

SZABAD MÉDIA PÁLYÁZAT [FREE MEDIA - GRANT PROGRAM]

CALL FOR PROPOSALS AND GUIDELINES

The Mérték Media Monitor and the Ökotárs-Hungarian Environmental Partnership Foundation (hereinafter jointly referred to as Mérték and Ökotárs), with the support of the Embassy of the United States of America in Budapest, Hungary, are pleased to announce a call for proposals to support national and local independent media in Hungary with the goal to protect and strengthen press freedom, with the following conditions.

WHO CAN APPLY - ELIGIBLE ORGANIZATIONS

Independent media outlets which

- operating in Hungary on the local or national level
- predominantly deal with public policy issues, publishing articles, investigations, reports, debates,
- impartially contribute quality content to the public discourse,
- have published continuously (regularly) for at least one year,
- on any medium (TV, radio, print newspaper, news portal, video or podcast channel, etc.)

regardless of the form of the organization (e.g. limited liability company, foundation, association).

Media without legal personality that meet the above criteria may apply through a host organization. In such cases, the host organization must assume responsibility for the management and proper use of the grant.

Media funded by the state or local government, or by political parties and party foundations **are not eligible.**

The call is not open to individuals!

WHAT CAN YOU APPLY FOR? - ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES

The following activities serving the continued operation, development and future sustainability of the applicant media are eligible for support:

1. Developing and renewing media content, including developing new formats, launching a new series or conducting a major, costly investigation.
2. Support for the professional development and well-being of journalists and media workers: participation in professional events, training courses or scholarship programs of shorter duration, access to paid services.
3. Technical development, including the purchase of hardware and software for day-to-day operations, setting up a video or podcast studio.
4. Purchase of databases, subscription to journalism-related tools and services.
5. Legal or administrative costs linked to legal or administrative procedures strictly necessary for the operation, access to information.

WHEN CAN YOU APPLY? - DEADLINES

The call will be open until 31 August 2024 at the latest (or until the full amount of the available funding has been used), and applications may be submitted in several rounds:

- 1) Submission deadline: **until 29 February 2024 (4 pm)** for all the activities indicated above, for activities **lasting up to 6 months**. The evaluation of applications is expected to last until April 2024.
- 2) Next submissions: **after 29 February 2024**, applications may **only be** submitted for the activities indicated in **points 3-5 above**.

All funded projects (in any funding round) must be closed by **31 October 2024**, no extensions beyond this date are possible.

A media outlet may submit one application in one round but may reapply in subsequent rounds.

HOW MUCH YOU CAN APPLIED FOR? - THE SIZE OF GRANTS

The maximum amount available for a project under this call for proposals is **HUF 1,800,000 minimum and HUF 5,200,000 maximum**. No co-financing is required.

The total budget available is approximately HUF 40 million, of which 8-12 projects are expected to receive funding.

HOW TO APPLY?

Applications must be submitted using the online form (Google Forms) in Hungarian, accompanied by the attached Excel budget table.

The answers to the questions in the application form should be concise and clear, to the point, and help us understand what you have to say. If you have any questions or uncertainties, please contact Mérték Media Monitor by e-mail at sajtoszabadsag@mertek.eu. Questions will be answered by Mérték or Ökotárs within 3 working days.

WHAT ARE THE SELECTION CRITERIA?

1) Formal pre-screening: full proposals completed on the online form will undergo a formal and administrative screening (regarding length of the project, size of the requested amount and eligibility of the applicant) by an Ökotárs staff member within 5 working days of submission. If necessary, the staff member may ask further clarifying questions by e-mail to the address provided in the application, which the applicant must answer within 5 working days. If the applicant fails to reply by the deadline, the application will either be rejected or the evaluation process will continue with incomplete information, depending on the nature of the deficiency.

The applicant organization or the applicant excluded due to non-compliance of the project with the formal and legal/administrative criteria detailed above may request the Ökotárs to review the decision within 10 calendar days of receipt of the notification.

