

# WESTERN BALKANS MEDIA FOR CHANGE

## CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

### FLEXI GRANT SCHEME

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| <b>Opening Date</b>        | 26 February 2024  |
| <b>Closing Date</b>        | 1 August 2024   |
| <b>Grant Budget Ranges</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Grants for individuals – ceiling of up to GBP 4,000</li><li>• Grants for initiatives – ceiling of up to GBP 4,000</li><li>• Grants for media outlets / organisations – ceiling of up to GBP 10,000</li></ul>  |
| <b>Grants duration</b>     | <p><i>The <b>duration of the projects</b> could range from <b>one (1) month to up to six (6) months maximum</b>. (Note: Priority area 1 will last for 5 months)</i></p> <p><i>*The Call will be open until 1 August 2024. All activities funded under this call must end by 28 February 2025.</i></p> |

## I. DESCRIPTION OF THE CALL AND PRIORITY AREAS

The **Western Balkans Media for Change** project provides support to media outlets and individual journalists to help them improve operational capacity, business sustainability and innovation potential, while aiming to better equip media professionals to produce more quality diverse, fact-checked and gender sensitive content that will reach and engage with wider audiences.

The long-term outcomes that the project aims to achieve are:

- Larger and more diverse audiences access quality, gender-sensitive and engaging content;
- Outlets and independent journalists are more operationally resilient and better equipped to provide quality and engaging journalism, with a focus on engagement of diverse women, youth, and underrepresented groups.

## WHO ARE THE FLEXI GRANTS INTENDED FOR?

The Flexi grants are intended for Western Balkans individuals, media outlets, associations and other organisations, which promote independent journalism, including:

1. Organisations – media outlets, both traditional and online media, groups/teams of journalists with the status of a legal entity (e.g. associations, formally established networks, etc.) and non-governmental media organisations in Western Balkan countries.
2. Individuals – media professionals, young journalists, students and media content creators.
3. Initiatives – actions of groups of professional individuals engaged in (or planning) strengthening the role of women and/or youth in the media sector, promoting quality journalism, regional initiatives, etc.

Funding aims to enable quality, engaging and innovative content production, local and regional collaboration, professional development, internships, networking, mobility, and validation of business ideas and networking potential.

The Flexi grants are intended to support well-defined innovative projects, actions and initiatives that go beyond regular operations, but not to finance the regular operations. The activities should be implemented in the Western Balkans: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia.

The grants that will be supported through this Call should fall within these six (6) priority areas:

| PRIORITY AREAS  |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <b>1.</b><br><b>Validation of a business idea</b>       | <b>2.</b><br><b>Content production through learning, mobility or collaboration</b> | <b>3.</b><br><b>Strengthening public broadcasting service content and audience reach</b> |
| <b>4.</b><br><b>Audience development and engagement</b> | <b>5.</b><br><b>Networking support</b>   | <b>6.</b><br><b>Promoting quality professional and ethical journalism</b>                |

The applicants may propose activities that fall within one-priority area. The Contracting Authority reserves the right to decide whether the proposed activities are properly categorised within a specific priority area.

## 1. Validation of a business idea

Validation Booster (VB) is a tailor-made acceleration programme for media outlets, CSO initiatives and individual content creators who want to learn how to do validation of their initiative/product/service ideas or networking potential. Successful applicants, in addition to the financial support through awarded grants, will benefit from mentorship and capacity building in the domain of business development during the five-month-long acceleration process.

The programme targets individuals that can act as “intrapreneurs” – people who work for media outlets or CSOs and launch new products/services or initiatives inside the existing entities. The ideal participant is a person with capacity, capability and high interest in spearheading innovative initiatives and demonstrated commitment to participate in the programme.

Besides individuals working for organisations and/or those performing as individual content producers we **highly encourage representatives from the below mentioned groups to apply for VB:**

- underrepresented, marginalised groups;
- youth CSO and youth media outlets and young individuals;
- women-led media and organisations that apply in everyday work gender and social inclusion policies and practices;
- niche media/platform with specific/unusual topics coverage.

**After completing the Validation Booster beneficiaries will have developed skills which enable them to:**

- Clearly define their idea/purpose;
- Test, validate and evaluate their business idea;
- Develop materials required to present and communicate their validated idea to interested parties and potential donors.

