

# Expanding Production of Independent Content (EPIC) Request for Applications Round 2 (Round 1 in Slovenia) – Regional Terms of Reference

## Slovenia

Publication date: 30 April 2024

### Background and overview

Expanding Production of Independent Content (EPIC) is a regional project led by Internews. It aims to support independent media in producing and disseminating high quality, credible content that covers locally identified issues of importance that are shared across borders in the project countries. Cross-border content produced in the EPIC project should make use of innovative multimedia tools to drive its storytelling and reach a wide range of audiences.

Selected applicants will receive financial support in the form of cost-reimbursable subgrants to produce relevant content. Grants are up to USD 15,000 in three different project categories.

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 of a specific media project/series.

### What we are looking for

Applicants in EPIC countries (see list below) may propose a) **solo projects**, as part of which they produce content in one or more other EPIC countries on their own, b) **collaborative projects**, as part of which applicants from at least two EPIC countries produce content within a joint project, and/or c) **stories from or about Ukraine produced using [UkraineWorld](#) resources**. Applicants can propose up to three projects, which can be under any or all of the three categories.

Applicants will have six to eight months to produce and publish their projects.

### Geographic Scope

The EPIC project is looking to support cross-border reporting where stories are produced by applicants in **Armenia, Georgia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, and Ukraine**. Stories must cover issues in at least one listed country other than the applicant's home country. Stories

covering countries that are not part of the EPIC project are not eligible. Solo projects covering an issue only in an applicant's home country will also not be supported.

## Who can apply?

In Slovenia, the EPIC project will welcome applications from:

- national media outlets,
- local and regional media outlets, and
- individual journalists and content producers.

Applicants should have an established distribution channel to publish content produced in the framework of the EPIC project. In Slovenia, this includes digital native publications and legacy (print, broadcast, radio) publications with digital operations.

Individual/freelance journalists and content producers (or groups thereof) without their own channels should include media outlets/channels that are prepared to publish the proposed content. This should be described in the distribution plan section of the proposal. This type of application should be supported by letters of intent from these outlets/channels. As a rule, these outlet/channels must also meet EPIC's eligibility criteria<sup>1</sup>.

The above list may vary in each country. When forming partnerships, all partners should verify if they are eligible under the Request for Applications in their respective countries.

Applicants must also ensure that they meet EPIC's [eligibility criteria](#) and [requirements](#).

## Matchmaking support

Applicants are welcome to apply with eligible partners from other EPIC countries for collaborative projects. Internews can also help applicants identify partners in other EPIC countries. Applicants are encouraged to contact the EPIC representative in their country for a list of contacts. EPIC representatives can also be contacted with a specific project idea and a request to provide the contact information of potential partners for that initiative. Please email [SI-EPIC-Grants-mbx@internews.org](mailto:SI-EPIC-Grants-mbx@internews.org) if you have any questions.

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<sup>1</sup> In Slovenia, public service media may also be part of the distribution plans of individual/freelance journalists.

## Project Categories

Each applicant may submit a total of three applications. These three applications may be distributed under any or all of the three categories.<sup>2</sup>

A single applicant may be awarded a maximum of one grant.<sup>3</sup>

Within the maximum grant ranges indicated for each category, the reasonability of the amount requested in applications will be evaluated, taking factors such as whether or not travel is involved (and how much), the number of pieces produced, and the complexity of the project into consideration.

### Solo projects

Projects in this category will be produced by a single applicant covering an issue in [at least one other EPIC country](#). The project can cover a single story or consist of a series of stories on a single topic or common theme. Coverage should be in-depth and involve extensive on-site reporting either by the applicant's own staff via travel to the target country or countries or by local journalists and content producers hired by the applicant for this purpose.

If applicants intend to propose solo projects that cover Ukraine, they should submit to the UkraineWorld category to take advantage of the support offered.

**Applicants from Slovenia can receive grants of up to USD 10,000.**

### Collaborative projects

Collaborative projects are produced by partnerships of applicants, one from at least two EPIC countries. Collaborative projects can also consist of a single story or a series of stories on a single topic or common theme. Content can be produced in a collaborative effort by a team of journalists from all partners, or they can agree to split production, each partner producing different stories or pieces in the series.

