REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS (RFA)

EPIC – Expanding Production of Independent Content

Hungary, Second Round

Publication Date: FEB 14, 2024

Program overview

Internews invites applications for grants offered under its project, the **Expanding Production of Independent Content in Hungary** (EPIC). Media organizations, independent journalists, and content creators with digital operations in Hungary for more than one year may apply with specific ideas for a series of stories or media project. 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 Hungary.

Support offered through the call

Financial support

Selected applicants will receive financial support in the form of cost-reimbursable subgrants to produce relevant content. Internews anticipates awarding four (4) grants, each **up to USD $10,000 per applicant**.

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 both 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 and the section Additional Considerations for more information.

Additional funding of **up to USD $1,000** can be available for content marketing to increase the reach and impact of content produced in the project (to be included in the budget), refer to the section Promotion and Distribution for details.

Grant payments will be made based on a quarterly needs-basis. The initial payment will be made following the signature of a subgrant agreement as an advance based on the partner's projected expenses for the following 3 months. Payments afterwards will be made based on actual reported expenditure and projected expenses.

Professional support

Based on the needs of the selected applicants, Internews 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 selected 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.

Other support

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

Timeline and Duration

Applications can be submitted until **23:59 (Central European Time) on 10 March 2024**.

Once grant agreements are signed, successful applicants will have up to six months, foreseeably between **May 1, 2024 and October 31, 2024** to produce, publish and promote the pieces of their media projects / series. No more than two months should elapse between two pieces.

Guidelines for project proposals

Internews is looking to support media projects and/or series of stories that are **innovative in their story approaches and angles, as well as their use of (audio)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.

Content formats

Applicants should pitch media projects and/or series of stories where **individual pieces are ideally linked by both a common theme and a common format**. Projects united by only a common format will be considered if they are sufficiently innovative and have the potential to fill an important gap in information. Projects that have the potential to be continued beyond the grant's implementation period are welcome.

The pieces should have **strong multimedia content and (audio)visual storytelling that is adaptable to social media platforms**, 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 photography, videography, animation, captioned video, a wide range of infographics (ranging from standalone charts and maps to innovative data visualizations), graphics, drawings, audio segments, interactivity or even gamification. A mix of formats within a media project / series of stories is acceptable if this enhances reader engagement and the potential reach of the stories.

Applicants who have less experience with multimedia, (audio)visual storytelling, data visualizations but have a stated interest in developing these capabilities are also welcome to apply and will be supported with expert consultancy and mentoring.

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

- **longform** (upwards of 12 000 characters) combining multiple audiovisual storytelling tools,
- **shorter pieces** (from 3000 characters) that provide concise information and/or quick overviews supplemented by multimedia (video, photography, data visualization, audio, etc.)
- **standalone videos** such as reportage, explainers, animations, features, interviews, or other video content (from 2 minutes upwards)
- **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 (websites) for original publication, except in the case of platform-native content creators. Shorter pieces should also include multimedia material(s).

Periodicity and Quantity of Content

A media project / series of stories should consist of at least three individual pieces. The stories will need to be produced and published within six months, with no more than two months between two pieces.

The number of stories within a project/series can vary depending on the format(s) and the budget. The variations given below are just possible examples for content over the course of the six months:

- 3 longform pieces,
- 3 in-depth videos / explainers,
- 5 shorter pieces with multimedia content,
- 10 shorter audiovisual explainers,
- 2 longform pieces supported by 2 shorter articles.

Mixing formats and lengths is acceptable to support good storytelling – a series of around ten shorter, well-researched, well-executed audiovisual explainers will be considered, as will a series of three in-depth longreads or two longreads supported by two shorter pieces.

Please be clear in your project proposal about what formats you intend to use, the planned number of pieces, the projected production and publishing schedule and how this will support your storytelling.

Promotion and distribution

To help widen distribution and increase reach of the pieces in the projects/series, selected applicants are also expected create platform-friendly or platform-native content based on them (at least one / piece, but ideally for all platforms the applicant has channels on). These pieces of content do not count toward the number of pieces in the series.

These can be adapted content but are ideally short segments produced suited to the specific platform, such as but not limited to:

- **shorts, reels, stories,** and **posts** used as teasers, highlights, or an iteration of the original content,

- **interactive content** such as polls, tests and quizzes related to the original content that drive interaction and engagement.

Additional funding of up to USD 1,000 can 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 (ad spend) or purchases of audience data. Beyond platforms, offline, email and other promotional methods are also welcome that drive reach and engagement.

For reimbursement of costs incurred for distribution and promotion, successful applicants should use the content marketing planning support made available by the EPIC project or have their own promotion plans approved by EPIC's expert.

Audience, Themes and Topics

Internews is looking for **media projects and series of stories that cover nationwide and local issues in Hungary**. We welcome projects that cover stories outside of Budapest. Local stories will be considered if the theme, topic, or subject is also relevant to audiences outside of the specific region.

Media projects and stories should **speak to a wide range of audiences** or **address issues of interest to communities and audience groups that are underserved**. Such groups include, but are not limited to young people, smaller 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 minorities) should prominently feature or speak with the voice of that the specific audience.

