

Request for Proposals

Strengthening independent, public interest journalism in Europe

About Civitates

Civitates is a philanthropic initiative that is committed to upholding democratic values in Europe. It believes in European democracies, where all citizens have the opportunity to access information, make their voices heard, organise, mobilise and engage fully in the democratic processes. To achieve this vision, Civitates strengthens the capacity of civil society to play its indispensable role in shaping vibrant and open European democracies that work for all. Civitates already supports initiatives that strengthen the resilience of the civil society sector and that push for a healthy digital public sphere in which public and democratic values are safeguarded. It will now also support independent, public interest journalism in Europe, because journalism plays a vital role in a democratic society. For more information about Civitates, please see <https://civitates-eu.org/>.

Background

Journalism plays a vital role in a democratic society. It provides a platform for dialogue and debate, helping individuals to form their opinions and participate as informed citizens in democratic processes. It also monitors governmental and corporate (in)actions, holding those in power to account. As research has shown, the health of independent media is linked to the health of democracy, with each powering the other. This connection is becoming even more important because of the growing pervasiveness of digital communication in people's lives. However, independent, in-depth journalism in Europe finds itself increasingly under pressure. Media freedom is in decline, trust in media low, and business models are in distress.

Despite all challenges, exciting new types of journalism organisations are popping up all over Europe. These organisations are in a vulnerable position, though, especially when operating in politically hostile environments. Civitates is convinced that philanthropy has a valuable role to play here: to ensure not just the survival – but the growth – of independent, public interest journalism.

Fund goal

Civitates aims to establish a strong cohort of independent, public interest journalism organisations which defend democracy in Europe by covering stories of societal importance, e.g. by exposing abuses of power and drivers of polarization and defending a space in which all voices are heard.

The fund will provide **multi-year commitments for general operating support and the institutional strengthening** of its grantee partners to build more durable, more resilient, more networked, and more impactful public interest journalism organisations in Europe.

In addition to strengthening specific organisations, Civitates aims to create a diverse cohort of organisations that **go on a learning journey together**. Through its Funding Plus activities Civitates connects organisations, encouraging them to meet, learn, and collaborate where it makes sense, so that the grantees in the cohort can grow stronger together. This network effect is an essential element of the sub-fund and grantees are expected to play an active role in it. At the start of the grant period, all grantees will undergo an organisational assessment with a trained facilitator (paid for by Civitates) to better understand and prioritize their needs.

The fund's point of departure is **editorial independence**. Civitates recognizes that while journalism can produce impact and change, journalistic organisations cannot and should not promise specific (policy) outcomes. Civitates' grantees therefore retain full editorial control and will never be asked for pre-publication editorial review or for any specific outcomes related to coverage in advance. Instead, grantees are asked to summarize what they have learned during the course of their work.

Application process: a phased approach

This Request for Proposals will make use of a phased application process:

1	Applicants submit their concept note by 30 June 2020 . After a first screening by the Civitates secretariat, a selection committee will shortlist the successful candidates. We will do our best to inform applicants whether they were selected for the next round by the mid-September 2020 .
2	Selected applicants will be requested to submit a full proposal by 19 October 2020 , highlighting the areas they want to bolster and develop further. Detailed guidance will be provided in due course. Applicants can expect to hear if their application has been successful by November 2020 . Our hope is that all grants will go out before the end of the year, but please note that several factors can delay the process, for example when an applicant needs additional time to respond to the review feedback or the selection committee requires additional time to review a proposal.

Application guidance

Who can apply for funding?

Civitates accepts applications from organisations **registered in any of the following countries:**

- Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, North Macedonia, Malta, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and United Kingdom.

...and that...

- engage in **public interest journalism** that informs the public about what matters to everyone in society, reporting about the common good, the general welfare and the security and well-being of everyone in the community/audience it serves (investigative journalism is included / excluded are organisations focusing purely on breaking news, infotainment or the daily news grind);
- Are **independent** of political, commercial, and religious interests (excluded are organisations with a partisan agenda);
- **Produce in-depth journalism (explanatory and/or investigative)**, demonstrating a commitment to producing journalism to high standards (no aggregation sites or 'churnalism' setups which cut and paste all content from press releases);
- Are registered as **not-for-profit** organisations or have a constitution that stipulates that all profits are retained for journalism and not shared as dividends;
- Are registered as a legal entity and have a **proven track record** with at least 12 months of active coverage;
- Uphold **high professional standards**, including a commitment to truth and accuracy, fairness and impartiality, humanity / minimizing harm, transparency and accountability;¹

We particularly welcome applications from organisations that:

- Operate in contexts where:
 - The market has failed to support independent public interest journalism; and/or
 - The free media have been captured by state or non-state actors; and/or
 - There is a hostile legal environment for independent public interest journalism.
- Are facing legal, digital, or other types of threats;
- Do not have the capacity to access large grants from institutions like the EU;

¹ Such as the standards laid out by the Ethical Journalism Network or Kovach & Rosenstiel's 'The Elements of Journalism'.