Editorial roles and responsibilities should be established and described by partners when designing the project. Projects should include extensive on-site reporting, but it is up to the partners to determine how this will be done. Every story should include on-site reporting from all countries in the project, exceptions will only be considered if the storytelling needs of the project warrant and proper context on local relevance and the series is included in every story.<sup>4</sup> All

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<sup>2</sup> For example, an applicant may submit three projects in one category, one project in all three categories, one project in one category, two projects in one category and one project in a second category or any such combination, as long as the number of applications does not exceed three.

<sup>3</sup> Publishing companies are welcome to submit applications for more than one publication (up to the limit of three applications each), but no more than one grant will be considered to the same publishing company.

<sup>4</sup> In a series on young Ukrainian refugees' educational outlook, a Polish-Georgian partnership could have a Polish team report on initiatives in Poland, with the Georgian team contributing reporting on relevant similar initiatives in Georgia to the same stories. Alternatively, both teams could cover different initiatives in both other countries (with travel). Resulting content would be cross published in both cases.

stories will be translated and cross-published by all participants of the collaborative project. EPIC can cover translation costs in addition to the grant amounts, so applicants will need to organize and manage translation services, but do not need to include these costs in their grant budgets.

**Grants for partners in Slovenia are up to USD 15,000.**

### UkraineWorld projects

Projects in this category will be produced by a single applicant from an EPIC country other than Ukraine, covering an issue in Ukraine, with the support of [UkraineWorld resources](#). UkraineWorld will not be producing the project but will offer support including consulting and assistance in connecting with speakers, fixers, and sources of information, logistics, assistance in sourcing videos and photos, a database of testimonies, fact-checking and context information, as well as materials for adaptation or publication. UkraineWorld cannot offer support for preparing applications, *please refer to [the section on UkraineWorld resources](#) for details on what support is available for successful applicants.*

The project can consist of a single story or a series of stories on a common theme. Coverage should be in-depth. Projects in this category are not required to (but may) include on-site reporting from Ukraine by the applicant.

Applicants are responsible for making sure they know any preconditions or accreditations necessary for reporting from Ukraine. Travel to frontlines, zones of active combat and other extremely high-risk areas will not be supported by EPIC.

**Applicants from Slovenia can receive grants of up to USD 10,000.**

### Content formats

Within this call for grants, applicants should produce multimedia and audiovisual content that enables them to reach a wide range of audiences. This content should work well natively on social media platforms or be adaptable for broad distribution, promotion, and engagement.

Examples of such content include:

- concise infographics, data visualization, and timelines,
- explainers,
- captioned videos, short videos, and animation,
- interactive tools (quizzes, interactive data, games, etc.)
- multimedia features (such as longform combination of text and audiovisual storytelling tools),
- video and multimedia reportage, or
- any combination of the above.

Text can also be an important part of storytelling and should be used in conjunction with effective audiovisual tools to add value to the reporting.

The **main guiding principle** for content is that whatever formats and tools a project utilizes, they should drive its storytelling by enhancing reader/viewer/listener engagement and finding innovative ways to convey, visualize or explain otherwise complex stories or issues simply.

## Quantity and periodicity

Projects should have a clear focus and well-defined scope. With this in mind, applicants can choose to pitch projects such as single in-depth stories, a series of stories united by a common theme, or a larger story broken down into multiple episodes. This should be determined by the storytelling needs of the particular project and the needs of its intended audiences.

## Themes, Subjects and Topics

Stories should address key current issues relevant in at least two EPIC countries (potentially, up to all seven) in an engaging and informative manner with the potential to counter disinformation. Projects that cover themes with partnerships involving more than one other EPIC country are encouraged.

Applicants are expected to identify the topics and subjects that make the overarching themes relevant to their audiences. Shared themes across project countries include, but are not limited to (i.e. applicants may propose projects on other topics they identify as shared between countries) the following:

- everyday life, the shared human experience, how various wider issues are reflected in individual stories (housing, work, prices, everyday economics, political and economic uncertainties, etc.),
- education,
- the effects of the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine on neighboring countries and the wider region, including (shifting) attitudes toward refugees, international support for Ukraine,
- other conflicts and/or frozen conflicts,
- issues affecting socially vulnerable groups, such as women and ethnic and other minorities,
- public health,
- food and food security,
- climate change and environmental issues,
- topics of interest to young people, and
- stories on Ukraine (with or without Ukraine World assistance).

