

MEDIA INNOVATION EUROPE 3.0

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

BUSINESS INNOVATION SYNERGIZER

**Deadline for application:
20 September 2026
23:59 CET**

1. BACKGROUND

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. The project supports local, investigative, and community-focused media in adapting to digital transformation, diversifying revenue streams, improving audience engagement, and developing sustainable business models.

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).

The following countries are eligible to apply for this Call: All 27 EU member states as well as Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Iceland, Kosovo, Liechtenstein, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia and Ukraine.

2. OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE OF THE CALL

Many media organisations have already identified promising business opportunities or validated innovative ideas, but often lack the financial resources, implementation capacity, and specialised expertise required to transform them into sustainable business results. Business Innovation Synergizer (BIS) was designed to bridge this gap by supporting media organisations in moving from planning and validation to implementation and growth.

Business Innovation Synergizer (BIS) aims to support media organisations with validated and developed business ideas. **BIS'** overall objective is to improve business sustainability of professional media and make journalists and media outlets more resilient to any external challenges.

The key vehicles of support include grants and business mentoring:

- Grants provide financial support for the further development and implementation of innovative business ideas, products, services, and digital solutions that contribute to the sustainability and growth of media organisations.
- Business mentoring offers personalised guidance and support; helps beneficiaries develop strategic plans focused on digital growth; exploring new revenue streams, innovative modalities of work by application of digital tools and navigating challenges in a rapidly changing media landscape.

BIS purpose is to enhance media outlets in order to have them successfully **implement their business plan, strategy or idea through** adapting to **digital transformation, diversifying revenue streams, improving audience engagement, and developing sustainable business models.**

3. PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

Business Innovation Synergizer (BIS) is the programme tailored for established media organisations with validated business ideas, plans or strategies that have capacity to absorb the support and utilise the provided resources to implement a business idea. It is a tailored implementation and growth support mechanism designed to help media organisations transform validated ideas into sustainable business models, scalable products, and measurable business results.

BIS enables media organisations to strengthen their long-term sustainability, resilience, and capacity for innovation through a combination of financial support, expert mentoring and practical implementation guidance.

Thomson Media (TM) will lead beneficiaries through the processes of **utilising digital product solutions to optimise media operations, improve content production, and enhance audience interaction** by:

- **Implementing and scaling business ideas** by providing financial resources and tools for project execution, offering expertise in business implementation;
- **Developing a customised Business Growth Roadmap** that aligns project activities with the organisation's strategic priorities, revenue goals, and long-term sustainability objectives;
- **Working closely with mentors** who provide hands-on support throughout the implementation process, helping beneficiaries overcome challenges, refine approaches, manage risks, and maximise results;
- **Strengthening business and operational capacities** by improving revenue generation strategies, diversifying income streams, enhancing operational efficiency, and embedding business thinking across the organisation;
- **Integrating innovation into newsroom and organisational workflows**, ensuring that new products, services, technologies, and processes become

sustainable parts of everyday operations rather than stand-alone pilot initiatives;

- **Building organisational resilience and independence** by developing assets, services, and capabilities that reduce reliance on external platforms and create greater control over audience relationships and revenue generation;
- **Creating pathways for future growth and investment** by strengthening beneficiaries' ability to present, position, and further develop their innovations for additional funding, partnerships, or commercial opportunities.

BIS is a combination of implementation funding, long-term mentorship, strategic business development, and practical innovation support. Rather than focusing solely on delivering project activities, BIS helps media organisations build the systems, skills, and business foundations necessary to sustain innovation and growth after the programme ends.

