



Call for Innovation Grants

Name of the Programme: Core Support for Independent Media in the Southern Neighbourhood

Overall context

Free Press Unlimited (FPU), in collaboration with Maharat Foundation, is implementing a programme called “Core Support for Independent Media in the Southern Neighbourhood” with the support of the European Union from 2021 to 2026. The main objective of this programme is to provide comprehensive bespoke core support the pluralism, independence, and resilience of the media sector in the Southern Neighbourhood to withstand existing threats. The overall strategy of the programme aims to:

Objective 1: improving sector capacities to safely produce and share more high-quality content within and outside the Southern Neighbourhood

Objective 2: improving business viability and resilience among the independent media outlets in the Southern Neighbourhood.

Objective 3: strengthening existing regional networks to more efficiently convene communities of practice in the Southern Neighbourhood.

It is worth to mention that collaboration with local partners with access to regional expertise and networks ensures regional ownership and a more tailored and locally driven approach in the implementation phase.

Among multiple and various needs identified within the media sector, independent media actors consistently indicate widespread need for sustained core support to continue developing sector capacities. They also recognize the urgent need to diversify their revenue streams and increase their resilience to external pressures, given the growing repression under which they work.

In this context, FPU in collaboration with Maharat Foundation will establish a quarterly grant scheme that will be an open, transparent, accountable and competitive process designed to identify media outlets and new initiatives with clear potential to contribute to overall sector development as a result of the support they receive. Financial support will be combined with needed capacity building, training and coaching/mentoring (i.e. in grant implementation, reporting requirements) and opportunities for networking and collaboration.

Each grantee can receive an amount of maximum 20,000. euros.

Maximum of 70% will be funded, with the expectation that the remaining 30% of the total budget comes from other means.

This call text describes the process for application, evaluation, selection and award of grants to projects applying for funding under this call.

Objectives

The overall objective of the grant is to provide short-term, small-scale funding for projects that can advance new or scale up promising media innovations and/or interesting media/journalism collaborations seeking to build a media business and serve local and often under-served audiences (e.g. teenagers/young adults, women/girls, marginalized communities/regions with independent quality information).

The specific objective are:

1. Pay attention to the *unusual suspects* and embrace new entrants to the sector, with emphasis on supporting innovative projects that lead by example. Innovation refers to the development of new ideas, challenges, such as: New media formats (storytelling techniques, transmedia formats etc.), technological advancements (new technologies to enhance production, distribution, and consumption of media content) audience engagement and participation, accessibility and inclusivity to cater diverse user needs, data driven innovations etc.
2. Promote diversity i.e. address youth and gender gaps in media representation or provide voice to marginalized groups. Marginalized groups are defined as social groups that face systematic disadvantage and exclusion within society due to various factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status. Example of marginalized groups are Immigrants, Refugees, LGBTQ+ community, People living with disability, racial and ethnic minorities, socioeconomically disadvantaged individuals.

Proposals that don't address innovation and diversity won't be considered by the Jury.

Type of support

3 projects per grant cycle will be selected.

In addition to financial support, the selected candidates will benefit from support on design thinking methods within an innovation lab for 2 days in order to improve/develop their ideas and approach.

Throughout the whole project duration (maximum six months), the grantees will be mentored by the regional partner based on their needs and demands (e.g. development of action plan, regular feedback on their ideas, brainstorming etc.).

The jury formed by Maharat and FPU will organize, in collaboration with the grantees, mid-term online M&E (with jury and grantees) to review progress and offer feedback/guidance (as needed).

Eligibility

Eligible **activities** to receive the grants:

1. Technical innovations for use in newsrooms;
2. Projects stimulating, generating or receiving independent data for the use of journalism;

3. Testing/developing cross-media formats, solution-based/constructive journalism approaches;
4. Increasing audience engagement with content producers and increasing dialogue (post-production experiences);
5. Experiments to increase the monetisation of journalistic content.

Eligible **costs** that can be covered by the grant:

1. Freelance fees and mentoring/consultancy costs;
2. Direct expenses for: a) knowledge exchanges/peer-to-peer learning visits; and/or b) networking activities, including travel and accommodation costs, per diem, travel insurances, visa costs;
3. Software licenses, data visualisation and publishing resources, hosting/streaming server costs (not hardware);
4. Digital/physical safety consultancy, safe communication tools, software (VPN);
5. Technical costs to hire equipment or crew;
6. Access to professional databases or specific publications/ networks;
7. Childcare/day care costs directly linked to proposed grant activities; e.g. necessary for enabling the grantee to successfully implement the grant

However, this grant is not intended to provide core funding.

Eligible types of **grant recipients**:

1. Media start-ups; journalism incubators;
2. Innovative media initiatives;
3. Non-profit and for-profit media organisations;
4. Individual journalists (freelancers) and entrepreneurs; journalist collectives (also see above).

Multi-country initiatives (between target countries) and/or joint applications by multiple actors (media, tech, business) are strongly encouraged.

Candidates must clearly present defined and realistic success indicators. Clear impact in support of the targeted audiences must be demonstrated. Projects can be experimental but must be measurable (clearly defined goals).

Additionally, any initiatives or applicants which have previously benefited from funding under the 'Core Support for Independent Media in the Southern Neighbourhood' are ineligible for this grant cycle.

Duration

Maximum duration of the grant is six months.

Budget

Maximum EUR 20,000. Shortlisted proposals need to present a detailed budget of all project costs. Successful grantees may submit a second proposal (maximum of 70% will be funded, with the expectation that the remaining 30% of the total budget comes from other means).

Criteria for determining amount of grant:

1. Innovative nature of the proposal;
2. Performance indicators and timeline;
3. Diversity and ability to reach under-served audiences;
4. Country/region served;
5. Realistic cost-effective budget and monetisation elements. Demonstrated capacity to effectively incorporate feedback on the initial Letter of Interest.

Geographical scope

Algeria, Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, Libya, Tunisia, Syria

Evaluation procedure

Applications (proposal and budget) must be submitted in English or Arabic to info@maharatfoundation.org using the attached templates to this call before June 23rd 2023.

The selection committee/ the jury will be composed of: FPU senior programme coordinator and Maharat program manager.

The jury will select applications according to the following criteria:

- | Innovative (out of the box thinking, new alliances etc.);
- | Diversity (inclusion of under-served audiences and marginalised groups; e.g. female and male youths, women)
- | Feasibility (clear set of success indicators, time frame, safety indicators, financial exit strategy)
- | Impact; i.e. on media sector or broader society.

Applicants will be informed about the status of their grant request a maximum of one month after submission.

Visibility of EU funded projects

Since this programme is funded by the European Union, the beneficiaries are required to include an explicit reference to the EU support. The beneficiaries must ensure the provision of coherent, effective and targeted information, including visual content, on the EU support received to multiple audiences, including the media and the public.

Derogation in exceptional situations:

Derogation from contractual visibility obligations is only permitted in exceptional situations. For example, security issues or local political sensitivities may make it preferable or necessary to limit visibility activities in certain countries or areas (such as crisis or conflict zones) or during certain periods (such as elections). In such cases, visibility tools, products, and channels to be used in promoting a given action will be determined on a case-by-case basis, in consultation and agreement with the EU prior to limiting EU visibility. Where such derogations are accepted, the recipient of the EU funding should proactively propose alternative arrangements to ensure EU visibility.