Content produced within the project should not reproduce or disseminate misinformation narratives, propaganda, or unverified and non-factual information.

Hidden or native advertising and sponsored, bartered, public relations or other paid content will not be supported. Content supporting any political party, candidate, or campaign will not be considered for support. Clickbait, short articles on accidents, small-scale emergencies, tabloid news, infotainment, etc. will also not be supported.

## Target Audiences

Projects should primarily target a wide range of audiences within the focus of the proposed content project.

In Slovenia, EPIC welcomes projects that address the information needs of communities with ties across borders or of groups that are particularly vulnerable to misinformation narratives, such as:

- Young people
- Ethnic minorities (residing outside of the capital and major metropolitan areas and/or border communities, including refugees)
- Rural communities.

## Production schedule, timeline

The project implementation period will begin after the signing the grant agreements and is projected to last from August 2024 through January 2025. This is when preparation, research, newsgathering, reporting, editing, and publication (including translation and cross-publication) will take place. In the case of projects consisting of multiple pieces, their publication should be reasonably distributed within this timeframe.

## Distribution and promotion support

Applicants, whether covering stories on their own or in partnership with media from other EPIC countries, should have clear distribution and promotional strategies for the content produced. They should make effective use of their existing channels on social media platforms and also experiment with new formats, approaches, and/or channels to drive and maximize potential reach and engagement.

Project partners will have access to **EPIC's Distribution Specialists**, who can provide hands on support in designing and implementing campaigns and platform-specific content to drive reach and distribution for content produced in the EPIC project, as well as mentorship on distribution and audience engagement strategies.

## Training, mentorship, and editorial support

Training, mentorship, and editorial support will also be available to successful applicants throughout the implementation of their projects. The EPIC country representative will arrange for this support at no cost to successful applicants in consultation with the successful applicants.

## Application and Selection

### Eligibility Criteria

To be eligible for grants in the EPIC project, applicants must

- adhere to journalistic and ethical standards, fact-checking content and maintaining accuracy, objectivity, transparency, and professionalism,
- self-identify as independent, but also demonstrate and maintain editorial independence from external sources (such as advertisers, sponsors, or other stakeholders),
- media outlets should not be owned (either directly or indirectly, fully or partially) or managed by public authorities, local or national governments, political parties, or individuals holding public office or office in political organizations (or their close relatives), while independent journalists and content producers should not have affiliations with any of the above nor conflicts of interest,
- have actively been producing content in Slovenia for at least 1 year.

The EPIC country representative will review all applications and verify that they meet the eligibility criteria. Applicants that do not meet the eligibility criteria will be excluded from the selection process and their proposals will not be scored by the selection panel.

### 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.

### Content of Applications

#### Solo projects

Applications for solo projects will consist of:

- a fully completed solo project application form with the technical project proposal and information about the applicant, and
- a fully completed budget using the budget template.

This package should be submitted to the EPIC representative in the applicant's country that issued this Request for Applications.

Applications and budgets may be in either English or Slovenian.

### Collaborative projects

In the case of joint projects, every partner in the collaborative project must submit the shared application to the EPIC representative in their own country.

These applications have shared and individual elements, and will consist of:

- a shared, fully completed collaborative project application form. This contains the technical project proposal and information about the partners in the project. This application sheet will be the same for all partners in the project and filled out together.
- a fully completed budget using the budget template. This budget will be separate for each partner in the project, and detail only the expenses incurred by the specific applicant submitting the application. Partners in other countries will submit separate budgets with their own expenses to the EPIC representative in their respective countries.<sup>5</sup>

This package should be submitted to the EPIC representative in each of the applicant's countries that issued this Request for Applications.

There is no designated lead partner for collaborative projects for the application process, but editorial roles and responsibilities for implementation must be clearly outlined in the proposal.

Budgets and Application Forms with the technical project proposal must be submitted in English for Collaborative projects.

### UkraineWorld projects

Applications for UkraineWorld projects will consist of:

- a fully completed UkraineWorld project application with the technical project proposal and information about the applicant, and
- a fully completed budget using the budget template.

This package should be submitted to the EPIC representative in the applicant's country that issued this Request for Applications.

Applications and budgets may be in either English or Slovenian.