Individual pieces within a project/series should ideally be **linked by both a common theme and a common format**, but projects united by only a common format or theme will be considered if they are sufficiently innovative and have the potential to fill an important gap in information (for example explainers that cover a wider range of issues).

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:

- everyday life, stories about livelihoods, food security, work, jobs, wages, living expenses and inflations (and their effect on the everyday life of people and communities),

- corruption, including its trickle-down effect in people's day-to-day lives,

- environmental issues, including how the climate crisis affects life and the economy across Hungary,

- social issues, ranging from how the welfare system functions to individual human interest stories that speak to the wider issue,

- women, the challenges they face in society, families, relationships, the workplace,

- the education system, including providing a big picture view of the system, the role of different stakeholders, any systemic risks,

- the health sector, including the role of private and public health care, their functioning, and systemic relation to each other,

- local, but universal stories of how people live, overcome difficulties, how small communities interact with each other and their relationships,

- the agricultural sector, including the bigger picture and the lives of people working in it,

- currently trending topics where there is a lack of policy debate before decisions are taken, including formats that enable / encourage real policy debates on local issues or cover the lack of transparency over such decisions,

- the effects of Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine on the lives of people in Hungary, the lives of refugees living in Hungary, the roles of different actors, and the war's effect on any of the above-mentioned areas,

- further topics, such as LGBTQ+, the role of the EU in various aspects of life in Hungary, migration, historical misrepresentations, and other areas.

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

Content producers should clearly mark any advertising, sponsored or paid content on their platforms appearing with the content created. The content itself must not be and may not contain any form of hidden or native advertising, sponsored, bartered, or paid content.

Application and Selection

Check the eligibility criteria and start planning your project / 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 media project / series of stories (the project proposal) detailed on the application form and an accompanying budget (the budget proposal).

A single applicant (publisher) may apply with multiple projects, but only one grant may be awarded per applicant.

If you have any questions while preparing your proposals regarding this Request for Applications, please email HU-EPIC-Grants@internews.org.

Submission of the application

Applications must be submitted by email to HU-EPIC-Grants@internews.org. 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. If more than one message is required to transmit the application, each message must be identified as part of a multi-part submission (e.g., "message 1 of 3").

Applications can be submitted in Hungarian or English.

Content of the applications

The following documents must be included with your application:

- **fully completed application form** in PDF format, and
- the **budget 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 media project / series of stories that you aim to produce with the support of this grant.

The budget 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 **23:59, 10 MAR 2024 (CET).**

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 emails comprising the application are received by the Internews representatives indicated in the Summary above.

Selection criteria

Applications will **be assessed by a selection panel** comprised of Internews 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 100 points. Applications will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Records/past experience/professionalism: 10 points
- Quality of the pitch: 30 points
- Ability to achieve planned results/capacity: 15 points
- Expected results/impact: 20 points
- Budget: 25 points

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

Award notification and contract

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

The successful applicant(s) must confirm the application and acceptance of the selection within three (3) working days of selection notification or the selection will be withdrawn due to non-responsive applicant and offered to the next most qualified applicant.

Internews does not notify and provide detailed reasoning to unsuccessful applicant(s).

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(s), subject to prime funder approval, environmental clearances, and successful vetting of eligibility.

Eligibility Criteria

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

- In the case of media outlets, the publishing organization is legally registered in Hungary, in the case of independent journalists and content creators, they have a registered business entity in Hungary, e.g. as a private entrepreneur.

- The applicant is active in the Hungarian online media market as a content producer for more than 1 year,

- The applicant regularly publishes Hungarian language media content that specifically targets a national, local or regional audience,

- 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,

- The applicant is in good standing regarding any previous Internews grants.

Expectations from Applicants

Applicants should

- demonstrate capability and produce high-quality, credible content,

- adapt project content to different platforms (including social networks), engage audiences, and make use of resources provided by Internews to do so,

- work with EPIC country representatives and the EPIC team throughout project implementation to maximize content quality, distribution, and reach,

- attend project meetings and work with mentors on an agreed-upon schedule,

- implement activities in a timely manner, with effective communication.

Internews 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 Internews.

Further rounds of grants for national and cross border stories will follow this call, for which applicants selected through the current call are eligible to apply.

Reporting

Selected applicants will have programmatic and financial reporting requirements. Narrative reports will need to be submitted once, at the end of the grant cycle, per Internews' judgement. Financial reports and audience reach and engagement reports will need to be submitted quarterly and with final reports at the end of the grant cycle.

Additional Considerations

Summary

- Funder (Prime Funder): Internews

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

- Announcement Type: Initial

- RFA Number: 01

- CFDA Number: 19.345

- Application Submission Deadline: MAR 10, 2024, 23:59, Central European Time

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 Subpart E, Cost Principles

2. For Profit organizations: 48CFR31.2 Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR) and 48CFR731.2

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.

Applicants that have received grants from Internews previously must continue using the same method (10% *de minimis* indirect cost rate or no indirect costs) they used in their previous grants.

Subgrant Administration

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

- 2CFR200 and 2CFR600 Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards

- US Department of State Standard Terms and Conditions

Project Goal and Description

Led by Internews and implemented in partnership with Media Initiatives Center (Armenia), Instytut Reportażu (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.

Attached documents

3. Application Form
4. Detailed Budget Template

End of RFA