#  REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS (RFA)

**EPIC – Expanding Production of Independent Content**

Georgia

**Publication Date:** 31/05/2023

# Summary

**1.1 Funder (Prime Funder):** Internews Networks (USA)

**1.2 Funder Project Name:** Expanding Production of Independent Content (EPIC)

**1.3 Announcement Type:** Initial

**1.4 RFA Number:** 01

**1.5 CFDA Number:** 19.345

**1.6** **Application Submission Deadline:** 13 June, 2023

# Program overview

Funder invites applications for grants offered under its project, the **Expansion of Production of Independent Content in Georgia** (EPIC). Media organizations, independent journalists, and content creators with traditional and/or digital operations in Georgia for more than one year may apply with specific ideas for a series of stories. The **EPIC** project aims to assist in the production and dissemination of high-quality, credible, engaging, and innovative fact-based multimedia content across platforms that addresses issues of importance to communities across Georgia.

# Support offered through the call

Selected applicants will receive financial support in the form of cost-reimbursable subgrants to produce relevant content. Funder anticipates awarding five (5) grants, each **up to USD $8,000 per applicant**. Under no circumstances will Funder consider an application for an award exceeding $8,000.

The disbursement of the grant will be made in two instalments, 70% upon signing of the grant agreement and 30% upon successful completion of the project and submission of the final narrative and financial report.

Additional funding will be available for enhancing the reach and impact of content produced in the project, refer to the section *Promotion and Distribution* for details.

Selected applicants will be reimbursed for costs incurred as part of content creation: production costs, such as travel and accommodation costs, fees of contractors (for example web developers) needed for certain aspects of production, office rent and salaries of staff involved in producing the content based on level of effort, running costs based on the level of effort, equipment not yet available but needed to produce the content (under USD 5,000) and other reasonable expenses expressly related to the production specific media project/series. Capital expenditures, servicing of loans, construction activities will not be considered for award. Please refer to the budget template for additional information.

Based on the needs of the selected applicants, Funder will also hire experts to provide technical expertise related to the content, and expert consultancy and/or training to help establish or strengthen capabilities of applicants to produce, disseminate and promote their content. Types of support may include consultations on audience expansion, multimedia products and editorial support. Applicants are encouraged to indicate on the application form the areas or specific aspects of production or promotion for which they would need or welcome consultancy, assistance, mentoring or training.

EPIC will also support content producers in regional cross-border networking and content sharing through a story database, online and in-person events.

Funder has the right to translate and republish / distribute produced multimedia materials on platforms of media partners in other countries covered by the EPIC project. Should selected applicants want to republish such content themselves, translation services will be made available by the Funder.

Further rounds of grants for national and cross border stories will follow this call, for which applicants selected through the current call will also be considered.

# Guidelines for project proposals

Funder is looking to support series of stories that are **innovative in their story approaches and angles, as well as their use of visual storytelling tools** to reach a wide range of audience groups and make content accessible to people with various information needs. Projects should address issues of public interest, the human experiences that reflect them, and have the potential to counter disinformation.

## Content formats

Applicants should pitch series of stories where **individual pieces are ideally linked by a common theme or interrelated themes**. Projects that have the potential to be continued beyond the grant’s implementation period are welcome.

The pieces should have strong video and/or **multimedia storytelling** to reach a wide range of audience groups and make the content accessible to people with various information needs.

Multimedia content can include, but is not limited to video, photography, animation, a wide range of infographics, graphics, drawings, audio segments, interactivity or even gamification. A mix of formats within a series of stories is acceptable if this enhances reader engagement and the potential reach of the stories.

The individual pieces within a series can be video stories or text- or visuals-based multimedia, for example but not limited to:

* **standalone videos** such as reportage, explainers, features, or other video content
* **Multimedia stories: text-based content** that provides concise information and/or overviews, supplemented by multimedia (video, photography, data visualization, audio, etc.); **or visuals-based content**, with photography, video segments or data visualization taking center stage with text providing supporting information.

Content should utilize the publishers’ own platforms (traditional channels and/or websites) for original publication, except in the case of platform-native content creators. Shorter versions, which also include multimedia element(s), will be shared by social media platforms.

## Periodicity and Quantity of Content

A series of stories should consist of at least **four individual pieces and four additional platform-friendly or platform-native content** based on these individual pieces (eight in total). The stories will need to be produced and published every month starting from July, 2023.

The project duration is between **six to eight months**.

The applicant should clearly describe in the project proposal what formats are intended to use, the planned number of pieces, the projected production and publishing schedule.

## Distribution and promotion

To help widen distribution and increase reach of the pieces in the series, selected applicants are expected to share all stories via traditional (if applicable), web and social media platforms, and promote with online tools and offline events (offline promotion is optional).

Additional funding will be available for enhancing the reach and impact of content produced in the project. This pool of funds will be available to buy third-party services for content production partners to support the distribution and targeting of selected supported stories. For example, services may include content promotion costs or purchases of audience data.