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<sup>5</sup> To continue the previous example, the Polish and Georgian applicants create the technical proposal for their project together, and fill out a single application form. However, as part of the process, they each budget for their expenses under the project separately, resulting in two budgets, one for the Polish, one for the Georgian applicant. They then submit their applications in their respective countries, consisting of the shared application form and their own budgets.



## Submission of Applications

Applications must be submitted by email to [SI-EPIC-Grants-mbx@internews.org](mailto:SI-EPIC-Grants-mbx@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”).

The following documents must be included with your application:

- **fully completed application form** in Word (docx) 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.

## Application Deadline

Applications must be submitted by **23:59 June 2, 2024, Central European Time (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, as set out in [Content of applications](#) above, are received by the Internews representatives.

## Award Notification and Contract

Successful applicant(s) will be notified of selection within twenty-six (26) working days following the deadline for submission of applications.

The successful applicant(s) must confirm the application and acceptance of the selection within six (6) working days of selection notification or the selection will be withdrawn and offered to the next most qualified applicant.

Internews does not provide detailed reasoning on the results of the selection 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.

## Selection Process

In the first stage, all applications will be evaluated in the country where they are submitted by a Local Selection Panel consisting of EPIC staff and external experts. Local Selection Panels will shortlist applications for all three categories of grants. Local Selection Panels will also delegate a member to represent them in the second stage of the selection process.

Shortlisted Collaborative Projects will be reviewed by delegated members of Local Selection Panels and EPIC project representatives in the second stage, and a final selection of Collaborative Projects will be made based on the evaluation of the Local Selection Panels.

## Evaluation criteria

Selection will take into consideration 1) the project proposal, 2) the capability and eligibility of the applicant, and 3) the financial proposal (the budget).

### Project/technical proposal

- **Relevance of the project** to the overarching themes and the scope of EPIC.
- **Quality of the pitch**, including its overall design, focus, and scope; its storytelling and use of formats; its approaches, angles, and characters; and its innovativeness, coherence, topics, and expected impact.

### Capability and eligibility

- Meeting eligibility criteria and requirements, past records and reference materials, distribution and promotion plans, and most importantly, a feasible timeline and allocation of resources to implement the project.

### Criteria for the Budget Proposal

- Reasonable expenses clearly and directly related to the production of content in the project, as well as a feasible allocation of resources.

## Additional information

### UkraineWorld resources

[UkraineWorld](#) is an English-language multimedia project about Ukraine, led by Volodymyr Yermolenko, a Ukrainian philosopher and journalist who serves as the chief editor. The project aims to provide comprehensive coverage of Ukraine, its culture, and the most significant developments within the country. It also strives to counteract anti-Western and anti-Ukraine propaganda and disinformation. Originally established as a volunteer initiative during the Euromaidan Revolution of 2013-2014, UkraineWorld has now evolved into a platform that contributes to the international coverage of Ukraine's ongoing fight against Russia's war of

aggression. One of its notable sections, called "Stories," features over 90 materials dedicated to firsthand accounts from witnesses of the full-scale war. These accounts include testimonies from soldiers, individuals who have lost loved ones, survivors of the occupation, and more.

For EPIC content production partners, UkraineWorld offers a range of services to facilitate their work on Ukraine-related projects:

- Consulting and assistance in connecting with speakers from Ukraine, including:
  - o Representatives of Ukrainian NGOs, volunteer initiatives, public and private institutions, and international organizations,
  - o Experts such as historians, military experts, media experts, analysts, and Ukrainian officials, and
  - o National and regional media outlets, photographers, and freelance journalists.
- Sharing the UkraineWorld database of testimonies:
  - o This extensive database contains stories from soldiers, witnesses of war, and volunteers. UkraineWorld can assist in contacting these individuals or help in finding new testimonies as required.
- Consulting on logistics and local fixers:
  - o UkraineWorld can provide guidance on logistics and recommend local fixers who can assist with production needs in Ukraine. However, the team does not offer on-site editorial fixer services in person.
- Assisting with information sources and references
- Assisting in providing video and photos
- Providing general fact-checking and context information, and
- Sharing UkraineWorld's materials for adaptation and publication.

Projects that utilize **UkraineWorld resources** may, but are not required to, involve traveling to the country and include reporting on the ground.

## Project Goal and Description

Led by Internews 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.

## 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:** 23:59 June 2, 2024, Central European Time (CET)

## 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 these terms can be found at [this link](#).

## 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](#)

## 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](#)