

## CALL FOR PROJECTS

### Strengthening independent journalism and countering disinformation in Moldova

#### GUIDELINES FOR APPLICANTS

Within the framework of the Main Project Strengthening Democratic Media in the Black Sea Region, CFI - French Media Development Agency wishes to promote the production of high-quality, independent journalistic content by media outlets in Moldova, with a specific focus on countering disinformation, improving access to reliable information, and reinforcing pluralistic public-interest reporting. With this in mind, grants and tailored technical support on media viability and digital strategy shall be awarded to the Beneficiary(ies) selected following this Call for Projects.

This document has no contractual value. CFI may at any time and until the effective conclusion of a grant agreement with the selected beneficiary(ies), unilaterally decide not to proceed, without any justification whatsoever. CFI reserves the right to amend all or part of the elements of this document or to enter into a similar agreement with the beneficiary of its choice. No applicant may make any claim in this respect or claim any compensation whatsoever.

#### **CLOSING DATE AND TIME FOR RECEIPT OF APPLICATIONS:**

**09 February 2026 at 20:00 (GMT+01:00 Paris, Brussels, Copenhagen, Madrid).**

**Applications must be submitted exclusively via CFI's online platform:**

<https://ac.cfi.fr/en/>

**Applications sent by e-mail or through any other channel will not be considered.**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS:**

1. BACKGROUND .....	3
1.1. Presentation of CFI .....	3
1.2. Context of the Call for Projects .....	3
2. OBJECTIVES OF THE CALL FOR PROJECTS .....	3
2.1. Objectives and priorities .....	3
2.2. Amount of the funding made available by CFI.....	4
2.3. Technical support provided by CFI .....	4
3. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA for obtaining the grant.....	5
3.1. Eligibility Criteria relating to Applicant status.....	5
3.2. Eligibility criteria relating to Project Activities .....	5
3.2.1. Duration.....	5
3.2.2. Geographic coverage .....	6
3.2.3. Sector(s) or theme(s).....	6
3.2.4. Type of activities .....	6
3.2.5. Ineligible activities .....	6
3.3. Eligibility criteria for costs.....	6
3.3.1. Eligible direct costs .....	7
3.3.2. Budgetary rules relating to eligible direct costs .....	7
3.3.3. Eligible indirect costs.....	7
3.3.4. Ineligible costs.....	8
4. APPLICATION .....	8
5. SELECTION OF APPLICATIONS .....	8
5.1. STAGE 1: Opening and administrative verification .....	8
5.2. STAGE 2: Assessment of the proposed project.....	9
5.3. STAGE 3: Award .....	10
6. APPENDICES.....	10

## **1.BACKGROUND**

### **1.1.Presentation of CFI**

#### **Canal France International: a government agency to support media**

CFI actively promotes the development of media in sub-Saharan Africa, the Mediterranean and the Levant. We are committed to working together with media organisations to promote dialogue between local authorities and citizens so that people can be as informed as possible. Combating disinformation, protecting the environment, and promoting human rights and gender equality underpin everything we do. CFI is an operator of the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs and a subsidiary of the France Médias Monde Group.

As part of its activities, CFI is implementing the Strengthening Democratic Media in the Black Sea Region Project.

### **1.2.Context of the Call for Projects**

The Call for Projects is launched within the framework of the Strengthening Democratic Media in the Black Sea Region Project, implemented by CFI and funded from the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs. The Project aims to enhance the capacity of independent media to provide accurate, accessible and public-interest information to citizens in Moldova.

In recent years, Moldovan audiences have been increasingly exposed to misleading or unverified information, including on topics related to public policies and the country's path towards closer cooperation with the European Union. Moldovan media play a key role in helping communities navigate these information flows, yet many of them operate with limited resources and face structural constraints that affect their ability to produce high-quality content.

This Call for Projects aims to reinforce independent journalism by supporting content production that improves the availability of verified, community-relevant information and strengthens the overall resilience of the Moldovan media landscape.

The purpose of this Call for Projects is to define the contractual terms of the future grant agreement, hereinafter referred to as the "agreement", to be concluded between CFI and the selected beneficiary(ies). The terms set out in this Call for Projects are for information purposes only and may be amended unilaterally by CFI prior to the conclusion of the agreement.

This Call for Projects does not constitute for any beneficiary a promise to award the future grant.