**To attend this programme you are expected to have a good command of spoken English.**

The programme has a total duration of 5 (five) months, and it will run of 2 (two) cycles: (I cycle: April 2024 – August 2024) and (II cycle: October 2024 - February 2025). Both cycles are the same content-wise, and you may apply for the first or the second cycle, depending on what suits you or your media better. Please note that the deadline for the application for the I cycle is **13 March 2024 by 23:59 CET** and for the II cycle, it is **1 August 2024, by 23:59 CET**.

## 2. Content production through learning, mobility or collaboration

We encourage empowerment of journalists, particularly those who are young or women, professionals in the early stages of their careers or women in media management roles to engage in creation of high-quality content through learning, mobility or collaboration. We welcome innovative applications from individual journalists, journalist teams, media outlets interested in producing engaging content that may include in-depth analysis and explore cross-border topics.

Selected applicants will receive editorial guidance and mentorship throughout the development and production process. Additionally, they will have access to digital tools aimed at enhancing the uniqueness of their content. The resulting work is anticipated to be published through the recipients' media outlets or channels they are affiliated with.

Funding can also be allocated for initiatives such as job shadowing, specifically targeting women and aspiring young journalists, as a means of further support and development within the field.

Applications within this priority area may include, but not limited to:

- Production of quality engaging content by journalists, teams of journalists or media outlets in various types of formats. In-depth analyses and investigations are strongly encouraged.
- Production of cross-border quality engaging content by team of journalists from different Western Balkan countries in various types of formats. In-depth analyses and investigations are strongly encouraged.
- Job shadowing initiatives for young and aspiring journalists, women journalists or other early career journalists, editors, and media managers in credible media outlets in and outside of their home country and creation of content of common interest and amplify audience reach.
- Practical mobility and learning initiatives which result in creation and publishing of engaging high-quality content.

## 3. Strengthening public broadcasting service (PBS) content and audience reach

Applicants are invited to apply with innovative proposals that enable collaboration between journalists, editors and teams working at a PBS, with a focus on engagement of diverse women, young journalists and underrepresented groups. This target group has experience and potential to lead on the efforts that tackle inequality and exclusion challenges and thereby contribute to social cohesion. Activities that can be proposed under this priority area, but are not limited to, include:

- Collaborations that engage diverse women, young and underrepresented journalists, editors and teams working within PBS.
- Production of quality engaging content by team of journalists, editors, and media professionals from public broadcasting service in various types of formats. In-depth analysis and investigations are strongly encouraged.
- Cross-border production of content from teams of journalists, editors and media workers from public broadcast service from different Western Balkan countries are also eligible. Access to different digital tools and editorial and mentoring support will be offered.
- Production and publishing of quality content in various formats based on information and data obtained from the Engaged Citizens Reporting (ECR) tool. Such as, production and publishing of articles, news, TV stories, TV debates, in-depth analysis, investigations, podcasts, videos and others.
- Participating in an exchange programme focusing on capacity-building opportunities for media, editors, and journalists from the public broadcasting across all Western Balkan countries. The proposed exchange of knowledge and experience should lead to the creation of high-quality, gender-sensitive, and engaging content. This will be achieved by fostering knowledge exchange, providing comprehensive mentoring, and encouraging cross-border approaches.
- Participating as the host media for the Job shadowing initiatives and exchange programmes. The host media hosts young and aspiring journalists, women journalists or other early career journalists, editors, and media managers journalists who applied for the job shadowing initiatives for and the exchange programmes.
- Participating in training programmes and practical workshops which result in production of high-quality content.

#### 4. Audience development and engagement

Applications within this priority area, may include, but not limited to:

- Community engagement and growth: development of innovative audience engagement strategies that actively engage contributions from diverse women, youth and underrepresented groups, including audiences 65+.
- Use of analytics, strategies and tools to develop and engage new audiences.
- Piloting new methodologies and channels for audience development and engagement.

#### 5. Networking support

Applicants are invited to apply with specific activities or programs of professional associations that promote fundamental rights and freedoms of journalists, with a focus on gender equality and social inclusion aspects that address diverse backgrounds, by providing particular services which respond

to their specific needs. This priority area seeks proposals that promote the role of women, youth and underrepresented groups in media through specific actions, platforms and networks.