## Audience, Themes and Topics

Funder is looking for series of stories that cover nationwide and local issues in Georgia. Local stories will be considered if the theme, topic, or subject is also relevant to audiences outside of the specific region.

Media stories should speak to a wide range of audiences or address issues of interest to communities and audience groups that are underserved or especially affected by or vulnerable to misinformation. Such groups include, but are not limited to young people, small town and village communities, minorities, and people not regularly reached by a wider range of independent media outlets practicing credible, fact-based reporting.

Stories for and/or about niche audiences (such as the youth) should prominently feature or speak with the voice of that specific audience.

Applicants are free to choose the themes and topics of the pieces produced as part of the project, but they must meet the audiences’ needs and address key current issues affecting them in a relevant and informative manner, with a focus on how they reflect on the human experience, especially where there is an important gap in information. Possible such topics and themes include, but are not limited to:

* Wars, conflicts, and security;
* European and Euro-Atlantic integration;
* Human rights;
* Education and employment;
* Health, living standards, and social welfare;
* Economy;
* Youth affairs;
* Debunking disinformation and fakes.

Materials produced should refrain from reproducing or disseminating misinformation narratives, unchecked and non-factual information, non-scientific statements and advice, superstitions. Editorials, opinion pieces, short-form fiction will also not be considered.

The content itself must not be and may not contain any form of hidden or native advertising, sponsored, bartered, or paid content.

**At least one grant will be awarded to a partner targeting the youth audiences.**

# Application and Selection

**Check the eligibility criteria** and start planning your series of stories after making sure you fulfil them. Only the proposals of applicants fulfilling the eligibility criteria will be considered. Take note of the deadline: **applications received after the deadline will not be considered**.

Your application will consist of a pitch for your series of stories (the project proposal) detailed on the application form and an accompanying budget (the budget proposal).

If you have any questions while preparing your proposals regarding this Request for Applications, please email to EPIC project coordinator in Georgia, Mariam Menabde at mariam.menabde@yahoo.com **.**

## Submission of the application

**Applications must be submitted by 13 June, 2023 via email** to **mariam.menabde@yahoo.com****.** The subject line must include the words “**Response to RFA EPIC**”.

The documents constituting the application must be included **as attachments**. The email must list and describe the documents to be included as parts of the application.

Any portion of the application containing confidential or proprietary information should be clearly marked within the application itself either by highlighting or italics. The email must describe specifically how these sections are identified.

**Applications can be submitted in Georgian or English.**

## Content of the applications

The following documents must be included with your application:

* the **project proposal** in **fully completed application form** in Word document (docx) format, and
* the **financial proposal** using the budget template in Excel (xlsx) format.

The application form should contain all information about you, as the applicant as well as your pitch for the series of stories that you aim to produce with the support of this grant.

The financial proposal should detail the costs of producing the content that you wish to fund using this grant. Please use our budget template spreadsheet for this.

## Deadline for applications

Applications must be submitted by **13** **June, 2023.**

Applications received after the deadline will not be considered. All applications submitted will be acknowledged within two (2) working days and will note the documents submitted. The respondent is responsible for ensuring and confirming that the email comprising the application is received by the Funder’s representative indicated above.

## Selection criteria

Applications will **be assessed by a selection panel** comprised of the Funder’s staff and independent media experts, taking into consideration the project proposal (quality of the pitch for the media project / series of stories and the eligibility and capability of the applicant) and the financial proposal (feasibility of the budget).

Each application will receive a score, with a maximum potential score of 20 points. Applications will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

* **Media outlet’s eligibility, professionalism and impact:** The extent to which the applicant adheres to ethical editorial principles and the professional standards of fact-based, ethical journalism, and produces impactful reporting; Compliance with eligibility requirements including being a registered organization or an registered individual entrepreneur with at least one year of experience on the media market; Availability of active traditional and or/web and social media channels with regularly published materials in Georgia — **maximum of 5 points**;
* **Media content impact and relevance:** Quality and clarity of story concepts, including compliance with the thematic requirements of the project; Potential impact and relevance of the proposed media content (thematic area, formats, channels, tools) to the target audience(s) — **maximum of 5 points**;
* **Applicant capacity to deliver the expected quality results:** The extent to which the organization clearly understands the steps/activities needed to implement the project successfully (allocating sufficient human and material resources, planning, producing and promoting the media content, engaging the target audience(s), etc.)— **maximum of 5 points**.
* The financial proposal’s (budget) compliance with the project and feasibility of expenses — **maximum of 5 points**.

Grants will be awarded to applicants whose proposals are most responsive to this Request for Applications and the goals of the EPIC project, all factors considered.

## Award notification and contract

Successful respondent(s) will be notified of selection within fifteen (15) working days following the deadline for submission of applications.

The successful respondent(s) must confirm the application and acceptance of the selection within five (5) working days of selection notification or the selection will be withdrawn due to non-responsive respondent and offered to the next most qualified respondent.

Funder does not provide detailed reasoning to unsuccessful applicants.

Notice of selection of the application is not to be construed as a contract or subgrant award. Once the selection is confirmed, a final subgrant agreement will be negotiated and signed with the successful respondent, subject to prime funder approval, environmental clearances, and successful vetting of eligibility.