## **2.OBJECTIVES OF THE CALL FOR PROJECTS**

### **2.1. Objectives and priorities**

The general objective of this Call for Projects is: to support independent Moldovan media in producing reliable information.

The specific objectives of this Call for Projects are:

- Provide financial support to independent media for the production of high-quality journalistic content.
- Offer capacity-building support to all selected beneficiaries to strengthen their editorial practices and professional skills. Depending on the needs identified during the diagnostic phase, this may include targeted training on verification techniques, fact-checking, OSINT tools, investigative methods or other relevant editorial skills.
- Improve the sustainability of beneficiary outlets through a dedicated media-viability programme. The beneficiaries will receive an individual organisational and editorial diagnostic, tailored training on revenue diversification, digital presence and audience development and one-to-one guidance to help translate recommendations into concrete operational improvements. Participation in the media-viability programme will be mandatory for all selected beneficiaries.

The priorities of this Call for projects are:

- Production of verified, accurate and well-sourced journalistic content addressing topics where disinformation circulates.
- Coverage of issues relevant to local communities, particularly for outlets serving minority-language audiences or operating outside Chişinău.
- Development of accessible, contextualised and audience-friendly formats that help the public better understand ongoing developments.
- Ensuring balanced and inclusive representation in all supported productions, avoiding sexist portrayals and improving the visibility of under-represented groups, particularly women.
- Coverage of issues related to public policies, community needs, EU-related developments or areas where disinformation is particularly active.

## **2.2.Amount of the funding made available by CFI**

The indicative total amount made available under this Call for Projects is ninety thousand euros (€90,000). This amount is indicative, CFI is not obliged to allocate the amount indicated and may unilaterally allocate a lower amount.

Estimated amount of grants:

Any grant requested under this Call for Projects must be between the following minimum and maximum amounts:

- Minimum amount: twenty-two thousand euros (€22 ,000)
- Maximum amount: thirty thousand euros (€30,000)

## **2.3. Technical support provided by CFI**

In addition to the financial grant, CFI will provide all selected beneficiaries with two complementary and mandatory support programmes:

### **1. Editorial capacity-building programme**

All selected beneficiary will benefit from targeted training and expert guidance, which may include:

- fact-checking techniques and verification methodologies.
- OSINT tools and practices for identifying, analysing and validating open-source information.

- investigative journalism methods, including advanced sourcing, data analysis and risk-mitigation approaches.
- editorial coaching to improve accuracy, ethical standards, and coverage of key public-interest topics such as local governance, community issues, democratic values and gender equality.

These sessions will be delivered by CFI through workshops, practical exercises and tailored guidance based on identified needs that will be discussed with the selected beneficiaries.

## 2. Media viability and independence programme

All selected beneficiaries will participate in a structured programme designed to strengthen their financial resilience, digital strategies and long-term sustainability. This programme includes:

- an individual diagnostic of each outlet (editorial, organisational, financial, digital) conducted by specialised experts.
- two in-person training sessions focusing on revenue diversification, business models, audience retention and crisis-resilience.
- targeted digital-growth support, including optimisation of online presence, SEO/SEA practices and monetisation strategies.
- one-to-one coaching sessions, enabling each media outlet to implement concrete improvements based on the diagnostic's recommendations.

## 3. Administrative and financial reporting support

CFI will deliver an online and mandatory session to explain the administrative and financial obligations linked to the grant. This session will cover:

- how to prepare the required narrative and financial reports
- rules on eligible expenses and supporting documents
- procurement requirements
- key deadlines and compliance expectations

This session aims to ensure that all beneficiaries meet CFI's reporting and financial-management standards.

### **3. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR OBTAINING THE GRANT**

#### **3.1. Eligibility Criteria relating to Applicant status**

The criteria are cumulative; if the applicant does not meet one or more of the criteria set out below, its application shall be rejected by CFI:

- Be a legally registered media organisation or a legally registered organisation whose primary activity is journalism or media production.
- Be directly responsible for the preparation and management of the project proposed under this Call for Projects;
- Be legally established and registered in the Republic of Moldova.

#### **3.2. Eligibility criteria relating to Project Activities**

##### 3.2.1. Duration

The selected projects must start no earlier than 15 February 2026 and end no later than 15 March 2027.

The initial planned duration of the selected projects may not be less than five (5) months and may not exceed ten (10) months.