- Involve people who are under-represented in journalism (e.g. women, ethnic minorities);
- Demonstrate thinking about how they relate to the audiences / communities they serve, and how to serve them best (e.g. by striving for greater audience and community engagement to bridge divides in society);
- Demonstrate a desire to grow their knowledge and skills, learn from other organisations in the grantee cohort, as well as are to draw on learnings from other fields.

What is the size/duration of the grants?

Grant amounts **may vary** depending on the size and scope of the plans proposed as well as the applicant organisation's annual budget. Organisations will be able to request funding according to these conditions:

- Organisations with an annual budget up to €100k can apply for funds up to 50% of their annual budget (based on the actual figures of the last closed fiscal year).
- Organisations with an annual budget up to €200k can apply for funds up to 40% of their annual budget (based on the actual figures of the last closed fiscal year).
- Organisations with an annual budget above €200k can apply for funds up to 30% of their annual budget (based on the actual figures of the last closed fiscal year), with a maximum of 200K EUR per year.

The duration of the grants can be up to **3 years** (potentially renewable for another two years).

What could be covered by the grant?

The grant provides **general operating support** and **core support for institutional strengthening** which can support, but is not limited to, the following:

- Staff salaries, including for non-reporting staff (e.g. administrative staff, fundraisers or business/finance managers, etc.).
- Activities (including trainings and consultancies) aimed at strengthening the organisation, related to the following areas:
 - Human resources (including in relation to making the team more diverse)
 - Organisational culture (incl. internal communications, decision-making processes and staff well-being)
 - Management and Leadership
 - Governance
 - Financial management
 - Fundraising and donor relations
 - Mission and strategy
 - Learning and evaluation
 - Administration
 - Safety and security
 - Field/community engagement

- Organisational costs, including rent, equipment, legal support for issues that arise during the grant period, insurance, utilities, etc.

Please note that this specific Request for Proposals does **not** cover funding for:

- **Individual story lines** or journalists coming together to work on a specific story.
- Initiatives that are primarily aimed at **countering media capture, addressing legal and digital threats against journalists, and media literacy projects**.
- **Sectoral infrastructure projects**. Grantees are encouraged, however, to engage with existing infrastructure providers, through their core funding or the Funding Plus element.

How funding decisions are made

Decisions are made by a selection committee comprised of representatives of Civitates' partner foundations, who will be advised by a group of external experts from diverse backgrounds and geographies. The following factors are considered:

- The commitment, understanding, traction and track record of the applicant organisation and the experience of the team;
- the likelihood of the applicant organisation becoming stronger and more sustainable thanks to a Civitates grant;
- the degree to which the goals established by the applicant are ambitious as well as realistic;
- the commitment to engaging audiences in the interest of strengthening of democracy and solidarity in Europe, by exposing abuses of power and the drivers of polarization;
- its relevance to specific needs and conditions in the geography the applicant is operating in;
- the strategy and vision of how best to allocate its budget to allow for greatest impact.

Application requirements

Applicant organisations must ensure they fully meet the eligibility criteria as set out in this Request for Proposals. All applications should be in English and must include the following items:

- **Proposal Narrative:** This form collects basic organisational information and a description of the activities to be covered with Civitates funds.
- **Proposal Budget:** This should correspond to the activities proposed in the narrative document. For the concept note applicants are free to use their own format (a simplified budget will suffice), but the budget should be in Euros. For the full proposals, applicants are required to use the Civitates template, which will be provided to the shortlisted applicants.

How to submit your application

Please submit your application through the online application system, [here](#).

First, create a user account. Next, access the application form. You will receive a confirmation once your application has been submitted.

You can also access a word version of the application form on the online application system to help you prepare.

Need help?

Please have a look at our Frequently Asked Questions on the website. If you feel you haven't found what you were looking for please contact us at secretariat@civitates-eu.org.