2) The applications that pass the formal pre-screening will be independently evaluated in writing by four senior staff members of Mérték and Ökotárs according to the following criteria:

- i. Relevance: does the proposed activity meet the objectives of the call for proposals?
- ii. Needs assessment: what is the problem, situation, pressing need that the planned activity is intended to address?
- iii. Coherence: do the proposed activities form a logical whole and are they likely to achieve the objectives set?
- iv. Feasibility: is the planned activity feasible within the timeframe and using the methods available?
- v. Impact: will the implementation of the project contribute to strengthening the applicant media - e.g. will it improve the medium's reach or brand, will it help to maintain its independence?
- vi. Innovation: will the planned project bring new tools and methods to the medium's operation?
- vii. Dissemination: does the project have a clear target group, is it likely to increase the applicant's reach among the target group? And/or: does it have the potential to reach out to new audiences?
- viii. Background: does the applicant organization have the experience and capacity to implement the project?
- ix. Sustainability: is the applicant committed to building on the results achieved after the end of the grant period?
- x. Value for money: is the budget realistic and justified by the activities?

The senior staff members carrying out the evaluation will provide a written justification of their opinion, listing the strengths and weaknesses of the application as described above, and will recommend whether to support or reject the application. The evaluation will be completed within six weeks of submission. During the substantive evaluation, the evaluators may request additional information on the project and the organization, which will be sent by the Ökotárs Program Officer by e-mail to the contact address provided in the application. The email will also indicate the deadline for response - normally 5 working days from the date of sending. Failure to reply will result in the application being assessed on the basis of the information available.

3) A joint meeting between Mérték and Ökotárs senior staff will review the written evaluations and, if possible, unanimously select the applications recommended for funding. A list of these will be sent to the U.S. Embassy in Budapest for final approval.

The embassy's decision is final, **there is no right of appeal, but you can submit a new application**. The decision on the grant will be published on the Mérték and Ökotárs websites (www.mertek.eu and www.okotars.hu, respectively) and all applicants will be informed of the outcome in writing (by e-mail to the address given in the application) within 10 working days.

In the case of rejected applicants, the notification will include a written justification of the decision.

The earliest date from which projects can start to be implemented is the date of receiving the notification of the grant decision, and costs can be charged from that date until the last day of the project (as specified in the grant agreement). No costs may be charged retroactively, either for activities incurred previously or for activities already carried out.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CONTRACTING?

A draft contract and a summary of the approved activities and budget, as an annex, will be sent by the Ökotárs Program Officer to the beneficiary organization by e-mail. This must be printed in triplicate, signed digitally (PDF format) and returned by post within 30 days, together with the annexes, to the signing **Ökotárs Foundation** (1056 Budapest, Szerb u. 17-19.).

Mandatory annexes to the grant contract:

Annex 1: project summary (activities and expected results) approved budget (signed!);

Annex 2: an extract from the (company) court not more than 30 days old certifying the registration of the organization;

Annex 2: A tax certificate not older than 30 days stating that the organization has no public debt (the "zero" certificate issued by the territorially competent NAV directorate can be replaced by the data from database of taxpayers free of public debt printed from the NAV website);

Annex 3: an immediate direct debit order issued by the organization's bank, valid for all the organization's bank accounts (a template of which can be downloaded from the Ökotárs Foundation's website);

Annex 4: a copy of the organization's most recent annual balance sheet and accounts (and annexes) and proof that the organization has filed them with the appropriate (company) court;

During the implementation of the project, it is possible to **amend the grant agreement**. Any significant change in general objectives and activities of the grant, any change in the schedule exceeding 2 months, or any transfer of funds *between the main budget categories (cost headings)* exceeding **20%** or HUF 350 000 must be requested in writing by the beneficiary organization to the Ökotárs Foundation at least 15 days before the planned expenditure.

HOW IS THE PAYMENT MADE?