### 3.2.2. Geographic coverage

The proposed projects must be implemented in the following country: Republic of Moldova

### 3.2.3. Sector(s) or theme(s)

The activities of the proposed project must relate to one or more of the following themes:

- topics where disinformation is prevalent (social issues, public policy, international affairs, etc.).
- Democratic values, accountability, transparency and anti-corruption.
- developments related to Moldova's cooperation/integration to the European Union.
- gender equality, women's rights and gendered forms of disinformation.
- public-policy developments or local governance issues affecting citizens.
- issues affecting local communities, including underserved or rural areas.

### 3.2.4. Type of activities

Projects proposed under this Call for Projects may include one or more of the following activities:

- Production of journalistic content.
- fact-checking activities, including verification of claims circulating in local or online ecosystems.
- investigative journalism, including data-driven or cross-regional investigations.
- development of new journalistic formats.
- adaptation or translation of content to reach minority-language audiences.
- community-oriented dissemination activities directly linked to the journalistic output (public debates, discussions or local dialogues aimed at presenting or explaining the produced content).
- editorial coordination and production planning required to carry out the proposed journalistic work.

### 3.2.5. Ineligible activities

The following types of activities are not eligible. If the applicant's project consists of one or more of the ineligible activities listed below, the application shall be rejected by CFI:

- Activities consisting solely or mainly in financing the participation of individuals in workshops, seminars, conferences and congresses.
- Activities consisting solely or mainly in financing individual study or training grants.
- Capacity-building or training activities, as these will be provided directly by CFI under the technical support programme.
- Pure communication or promotional campaigns not linked to the production of journalistic content.
- Lobbying, political campaigning or activities supporting a political party, candidate or public official.
- Projects focused primarily on entertainment content (lifestyle, infotainment, general culture, etc.) without a clear public-interest journalism component.
- Procurement of heavy or durable equipment (professional cameras, computers, servers or studio infrastructure) except for limited items strictly necessary for the proposed journalistic activity.
- Any activity that poses a risk of harm, discrimination or incitement against individuals or groups.

## **3.3. Eligibility criteria for costs**

Only "Eligible Costs" shall be covered by the grant awarded. The budget is both an estimate of costs and an overall ceiling for "Eligible Costs".

### 3.3.1. Eligible direct costs

Eligible direct costs must meet all of the following criteria:

- a) They must be incurred during the project implementation period by the beneficiary, with the exception of the costs of the final external audit. They must comply with the following formalities:
  - (i) Costs relating to supplies must concern the delivery and installation of equipment during the implementation period;
  - (ii) Costs presented in the final reports should be paid before the final reports are submitted. In the event of a cash shortage, which is duly justified, they may be paid at a later date, provided that they are mentioned in the Final Report, together with the estimated date of payment;
- b) They are mentioned in the budget allocated to the beneficiary;
- c) They are necessary for the performance of the activities;
- d) They are identifiable and verifiable, and in particular are recorded in the beneficiary's accounts and determined in accordance with the accounting standards applicable in the country where the Beneficiary is established and with the beneficiary's usual cost accounting practices;
- e) They comply with the provisions of the applicable tax and social security legislation;
- f) They are reasonable, justified and comply with the principle of sound financial management, particularly as regards economy, efficiency and the award of contracts (services, works, supplies) for which the procedures put in place by the beneficiary can be applied.

### 3.3.2. Budgetary rules relating to eligible direct costs

- a) For all purchases of services and purchases in excess of €5,000 excluding tax (five thousand euros excluding tax), a transparent and impartial competitive bidding procedure for service providers/suppliers and the production of three (3) quotes will be required.
- b) The human resources allocated to the project may not exceed 25% of the total eligible costs of the project.
- c) If the amount of the grant requested exceeds €40,000, an external financial audit must be included in the budget.
- d) A budget line for editorial safety and digital security measures directly linked to the production of the proposed content (e.g. encrypted tools, two-factor authentication solutions) is eligible.

### 3.3.3. Eligible indirect costs

Indirect costs incurred during the implementation of the project may be eligible for flat-rate funding, up to a maximum of 7% of the total estimated eligible direct costs. Indirect costs are eligible as long as they do not

include costs taken into account under another heading. No supporting documents need be provided to justify the use of the indirect costs granted.

