

Request for Proposals

Strengthening independent, public interest journalism in Europe

Frequently Asked Questions

About the focus of the funding

- **How do you define independent, public interest journalism?** By ‘independent, public interest journalism’, we mean journalism that 1) informs the public about “what matters to everyone in society. It is about the common good, the general welfare and the security and well-being of everyone in the community we serve”¹; 2) is made by actors who are independent of vested (political, corporate or other private) interests; and 3) is committed to the pursuit of truth, seeking to provide the public with reliable and accurate, balanced and representative information, in accordance with the standards of the profession². The standards of the profession have always dictated ‘quality journalism’ as characterized by independence, objectivity, diversity and by a strong sense of ‘doing it for the public’³. With journalism challenged by phenomena like junk news, tabloid news, PR, propaganda, and censorship, recent years have witnessed the rise of the term ‘public interest journalism’, as to re-emphasize journalism’s public service character and in order to differentiate ‘quality’ journalism from the rest.
- **How do you define an "organization with a partisan agenda"?** By organisations with a partisan agenda we mean: “Excluded are those news organizations with a pervasive or widespread bias contravening the standards of journalism, rather than the perspective of an individual journalist or article.”
- **Why is funding excluded for organisations focused on certain activities?** While there are many important activities aimed at strengthening independent, public interest journalism in Europe, Civitates has a limited budget. The activities excluded from this Request for Proposals might already be pursued by other charitable donors, and while they will remain on our radar, we decided to focus on direct support for independent, public interest journalism organisations at this stage.
- **When it comes to demonstrating a positive influence on strengthening democracy in Europe, does the work of the applicant organisation have to focus on Europe as a whole?** No, we welcome applications from organisations that work on different levels, be it at the pan-European, national, regional or even very local level.

¹ As defined by the Ethical Journalism Network, 23 August 2-19, available at:

<https://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/the-public-interest>.

² Mark Deuze (2005) “What is journalism? Professional identity and ideology of journalists reconsidered”, in: *Journalism*, volume: 6, issue: 4, pp. 442-464.

³ Idem.

About who can apply

- [I am an individual journalist, can I apply?](#) No, this round of funding is only for organisations.
- [We are a for-profit organisation, can we apply?](#) Yes, but only if your profit model specifically requires your organisation to reinvest all profit back into the organisation. You need to be able to show a legal document that stipulates that profits are retained for journalism and not shared as dividends.
- [We are a small start-up organisation and are looking for seed funding, can we apply?](#) Yes, funding is open to start-ups where these are (a) registered, and (b) can point to a strong and credible track record of the team in relation to the criteria set out in the Request for Proposals.
- [Can we apply if we do not yet have a detailed organisational health strategy to propose?](#) Yes, you are welcome to apply. Should your concept note be reviewed favorably, you will have time to further develop your strategy before submitting your full proposal.

About the application process

- [Do we get to choose our own priority areas to bolster and develop or will this be decided by the funders?](#) We want you to take the lead on this. Once the grant has been approved, all grantees will have the opportunity to do an assessment with a trained facilitator (paid for by Civitates) which will help you better understand and prioritize our needs in key areas like strategy, leadership, finances, etc.
- [How concerned should an applicant be with the character limit in the application form?](#) The character limit is strict in the application form. Please note that applicants who move past the initial review round will be asked to complete a full proposal where longer descriptions are expected.
- [At what time is the application due on 30 April?](#) At 23:59 CET.
- [How many applicants do you expect will receive a grant?](#) This is very hard to tell at this stage, as it will depend on the quality of the proposals received and the amounts requested.

About the budget

- [How much money is being made available for this Request for Proposals?](#) Because this is a brand-new line of work and we are still trying to get more donors on board, we cannot indicate the exact amount that will be dedicated to this first round. But our estimation is that it will be approximately 2M EUR.
- [Can we include staff and administrative costs?](#) Yes, Civitates recognizes that staff and critical infrastructure of organisations are of key importance for any organisation.
- [Is there a specific budget distribution or percentage that we need to abide by when it comes to allocating funds to general operating support versus core support for institutional strengthening?](#) No. We acknowledge that no two grants will be identical, and that the mix of strengthening support and general support might vary in each grant. We therefore set no minimum or maximum amounts/percentages in this regard.
- [Is co-funding a requirement?](#) No, co-funding is not a requirement. It is encouraged though.
- [If we apply for a grant from Civitates, can we still apply for grants from one of Civitates' partner foundations?](#) Yes, there are no restrictions in this regard.

About the organisational assessment at the start of the grant period

- **What is this organisational assessment about?** It concerns an open-source, organisational assessment tool, to help applicants identify and prioritize their organisational strengthening needs. The tool is to a large extent based on the assessment tool used by the Ford Foundation's BUILD program, adapted with the organisational health of independent, public interest journalism organisations in mind.
- **What kind of assessment is it?** The assessment provides clear qualitative markers of organisational development, which make the results very usable. There are no numbers involved; just questions that identify a particular aspect of nonprofit functioning, like financial systems or staff development, asking you to rate your organisation as basic, minimal, moderate, or strong, each of which has a concrete description of what that state looks like. This provides a roadmap for improvement, as well as an assessment of the organisation's current state.
- **How does it work?** Unlike other assessment tools that are taken online by individuals, this tool is designed to be a face-to-face, organisation-wide process. This usually means that the whole staff participates in the exercise. If your organisation has a staff larger than 30 people, you can also choose a representative group to take it. To get the best results, Civitates will arrange for a professional facilitator. The length of the discussion varies depending on your preferences, ranging from a couple of hours to a full day or more.
- **Do we really need to do that assessment at the start of the grant period?** Yes, it is an essential part of the Funding Plus trajectory for this sub-fund. But more than anything, we think it will be very helpful to you in further identifying your areas for development.
- **Will Civitates need to see our survey results?** No. You do not need to share your results with Civitates unless you choose to do so.

About what it's like to be a Civitates grantee

- **Will Civitates want to get involved in our editorial choices?** No. Our point of departure is absolute editorial independence for our grantees.
- **In addition to providing money, what else can Civitates help us with?** Through its Funding Plus activities Civitates connects organisations working on related issues, in similar geographies, and/or facing comparable challenges. We create opportunities for grantees to meet, learn, and collaborate, so that the grantees in the cohort can grow stronger together.