The following **list of activities**, but not limited to, will be considered for support and funding:

- Further refining, finalisation and implementation of new revenue generation models, including subscription programmes, membership schemes, premium content services, events and other audience-supported initiatives;
- Implementation of digital tools and technologies that improve operational efficiency, content production, audience analytics, customer relationship management, or business processes;
- Enhancement, or optimisation of digital platforms, websites, mobile applications, newsletters, and other audience engagement channels;
- Activities aimed at increasing audience reach, engagement, retention, and loyalty through innovative content formats, community-building initiatives, and data-driven approaches;
- Implementation of digital transformation initiatives that improve organisational workflows, collaboration, and productivity;
- Further development, refining and/or implementation of innovative products, services, or content formats designed to address audience needs and market opportunities;
- Capacity-building initiatives directly linked to the implementation of the supported business plan or strategy, including specialised training and professional development;
- Acquisition of equipment, software, licenses, or digital infrastructure necessary for implementing the proposed business innovation or development plan;
- Implementation of marketing, branding, distribution, and audience acquisition strategies;

- Activities aimed at improving client services, advertising products, partnerships, and commercial offerings;
- Other validated and/or developed activities that clearly contribute to strengthening the financial sustainability, operational resilience, digital readiness, and long-term viability of the applicant media organisation.

All proposed activities must demonstrate a **clear link to the applicant's business plan, development strategy, or validated business idea** and contribute to the achievement of measurable business and organisational outcomes.

Preference will be given to applicants proposing business ideas that have undergone a structured validation programme or can demonstrate that they have independently carried out a systematic validation process and can provide evidence of the key insights, findings, and results obtained.

Applicants under this programme should propose projects that follow ethical journalistic and business standards and safeguard the rights and interests of diverse target groups.

The BIS Programme will be implemented through a two-stage selection process. Following the evaluation of applications, the fifteen highest-ranked media organisations will be pre-selected to participate in a Preparation Programme. During this phase, participants will work closely with experts to further refine their proposed business ideas, ensuring their alignment with current media market trends and sustainability requirements. The Preparation Programme is designed to strengthen and transform promising concepts into robust and actionable implementation plans.

The Preparation programme will be delivered over a one-month period (November/December 2026) and will include tailored mentoring support and up to three online workshops. This programme is designed to help participants further develop their ideas, define clear implementation plans, and prepare project pitches. At the end of the preparation programme, participants will pitch their refined business ideas and implementation plans to a panel composed of Thomson Media representatives and mentors. The panel will assess the quality, innovation potential, implementation readiness and sustainability of the proposed solutions, and will select the five strongest teams to receive funding and implementation support within the BIS programme.

Means of support include the combination of:

- **Financial support** through grants: up to EUR 30,000 per beneficiary. Grants will provide the resources for innovation and will empower media outlets to

pioneer fresh approaches, audience engagement and implement new digital products and services.

- **Capacity-building and implementation support** through dedicated one-on-one mentoring and regular online and/or in-person meetings. Each beneficiary will be paired with an experienced mentor who will provide tailored guidance throughout the implementation period, supporting the execution of the approved business initiative, addressing operational and strategic challenges.
- **Networking and collaborative opportunities.** Networking will facilitate knowledge sharing and collective action among media organisations, especially in countries where media freedom is under threat.

4. FUNDING, REQUIREMENTS AND DURATION

Media applying for the Business Innovation Synergizer may consider applying for **grants ranging up to 30.000 EUR.**

To be considered for support, a media outlet has to have EUR 80,000+ annual revenue; 5+ full time employees.

NOTE: No co-financing from the applicant's side is expected or is obligatory for this Call for Applications.

The duration of the project may be up to **twelve (12) months** in total (January 2027 till December 2027)

5. INSTRUCTIONS FOR APPLICATION SUBMISSION

5.1.1. Application form content

Applications must be submitted in line with the instructions provided within this document, and consisted of:

1. Application form including budget proposal - [LINK](#)

The Application form should contain the following annexes:

- a. Registration documents (certificate) of the legal entity confirming that it is registered within the country of application,
- b. Document(s) that proves that the media outlet is established before 01 January 2025 (if different from date of Legal Registration)
- c. Financial statements for 2025 calendar year
- d. Certificate from relevant tax authority that the legal entity has paid all due taxes, in accordance with local legislation and issued within the last 3–6 months before the application deadline.

e. Company organisational chart.

Application form should be completed in **English**.

