#  REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS (RFA)

**EPIC – Expanding Production of Independent Content**

Local Content Production Grants

Georgia

**Publication Date:** 05/02/2024

# Summary

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

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

**1.3 Announcement Type:** Initial

**1.4** **RFA Number:** 03

**1.5 CFDA Number:** 19.345

**1.6** **Application Submission Deadline:** February 25, 2024

# Program overview

The Funder invites applications for grants under the **Expansion of Production of Independent Content in Georgia** (EPIC) project, which it leads. 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. The Funder anticipates awarding five (5) grants, each **up to USD $8,000 per applicant**. Under no circumstances will the Funder consider an application for an award exceeding $8,000.

The disbursement of the grant will be made in two installments: 80% upon signing of the grant agreement and 20% upon successful completion of the project and submission of the final narrative and financial reports.

Additional funding will be available for enhancing the reach and impact of content produced in the project (See *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, content distribution and promotion costs, equipment that is not yet available but necessary to produce the content (under USD 5,000) and other reasonable expenses expressly related to the production of a specific media project/series. Capital expenditures, servicing of loans, and construction activities will not be considered for awards. (See *Budget Template* for additional information).

Based on the needs of the selected applicants, the 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 and multimedia products as well as editorial support. Applicants are encouraged to indicate the areas or specific aspects of production or promotion for which they would need or welcome consultancy, assistance, mentoring, or training on the application form.

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

The Funder has the right to translate and republish/distribute project-supported multimedia materials on the 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.

# Guidelines for project proposals

 The 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 and the human experiences that reflect them, as well as have the potential to counter disinformation.

## Content formats

Applicants should pitch series of stories where **individual pieces are 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 it enhances reader engagement and the potential reach of stories.

The individual pieces within a series can be video stories or text- or visual-based multimedia, including, 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.);
	+ **visual-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 via 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 materials** based on those individual pieces (eight in total). The stories will must be produced and published every month starting from March 2024.

The project duration is **six months**.

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

## Distribution and promotion

To help widen distribution and increase the 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 them with online tools and offline events (offline promotion is optional).

Additional funding will be available for enhancing the reach and impact of content produced under the project. This pool of funds will be available to purchase 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

The 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: youth, 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 specific audience groups (such as youth or ethnic minorities) 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 information gap. Possible topics and themes include, but are not limited to:

* Wars, conflicts, and regional affairs;
* Territorial integrity and security;
* European and Euro-Atlantic Integration;
* Elections;
* Youth affairs;
* Human rights, including the rights of minority groups;
* Education and employment;
* Health, living standards, and social welfare;
* Countering disinformation and fakes; and
* The economy.

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

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

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

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 February 25, 2024 via email** to **Mariam.menabde@yahoo.com****.** The subject line must include the words “**Response to EPIC RFA.**”

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

Any portion of the application containing confidential or proprietary information should be clearly marked within the application itself either with highlighted text 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 a **fully completed application form** in Word (docx) format, and
* the **financial proposal** using the budget template in Excel (xlsx) format.

The application form should contain information about you as the applicant as well as your pitch for two story ideas for the series 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 **February 25, 2024.**

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 applicant 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 (i.e., feasibility of the budget).

Each application will receive a score, with a maximum potential score of 100 points. Applications will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

* **Media outlet’s eligibility, professionalism, and impact:** **maximum of 30 points**
	+ 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 a registered individual entrepreneur with at least one year of experience on the media market; and
	+ Availability of active traditional and or/web and social media channels with regularly published materials in Georgia
* **Media content’s impact and relevance:** **maximum of 30 points**
	+ Quality and clarity of story concepts, including compliance with the thematic requirements of the project; and
	+ Potential impact and relevance of the proposed media content (i.e., thematic area, formats, channels, tools, etc.) to the target audience(s)
* **Applicant’s capacity to deliver the expected quality/results: maximum of 30 points**
	+ The extent to which the organization clearly understands the steps/activities needed to implement the project successfully (i.e., allocating sufficient human and material resources; planning, producing, and promoting the media content, engaging the target audience(s); etc.)
* **The financial proposal’s (budget) compliance with the project and feasibility of expenses: maximum of 10 points**.

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

## Award notification and contract

Successful applicant(s) will be notified of selection within twenty-five (25) working days following the deadline for the submission of applications.

Successful applicant(s) must confirm their application and acceptance of selection within five (5) working days of selection notification or the selection will be withdrawn due to unresponsiveness and offered to the next most qualified respondent.

The 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 applicant, subject to prime Funder approval, environmental clearances, and successful vetting of eligibility.

# Timeline and Duration

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

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

During this time, they will have expert consultancy and mentoring provided by the EPIC project available to them. Online exchanges 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. 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:

* *For media outlets:* the publishing organization must be legally registered in Georgia; *for independent journalists and content creators:* the applicant must have a registered entity in Georgia, e.g. as a private entrepreneur;
* The applicant has been 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, individuals holding public office or positions in political organizations, or their close relatives;
* *For former media partners:* the applicant is in good standing in performance and reporting under previous subgrants by the Funder, if applicable.

The current grantee media outlets funded by the EPIC project are also eligible to apply.

# 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 I the EPIC project is to help foster a strong independent media sector.

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 variety 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