The approved amount will be transferred by the Ökotárs Foundation to the beneficiaries in two installments: 80% of the amount within 10 days of the signing the grant contract as an advance payment; the remaining maximum 20% after the approval of the final report.

HOW ARE PROJECTS MONITORED?

The implementation of the content of the projects is monitored by Mérték. Its staff will contact the beneficiary organizations on a regular basis at least every two months (by phone or e-mail) to request information on the progress of the project, any difficulties or obstacles encountered and to help overcome them. They may also visit the beneficiaries in person during the project and organize joint online meetings with the beneficiaries at the beginning and end of the project period to exchange experiences and build relationships.

Regarding administrative matters, beneficiaries can contact the Ökotárs for assistance with queries at any time during the implementation of the project.

HOW TO REPORT?

Organizations receiving more than HUF 5 million must send **an interim report** at the mid-term of the project and all beneficiaries must submit a **final report** within 15 days of the end of the project by e-mail, using the form provided by the Ökotárs Foundation, as specified in the contract.

The **reports** consist of a narrative and financial part, which must be written on the form provided by the Ökotárs and sent by e-mail. The content of the report must include activities, results, impacts achieved and justification for deviations from plans. The report should be accompanied by an electronic version of tangible products and documents generated during the implementation of the project (e.g. publications, invitations to events, photographs, etc.).

The **financial part** consists of a table listing the itemized costs. Prior to the payment of the interim and final grant installments, Ökotárs will check the supporting financial documentation (payrolls, contracts, posting orders, quotations, invoices, performance certificates, bank statements and cash register receipts for payments, etc.) for the items selected at random from the financial reports. This check will cover 20% of the financial supporting documents (including all types of costs), reserving the right to verify all financial data if necessary.

The Ökotárs will check the reports within 20 working days of submission and may then ask clarifying questions and request additional documents (including copies of financial documents). Beneficiaries have 8 days to complete the report (with an extension of 8 days if necessary).

ELIGIBLE COSTS

All **direct costs necessary and proportionate to the implementation of the project** and incurred by the beneficiary organization or its partners are **eligible**, as follows:

- are incurred during the implementation of the project (i.e. the costs are incurred and invoiced during the lifetime of the project);
- necessary to implement the project and included in the budget submitted and approved in the application;

- the costs can be identified and verified as being properly recorded in the accounting records of the beneficiary or its partners;
- comply with applicable domestic accounting, tax and procurement rules;
- reasonable, justified and consistent with sound financial management;
- comply with the relevant legislation.

In view of the above, the following direct costs are eligible:

- the salary and benefit costs of staff involved in the project (the total cost of employment, regardless whether it is an employment contract, a mandate contract or a scholarship grant);
- travel expenses and per diem for staff and other participants (e.g. volunteers, participants) involved in the project (specifying the purpose, mode and distance of travel);
- the rent or purchase of equipment and supplies (new or second-hand) needed for the project (taking into account the best available offer);
- the costs of services, including events, printing and publication costs, subscriptions, participation fees, lawyers' fees and other services (with a brief description of the name and content of the service).

In addition to the direct project costs, costs of the general operation of the applicant and not directly related to the project (office rent, cleaning and maintenance costs, utility charges, telephone, internet, accounting, etc.) are eligible, too. Such indirect overhead costs may be claimed up to a maximum of 10% of the eligible direct project costs. Indirect costs need not be itemized, but must be included in the organization's accounts in accordance with the accounting rules, in such a way that they do not include costs already reported under another budget heading.

NON-ELIGIBLE COSTS

The following costs are not eligible:

- purchase of land, real estate, construction of new buildings;
- cost of overdraft, other cash flow costs;
- recoverable taxes (including recoverable VAT)¹ ;
- foreign exchange/currency exchange losses;
- commissions and dividends, profit payments, write-off of losses and future receivables;
- payment of interest and interest on arrears;
- items already financed from other sources;
- costs incurred before the grant decision;
- excessive and unnecessary spending.

¹ Organizations entitled to a VAT refund, must prepare their budgets and accounts in net amounts.