

## Terms of Reference for Business Expert Consultants (experts, trainers, mentors)

### BACKGROUND

Thomson Media supports journalists and media organisations worldwide often in challenging and emerging economies. Our work promotes ethical reporting and ensures independent, trusted sustainable media businesses developments. Thomson currently implements several media support programmes in the regions of Western Balkans and Central and Eastern Europe. The focus of Thomson's work is to provide guidance to media outlets for sustainable development and operation through business mentorship, testing and implementing new and innovative business modalities, supporting media to attract and engage new and underrepresented media audience(s) including young, female, minority groups and diaspora.

Thomson is looking to hire a Business Expert Consultants to become part of the wider Western Balkans and Central and Eastern European team and support implementation of its programmes.

### ABOUT THE PROJECT

*Media Innovation Europe: towards resilient public-interest media ecosystem (MIE 2026-2028)* is a two-year programme co-funded by the European Union aiming to provide support to the European newsrooms and individuals through business needs assessments and personalised advisory, grants, training and mentorship to media managers and journalists that work or are building working in and building newsrooms that are moving towards a full digital transition. MIE's overall goal is to empower media outlets to navigate a changing media context, providing tools and guidance to align their journalistic products, business structures, and means of discovery and distribution in an audience-focused and sustainable way. The project is delivered by a consortium led by the Vienna-based International Press Institute (IPI) together with the Berlin-based Thomson Media (TM), The Fix Foundation (TFF) and the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN).

As part of the project, Thomson Media will implement the following programmes:

a. Ideation – following the open call for support, selected beneficiaries will pass the series of three ideation workshops (September - November 2026). The three main objectives of ideation sessions are to (1) have innovative and articulated ideas, (2) inspire and support out of the box thinking and (3) secure quality and committed candidates for its programs that will ensure impact. Workshops will engage with two types of beneficiaries are (1) new media outlets, journalists or collectives of journalists/media professionals with a start-up plan for a sustainable new media model and (2) experienced media professionals and decision makers in established newsrooms. Selected participants will get familiar with key concepts such as ideation techniques, steps they have to complete to be able to better understand testing and validation. They further have the chance to brainstorm ideas with facilitator support that they can possibly turn into project proposals and apply for funding from Thomson or other donor organisations. Upon the completion of the series, participants will have three potential trajectories: have a reserved spot in our Validation Booster program (to validate ideas they previously articulated through the workshops), or to take part in networking and collaborative

activities and fellowship program, Thomson and its partners plan to organize within this project, or beyond.

b. Validation Booster (VB) - tailored for smaller media outlets, content producers, journalists, communication/media startups and networks. Validation Booster is structured as a guided program consisting of up to 12 workshops, related resources and tasks designed to help beneficiaries to learn how to validate and test their business idea that imply new digital products/services, diving into the process of rethinking a media's potential and feasibility in the digital environment. The goal is for beneficiaries to be acquainted with the necessary tools, knowledge, and directions to properly understand and implement validation methodology for their business idea. After completing Validation program key beneficiaries will be: a) equipped to present their ideas and mission clearly; b) capable to validate on their own any business idea they may have within their outlet in the future; c) develop materials to present and communicate their validated idea to interested parties and potential funders and d) present their idea, if validated, to broader pool of funders and investors. Besides structured mentorship, beneficiaries will receive funds through grant schemes (up to EUR 3.000) to implement all validation program related tasks. The program will be driven through one cycle (February – June 2027). Up to 12 beneficiaries will be involved in this support stream.

c. Business Innovation Synergizer (BIS) - tailored to support larger media with significant absorption capacities, developed strategic or business plans and/or validated ideas. Media outlets will be supported through grants (EUR 30.000), technical support (1-on-1 mentoring, capacity building). The program will be implemented from January 2027 until December 2027. Only one cycle will be organized, with a defined number of beneficiaries (up to 5 under the Business Innovation Synergizer programme). BIS' overall objective is to improve the business sustainability of professional media and make journalists and media outlets more resilient to any external threat.