### 3.3.4. Ineligible costs

The following costs are not eligible and cannot be included in the estimated budget submitted:

- Debts and debt servicing costs (interest);
- Provisions for losses or possible future liabilities;
- Costs declared by the beneficiary and financed by another action or programme;
- Purchases of land or buildings;
- Foreign exchange losses;
- Loans to third parties;
- Taxes, including VAT, unless the Beneficiary is able to produce a certificate proving that it does not benefit from an exemption or other exceptions allowing it to recover VAT from the relevant administration and only in cases where the VAT to be paid was not included in the sums described in the budget submitted to CFI.

## **4. APPLICATION**

Each applicant must produce an application including all the documents and information listed below, failing which they will be eliminated from the CFI selection process:

- **Appendix 1: Project presentation note:** each project must be presented in accordance with the document;
- **Appendix 2: Provisional project budget:** the provisional budget must be presented in accordance with the document and must be drawn up in accordance with the provisions of Article 3.3. Eligibility criteria for costs;
- **Appendix 3: Application form:** it must be dated and signed and contain the Applicant's legal registration document and bank details, failing which it will be incomplete.

Handwritten Applications are not accepted.

Applications must be submitted in English.

Any application that does not comply with the above requirements shall be rejected by CFI without the applicant having the opportunity to amend it.

## **5. SELECTION OF APPLICATIONS**

Applications shall be examined and assessed by CFI with the possible assistance of external assessors. All applications shall be assessed according to the stages and criteria described below.

If examination of the application reveals that the proposed project does not meet the eligibility criteria set out in this Call for Projects, the application shall be rejected for this reason alone.

### **5.1. STAGE 1: Opening and administrative verification**

At the opening and administrative verification stage, the following elements shall be checked:

- Compliance with the application deadline and format. Non-compliance shall result in automatic rejection of the application;
- Compliance with all the criteria on the Application Form checklist (Appendix 3). If any of the information requested is missing or incorrect, the application may be rejected for this reason alone and shall not be analysed.

Compliant and complete project presentation notes shall be analysed with regard to the requirements of the Call for Projects and the relevance and design of the proposed Project.

## **5.2. STAGE 2: Assessment of the proposed project**

The project presentation notes (Appendix 1) shall be given an overall score out of **100 points**, broken down according to the assessment grid below. The assessment shall also check compliance with the instructions on how to complete the project presentation note. The assessment criteria are used to assess the quality of the applications in relation to the objectives and priorities set out in the Guidelines.

<p><b>1. Public-interest relevance and alignment with the Call</b></p> <p>Assesses whether the proposed project clearly matches the themes and objectives of the Call and responds to real information needs in Moldova:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is the topic important for Moldovan audiences?</li> <li>- Does it clearly fit the Call?</li> <li>- Does it address a real information gap?</li> </ul>	<b>20</b>
<p><b>2. Editorial strength</b></p> <p>Quality of the editorial approach, the methods for gathering and verifying information, and the applicant’s ability to produce reliable content.</p>	<b>20</b>
<p><b>3. Feasibility and operational capacity</b></p> <p>Checks whether the applicant can realistically deliver the proposed activities with the team, timeline and resources available.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can this team realistically produce what they promise?</li> <li>- Is the timeline achievable?</li> <li>- Does the organisation seem reliable?</li> </ul>	<b>20</b>
<p><b>4. Contribution to pluralism and inclusion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Does funding this media add value to the overall media landscape?</li> <li>- Does the project contribute to pluralism (local, minority-language, independent)?</li> <li>- Does it integrate gender aspects?</li> </ul>	<b>10</b>
<p><b>5. Sustainability of the Project</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Does the project strengthen the outlet in a durable way (editorial, digital, audience)?</li> <li>- Will the content produced continue to be useful after the funding ends?</li> <li>- Does the project build something that lasts (methods, workflows, skills, formats)?</li> </ul>	<b>10</b>

<p><b>6. Project Budget</b></p> <p>Does the budget match the proposed work? Are costs reasonable and justified?</p>	<p><b>20</b></p>
<p><b>TOTAL SCORE</b></p>	<p><b><u>100</u></b></p>

**5.3. STAGE 3: Award**

**Applications with a score higher than 70/100 shall be shortlisted.**

A reserve list is drawn up by CFI. This list shall be used if other funds become available during its period of validity or if one of the selected projects does not give rise to funding.

Applicants shall be informed in writing of the action taken by CFI on each application.

<p><b>6.APPENDICES</b></p>
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Application:

- Appendix 1: Project presentation note;
- Appendix 2: Provisional project budget;
- Appendix 3: Application form.