# Timeline and Duration

There will be two weeks for submission of the Project Proposals after the Request for Applications is announced through an open call.

Once grant agreements are signed, Media Partners will have six to eight months to produce, publish and promote the pieces of their series. No more than one month should elapse between two pieces.

During this time, they will have the chance to use expert consultancy and mentoring provided by the EPIC project. Three online exchanges and one in-person unconference will be organized for media partners from the project countries.

## Reporting

Selected applicants will have programmatic and financial reporting requirements. Narrative and financial reports will need to be submitted once, at the end of the grant cycle, per the Funder’s judgement. Quarterly reports about the audience reach and engagement of pieces supported through this call will need to be submitted. Final reports will also need to include these data.

# Eligibility Criteria

Applicants must meet the following criteria to be considered eligible for a subaward resulting from this RFA:

* In the case of media outlets, the publishing organization is legally registered in Georgia, in the case of independent journalists and content creators, they have a registered entity in Georgia, e.g. as a private entrepreneur;
* The applicant is active in the Georgian media market as a content producer for more than one year;
* The applicant regularly publishes media content that specifically targets a national, local or regional audience with public affairs coverage;
* The applicant follows an independent editorial policy and has a proven dedication to professional journalistic standards and ethics;
* The applicant has a demonstrated record of producing clear, unbiased, pluralistic content about issues of public interest;
* The applicant publicly self-identifies as an independent organization or journalist;
* The organization publishing this media outlet is not owned or managed by public authorities, local or national governments, political parties, by individuals holding public office or office in political organizations, or their close relatives;
* In the case of former media partners, the applicant is in good standing in performance and reporting under previous subgrants by the Funder, if applicable.

# Additional Considerations

## Indirect Costs

Selected subrecipients will be eligible for reimbursement of indirect costs if they:

1. Have a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement from their cognizant agency, or
2. Accept a *de minimis* indirect cost rate of 10% applied to Modified Total Direct Costs (MTDC). MTDC is defined as all direct salaries and wages, applicable fringe benefits, materials and supplies, services, employee and consultant travel, and up to the first $25,000 of each subaward or subcontract (regardless of the period of performance of the subawards or subcontracts under the award). MTDC excludes equipment\*, capital expenditures\*, charges for patient care, rental costs, tuition remission, scholarships and fellowships, *participant support costs*\* and the portion of each subaward or subcontract in excess of $25,000.

\*: Exact definitions of the terms can be found via [this link](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-II/part-200/subpart-A/subject-group-ECFR2a6a0087862fd2c/section-200.1).

## Cost Principles

Proposal budgets will be reviewed in accordance with, and selected subrecipients’ costs will be subject to, the cost principles that apply to them to assure reasonableness, allocability, and allowability:

1. Not for Profit organizations: [2CFR200](http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=3a5b24a09e5a2bee7c2d178e2e9ca53e&mc=true&node=pt2.1.200&rgn=div5) Subpart E, Cost Principles

2. For Profit organizations: [48CFR31.2 Federal Acquisition Regulations](http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title48/48cfr31_main_02.tpl) (FAR) and [48CFR731.2](http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=d947754b86e1b3fe925ad7c9d6056e10&mc=true&node=pt48.5.731&rgn=div5#sp48.5.731.731_12)

## Subgrant Administration

The following regulations and provisions, at minimum, will apply to subawards issued as a result of this RFA:

* [2CFR200](http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=3a5b24a09e5a2bee7c2d178e2e9ca53e&mc=true&node=pt2.1.200&rgn=div5) and [2CFR600](http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=de342bfd8f33c25cd6f657e006dc5481&node=pt2.1.600&rgn=div5) Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards
* [US Department of State Standard Terms and Conditions](https://www.statebuy.state.gov/fa/Documents/2015DeptTermsAndConditionsForUSandForeignOrg.pdf)

## Project Goal and Description

The goal of EPIC project is to help foster a strong independent media sector that is resistant to powerful interests seeking to manipulate, isolate, or control the press.

 The project’s activities are funded by an award from the US Department of State (DOS).

Led by the Funder and implemented in partnership with Media Initiatives Center (Armenia), Instytut Reportazu (Poland), Internews Ukraine (Ukraine) and Center for Independent Journalism (Romania), the **Expanding Production of Independent Content (EPIC)** project aims to support independent media in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus through a varied blend of activities. Its goal is to

* enable media to produce and disseminate high-quality and credible content across platforms that addresses issues of importance in their local communities and counters disinformation,
* improve cross-border content production and contextualize national stories into regional perspectives and better connect media and audiences across target countries, and
* strengthen networks within their countries and across the region.

Through EPIC, media beneficiaries will have access to community-driven, country-specific and regional research and editorial policies and plans to drive high quality and responsive information, particularly as it relates to the war in Ukraine and vulnerable populations, such as women, youth and those that are discriminated against based on their gender or religion.

# Attached documents

1. Subgrant Application Template
2. Subgrant Detailed Budget Template

End of RFA