

Request for Applications for Expert(s) for Developing Essential Website Features Templates for Media Outlets

The Thomson Foundation (TF) is seeking to hire Expert(s) in providing professional and technical support for developing essential website features templates for media outlets within the project ‘Supporting Greater Media Independence in the Western Balkans’.

BACKGROUND

The aim of the “Media for All” (Supporting Greater Media Independence in the Western Balkans) project - is to develop and strengthen the editorial independence and business operation of the media outlets, enabling them to provide a more diverse range of media content to their audiences, and thus to encourage an opened, informed and active discussion amongst the citizens in the six Western Balkans countries.

The main beneficiaries of the project are media outlets and those working within the media sphere (e.g. editors), but the programme will contribute to an impact focused on increasing citizens’ engagement with a wider range of media, and potentially (over the longer term) increasing levels of trust in media which demonstrate more balanced editorial policies.

Supporting Greater Media Independence in the Western Balkans project is funded by the **Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) of the UK Government** and implemented by the consortium consisted of the **British Council** (lead partner), **Thomson Foundation**, **Balkan Investigative and Reporting Network (BIRN)** and the **International NGO Training and Research Centre (INTRAC)**.

The duration of the project is two years, until **March 2022**, and it will be implemented across six Western Balkans countries: **Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Albania, and North Macedonia**.

Our inception report demonstrates that challenges that the media sector is facing with, are shared among the 6 WB countries. Those are: overwhelmingly neglected local media compared to the national ones, limited business capacity/financial viability of local media, low IT and organisational capacity of local media, low quality of content produced by local media, weak relationship between local media and their audiences and limited experience or opportunities for journalists to engage with citizens in the region.

As a part of a consortia, the Thomson Foundation is participating in the implementation of the following four sets of activities, to contribute mitigation of the abovementioned challenges:

1. **Technical assistance support** to media outlets to develop their business ideas into Business plans (Media Accelerator and mentoring)
2. **Grants for Business plans implementation**
3. **E-learning** through online courses and mentoring, and
4. **Capacity building** tailored to individual needs of media outlets (digital tools and media outlets’ capacity improvement).

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The binding outcome of these activities is to equip the media outlets with knowledge, skills and tools to improve their internal structure, content production/distribution, audience engagement, and overall business performance.

ABOUT THE ACTIVITY

Development of a robust **online platform** that will serve as a go-to **resource base for media outlets** from the entire WB region, is one of the expected results from TF mandate within this project. Our vision is to create a platform that will outlive the project, which is expected to come to its end in mid 2022. The platform will contain the following elements:

- E-learning courses (8 topics important to media outlets)
- Educative content about business models, content production/distribution, audience engagement etc.
- Essential website features templates for media outlets (EWF templates)
- Technical support for implementation of the EWF templates

EWF templates are website software tools that will be built and published as an open source tool - available for download and usage for media outlets all across the WB region. They may contain some (or all of) the following elements and functionalities (newly produced, adapted or already existing):

- Pre-defined and adaptable categories for content publishing tailored to media outlets
- Banner positions with standardized formats and sizes
- Digital security and general data privacy tools and policies built in
- Engaged Citizens’ Reporting (ECR) tool provided by BIRN built in
- Multilingual content publication functionality (BISM, Macedonian and Albanian)
- E-payment gateway for online donations/subscription
- Content research tool built in (i.e. smartocto insights (ex Content Insights), UpScore or alike)
- Additional functionalities and potentials that initial assessment may be recommended

For development and production of such a robust and adaptable digital tool - TF seeks to hire expert(s) to firstly assess its usability, functionalities and applicability, and afterwards to plan and eventually lead the process of its development and production in a later phase of the project.

SCOPE OF WORK

Main Tasks and Responsibilities

The expert(s) main tasks will be to:

- Plan the process of assessment on what media outlets in WB need, what kind of website features would they use, etc.
- Analyse the website structure and performance of the selected media outlets’ that will be supported through the business development grant scheme
- Consult the experts in the field of website creation, back-end and front-end programming, content production, media publishers, WordPress themes creators, e-payment etc. – in the assessment phase
- Develop a detailed technical specification for the development and production of EWF templates

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- Provide support in the process of selection a vendor that will develop and produce EWF templates and provide technical support to media outlets to apply and adapt the tool to their specific needs
- Define the scope and type of technical support that media outlets may need to successfully adapt EWF templates and easily start using them
- In the later phase of the project: Lead and monitor the process of EWF templates development and production, and further use and implementation by media outlets.

DELIVERABLES

- Assessment report
- Technical specification for the EWF templates
- Terms of reference for the vendor
- Monthly reports on progress and implementation

REQUIREMENTS

- Sound understanding of the online media sector in the Western Balkan, with a focus on digital business and publishing
- Up to 5 years of experience working with media outlets from the WB region
- At least 3 research projects tied to media outlets conducted and published
- 5 years of experience in product development
- 5 years of experience in project planning, implementation and reporting
- Sound understanding of IT services and programming, up to 5 years of relevant experience in this area
- Knowledge about WordPress, content publishing platforms and distribution
- Expertise in GDPR, data protection and cybersecurity
- Expertise in media self-regulation and media law
- Excellent writing and communication skills in English and BHS languages (optionally Macedonian and Albanian)
- Willingness and the ability to work, deliver and communicate online
- Having the ISO 27001 Lead auditor certification will be considered as an asset
- Demonstrated innovative ideas and approaches would be preferred

DURATION OF ASSIGNMENT

It is expected that the assignment will commence no later than 15th of August 2020. Expert(s) are expected to complete the assignment until December 2021.

APPLICATION

Interested experts are kindly asked to send the following documents (in English):

- **CV/portfolio with examples of previous work relevant for this assignment**
- **Concept proposal – a single page document that briefly explains the expert’s vision and approach, accompanied by a general timeline.**

Both documents should be submitted to Davor Marko, TF Balkans Programme Manager by email: davorm@thomsonfoundation.org - not later than **31 July 2020**.

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Note: Issuing this Request for Application does not commit Thomson Foundation nor other members of the consortium, to select any expert and/or applicant. Thompson Foundation also reserves the right to extend/change the duration of the assignment, its scope of work, deliverables or expected outcomes.