## 6. Promoting quality professional and ethical journalism

This priority area is focused on strengthening independent journalism, work based on professionalism and integrity and creating working environments that are inclusive and promote diversity. The following activities, but not limited to, can be included in applications under this priority area:

- Marking relevant dates through meaningful events that promote independent journalism/contributions and integrity of women, youth and diverse groups in media/fact checking and fight against disinformation and misinformation.
- Creating an event connecting media professionals, with a focused engagement of diverse women, youth and underrepresented professionals of diverse backgrounds, whose contribution could encourage collaboration and new audience reach.
- Promoting the role of diverse women, youth and other voices from the margin of the media through specific actions, platforms, content production or any other action with significant impact.

**The following interventions/activities will not be funded under any priority area:**

- Capital investments: funding for infrastructure, or physical assets (e.g. media studios, media rooms, general office equipment);
- Grants consisting entirely or mainly of work and/or preparatory studies/research;
- Service-type activities, such as technical assistance;
- Awareness-raising campaigns without appropriate follow-up activities;
- Giving grants to third parties. Small-scale financial assistance to beneficiaries is allowed only in cases where all expenses are executed by the implementing organisation;
- Scholarships to third parties.

## II. APPLICATION PROCESS

| Who can apply  | Eligibility criteria   |
|--|--|
| <p><b>Organisations</b> – media outlets, both traditional and online media, groups/teams of journalists with the status of a legal entity (e.g. associations, formally established</p> | <p>○ The applicant must be established in one of the WB countries, before 1 January 2022 (latest registration certificate to be submitted with the Application Form)</p> |

networks, etc) and non-governmental media organisations in Western Balkan countries.

**Individuals** – media professionals, young journalists, students and media content creators

**Initiatives** – networks, groups, current or planned initiatives that aim at strengthening the role of women and youth in the media sector, promoting quality journalism, regional initiatives, etc.

- The media outlets should already have made journalistic content publicly available before 1 January 2022
- The applicant must be a resident in one of the Western Balkan countries
- The applicant has at least two (2) years experience in content production or other form of engagement in the media sector
- In case the applicant is a student, the applicant must be in their final year of university studies, and no professional experience is required
- The initiative is an action of group of professional individuals and will serve for their benefit and protection and promotion of their rights and values
- The initiative operates in the Western Balkans media sector
- The initiative has the potential of becoming an organised and sustainable group
- The initiative must provide evidence of the entity's residence in the Western Balkans

### Important information for all applicants:

*Important Note: If the application implies collaboration of the applicant with another media outlet / organisation / individual from the region, in case of cross-border cooperation activities, this cooperation needs to be clearly described in the Application; however, formal partnership is not required)*

- An applicant **may submit more than one application** under this grant scheme, as the call will be ongoing. However, applicants who have been awarded more than one grant are not allowed to implement multiple projects funded under this grant

scheme simultaneously; there can only be one active grant agreement with the applicant at any point in time. Therefore, applicants should take into consideration the proposed timeframe when applying for Flexi grants.

- An applicant **cannot be a beneficiary of another donation** or grant scheme financing activities that are **identical to the ones proposed** for this grant scheme.
- **An applicant cannot be a beneficiary (or employee of a beneficiary organisation) of an ACTION Grant awarded by the Western Balkans Media for Change Project.**
- **Grant received by the Project must be fully inclusive of any and all taxes** that may be payable in connection with the award, receipt or use of the grant. In no circumstances shall the Contract Authority be required to pay any additional sums in respect of taxes. Individuals who apply as natural persons are advised to timely consult about any and all tax burdens within local jurisdictions.

**This Call is open until 1<sup>st</sup> August 2024 at 24:00.** The applicant can submit the application(s) throughout the period of this Call remaining open.

**The application must be submitted, within the given deadline to the following e-mail address:** [mediagrants@britishcouncil.org](mailto:mediagrants@britishcouncil.org)

**Please follow the instructions provided in the Application Form to ensure that the application is completed according to the requirements of the Call.**

Once the application is submitted, the Project will generate a unique application ID number. **Applicants should note this number and use it in all communications with the Project.** Once we have received your application, project staff members may contact you with **follow-up requests for clarification.**

You can expect to **be notified of a funding decision within 30 days** of submitting your grant application.