The Business Expert Consultants will support the project team from (June 2026 – May 2028) to implement segments of Thomson programmes and to be in charge as methodology experts, trainers, and mentors during project implementation

## SCOPE OF WORK

To provide technical expertise, training, mentoring, and advisory support to participating media organizations and teams throughout the Ideation, Validation Booster (VB), and Business Innovation Synergizer (BIS) programmes, enabling them to develop, test, validate, and scale innovative and sustainable media business solutions.

### Key Responsibilities

#### 1. Training Delivery

Design and deliver interactive workshops, training sessions, and practical exercises covering topics such as:

- Innovation and design thinking methodologies;
- Idea generation and refinement;
- Audience research and market analysis;
- Business model development and innovation;
- Revenue diversification strategies for media organizations;
- Validation methodologies and experimentation;
- Product and service prototyping;
- Minimum Viable Product (MVP) design and testing;

- Financial planning and budgeting;
- Sustainability and growth strategies;
- Pitch preparation and presentation techniques;
- Partnership development and fundraising opportunities.

## 2. Mentoring and Coaching

Provide individualized mentoring and group coaching to participating teams and organizations by:

- Supporting teams in refining and strengthening their ideas and business concepts;
- Guiding participants through customer discovery and validation processes;
- Reviewing validation plans and experimentation frameworks;
- Assisting participants in adjusting business models based on evidence gathered during validation;
- Providing strategic advice on implementation, scaling, and sustainability;
- Helping teams prepare final presentations, pitches, and business cases.

## 3. Review and Assessment

- Review participant assignments, validation plans, business models, and pitch materials;
- Provide written and verbal feedback throughout the programme;
- Participate in evaluation and selection processes when required;
- Contribute to assessing participant progress and readiness for subsequent programme stages.

## 4. Reporting

- Coordinate closely with the Programme Coordinator and project team;
- Prepare training materials, mentoring plans, and session agendas;
- Submit mentoring and progress reports following programme milestones;
- Participate in programme planning meetings;
- Contribute recommendations for programme improvement and lessons learned
- Write case study after the end of the programme

### Key deliverables

- Training curriculum and session materials;
- Delivery of workshops and training sessions;
- Individual and group mentoring sessions;
- Feedback reports on participating teams and organizations;
- Review of validation plans, business models, and pitch decks;
- Final mentoring summary report including participant progress, achievements, and recommendations.

### KEY REQUIREMENTS

**Education:** At least graduate degree in the field of business, communication, media, graphic design, informational technologies, social sciences, and other fields relevant to the call.

**Professional Experience:** At least 5 years' combined experience working in media sector in some of the following fields:

- Strategic planning and business communication;
- Demonstrated experience in business development, innovation, entrepreneurship, or media business transformation;
- Proven experience delivering training and mentoring programmes;
- Strong understanding of business modelling, validation methodologies, audience development, and revenue generation strategies;
- Pitching business ideas;
- Experience working with media organizations, startups, innovation programmes, or accelerator/incubator initiatives;
- Excellent facilitation, coaching, and communication skills.

## **LANGUAGE AND SKILLS**

- Speaking, reading, and writing proficiency in English and one of the languages spoken in the Western Balkan or the Central and SouthEast Europe is preferable;
- Relevant experience working within the media sector and/or start up in the Western Balkans and Central and South East Europe;
- Excellent presentation, oral and writing communication skills, with strong interpersonal and cross-cultural communication skills;
- Strong organisational skills, problem-solving, proactive, can-do-it attitude and ability to get things done;
- Dedication to delivery of outputs in line with the highest standards;
- Record of innovative ideas and approaches would be an asset.

## **DURATION OF ASSIGNMENT**

Assignment will commence from June 2026 and will last until 31 May 2028.

## **LOCATION**

Experts will primarily work remotely, as most consultancy activities will be delivered online. However, when necessary and in close coordination with the Thomson team, onsite engagements may be arranged depending on the beneficiary's needs and preferences

## **OTHER**

The liaison persons at Thomson for experts are the Key Business Expert, the Regional Programme Manager and the Project Programme Coordinator.

## **APPLICATION PROCESS**

Interested candidates should submit their resume, cover letter and offer to [jobs\(at\)thomsonfoundation.org](mailto:jobs(at)thomsonfoundation.org) by **30.06.2026**.

## **REVIEW AND AMENDMENTS**

These Terms of Reference may be reviewed and amended as needed to meet the evolving needs of the project and organization.