OF ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE CALL

	Date	Time
1. Information sessions	14 January 2026 16 January 2026	Online, 14h00 Online, 14h00
2. Deadline for requesting any clarifications about the call	20 January 2026	-
3. Deadline for publication of clarifications	22 January 2026	-
4. Deadline for submission of project proposals	2 February 2026	
5. Information to organizations that have passed the administrative check	4 February 2026	-
6. Information to organizations whose projects have been selected for funding	27 February 2026	-
7. Contract signature	5 March 2026	-
8. Mandatory capacity building programme for subgrantees	5 – 8 March 2026	-

Note: This is a provisional timetable of activities, except for the dates indicated in items 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. CCE reserves the right to modify the timetable, and the modified timetable will be published on the official website www.cgo-cce.org.