5.1.2. Where to and how to send the applications

The Application Form with related budget must be exclusively submitted through our platform. Applicants will need to submit the **application form** including the proposed budget via this [LINK](#).

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.**

5.1.3. Application deadline

The Applicant must submit the Application Form by **20 September 2026** at 23:59 local time. Applications submitted after the deadline will not be considered for funding. The deadline applies to all parts of your application, including supporting documentation.

5.1.4. Clarifications, Questions & Answers

Requests for clarification should be submitted in English language to the email address: nerminas@thomsonfoundation.org by **1 September 2026** at the latest.

An online information session will be organised on **27 August at 11h CET** via this [link](#).

Applicants will be informed in writing of the outcome of their application. Non-selected applicants may request feedback on their proposal within 10 calendar days of receiving the notification of results. Feedback will be sent and limited to information related to the evaluation of the applicant's proposal and will not include confidential information concerning other applications.

6. EVALUATION AND SELECTION

STEP 1: ADMINISTRATIVE AND ELIGIBILITY CHECK

During the administrative check the following will be assessed:

- Compliance with the submission deadline. If the deadline has not been met, the application will automatically be rejected.

- Compliance with the countries eligible for application.
- The Application Form satisfies all criteria specified in subsection 5.1.1 Application Form content. If any of the requested information/document is missing or is incorrect, the application may be rejected on that sole basis and it will not be evaluated further.

The application that passes this check will be evaluated further as part of the quality assessment.

STEP 2: EVALUATION CRITERIA (QUALITY ASSESSMENT)

The following are the evaluation (quality assessment) criteria for applications that passed the administrative check:

Criteria	Total Score (max) 100
1. Relevance of proposal • Objectives: Does the proposal align with the specific objectives of this Call? • Business model: Is the proposed action clearly linked and integrated into an existing business model/plan ? • Resilience: Does the applicant demonstrate a commitment to business resilience and sustainability? • Innovation: Does the applicant show interest in innovation, new forms of content production, digital transformation? • Feasibility: Are the intended results, deliverables and activities clear and achievable? • Target group: Does the proposal specify the target group (of the proposed project)?	Max 40 points
2. Organisational capacity • Operational capacity: Does the applicant demonstrate the operational capacity to implement the project? • Relevant experience: Does the applicant have sufficient and relevant experience in implementing similar projects? • Risk Management: Are the identified risks and challenges specific and manageable, and is there a proposed mitigation plan? • Professional Standards: Does the applicant demonstrate a commitment to professional and ethical standards of journalism?	Max 20 points

3. Sustainability Does the proposal clearly outline activities and expected outcomes that contribute to the sustainability of the media outlet (explained revenue models, audience engagement, or other sustainability mechanisms)	Max 20 points
4. Validated business idea Has the proposed business idea, strategy, or initiative previously undergone a business idea validation programme or independently carried out a systematic validation process?	Max 10 points
5. Financial proposal - Does the proposed budget demonstrate value for money and feasibility? - Are the proposed costs realistic and reasonable?	Max 10 points

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

The Due Diligence process will be conducted after the quality assessment. The Due Diligence will be conducted through the Due Diligence Checklist which will be provided to the applicant by the project team.

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.

STEP 4: NOTIFICATION

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

The following is the **indicative table** of the application, evaluation and notification process:

Call for Application process	Date / Month
Launching of the Call	16 July 2026
Information session	27 August, 2026 at 11h CET
Deadline for requesting any clarifications from the Project in writing	1 September, 2026
Deadline for submission of applications	20 September 2026, 23:59 CET
Notification to rejected applicants on the results of the administrative check (Step 1)	29 September 2026
Notification to applicants on the results of the qualitative assessment and due diligence (Step 2 and 3)	15 October 2026
Grant Agreement Signature	January 2027

7. CONDITIONS OF IMPLEMENTATION

7.1. 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 Thomson Media.

7.2. Data Protection Policy

The Thomson Media 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 EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)) to all our global operations unless the local equivalent law is stronger.

Annexes

Annex 1: [Application form including budget proposal](#)