Please note that the Project receives many grant applications and **unfortunately cannot fund all of them.**



### III. EVALUATION AND SELECTION PROCESS

The evaluation will be conducted in three (3) steps:

#### Step 1 – Administrative Check

During this step, the application will be assessed whether:

- Application Form is filled as per instructions provided in this Call and in the Application Form;
- All mandatory documents are submitted;
- The requested budget amount is within the given threshold; and
- Duration of the proposed project is from one to up to six months (In case of Priority area 1, duration of the project is 5 months)

The application that does not meet the above listed criteria will be rejected and the applicant will be notified accordingly.

The application that passes this check will be evaluated further.

#### Step 2 – Quality Assessment

The application is assessed based on these criteria:

- The quality and relevance of the proposed project (40 points)
- Engagement of target groups/audience (40 points) <sup>1</sup>
- Relevant experience/adequate level of capacities for implementing the proposed project (10 points)
- Alignment of the proposed budget with the proposed project and value for money (10 points)

The application that does not meet the above listed criteria will be rejected and the applicant will be notified accordingly.

The application with higher scores will be recommended by the evaluation panel for possible grant awarding and subject to available funding.

#### Step 3 – Due Diligence

This process will be conducted in parallel with the evaluation process – the Quality Assessment. The Due Diligence will be conducted through the Due Diligence Check list which will be provided to the applicant by the project team.

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<sup>1</sup> For Priority Area 1 (Validation of a business idea), the Selection Panel will assess the potential for engagement of target groups/audience resulting from validated business idea (if implemented in the future).

The Due Diligence Checklist is a self-declaration document to be filled by the applicant and will be confirmed by the Project. Any missing supporting document or any incoherence between the declaration by the applicant and the supporting documents may lead to the rejection of the application on that sole basis.

Any rejected application will be replaced by the next best placed application on the reserve list that falls within the available budget for this Call for Applications.

The applicants will be informed in writing, by email, on decisions concerning their application.

The Project reserves the right to propose budget changes to maximise budget utilisation, ensuring that the principles of value for money and the overall project efficiency are applied.

Successful applicants will receive a Grant Agreement. All projects must be completed in accordance with their Grant Agreement.

In order to understand the impact of awarded grants, the Project asks grant recipients to submit a post-grant report that includes a narrative description of project outcomes and a financial report backed up by relevant eligible evidence of spend. The report template will be prescribed by the Project.

#### IV. IMPORTANT DATES

| Process  | Date / Month  |
|--|---|
| <b>Launching of the Call</b>   | 26 February 2024  |
| <b>Deadline for requesting any clarifications from the Project in writing</b>  | 29 July 2024  |
| <b>Deadline for submission of applications</b><br><br>(This call is open and receives applications on a rolling basis) | 1 August 2024 at 24:00*<br><br><i>*for Validation of Business Idea (Priority area 1) deadline for the 1<sup>st</sup> cycle is 13 March 2024 and for the 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle is 1 August 2024</i> |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Notification to applicants on the results of the assessment</b> | Within 30 days of submitting the application                        |
| <b>Grant Agreement Signature</b>                                   | Beginning of each month starting from April 2024 until January 2025 |

## **V. CONDITIONS OF IMPLEMENTATION**

### **(a) Contractual arrangements**

Selected applicants will be considered for funding under this Call for Applications. Subject to successful due diligence check, a grant agreement, containing terms and conditions will be signed with the British Council.

### **(b) Visibility**

All project-related visibility activities will be carried out in accordance with the Project Communication Strategy. Grantees will be required to plan and carry out communication activities in accordance with Project rules and procedures. All equipment purchased from the grant donation will be properly marked to reflect the ownership.

Grantees will receive a Publicity toolkit, designed by the Project, to support their promotional activities and guide them on the Project's visibility requirements.

### **(c) Data Protection Policy**

The British Council takes data protection seriously and recognises the importance of collecting and managing data in a way that protects the rights of the people with whom we work. In doing this we work to a set of internationally recognized minimum standards in data management and we support our grant beneficiaries to work to the same minimum standards.

We apply the UK Data Protection Act (incorporating the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)) to all our global operations unless the local equivalent law is stronger. For more detailed information and guidance, please refer to our website: <https://www.britishcouncil.org/privacy-cookies/data-protection>.

Annexes:

- Application Form