MEDIA >FORWARD FUND

Application Guidelines

General Funding Line (GEN)

Contents

About the guidelines

Media Forward Fund selection process includes several steps. They are divided into oral and written stages.

With these guidelines, we provide applicants with additional information on the written procedures and explain what to look out for when applying.

The aim of these guidelines is to present the application process as transparently as possible and to anticipate the most important questions that might arise.

Basic information can be found on our website under the Apply tab. There you will find concise answers to the most important questions, including a timetable for the current call for application and our five overarching selection criteria.

Should you still have questions after reading our website and the guidelines, we invite you to take a look at our detailed FAQs.

If your question also isn't addressed in the FAQs, please contact us by email at: funding@mediaforwardfund.org.

Thank you for your interest in a grant from Media Forward Fund and for the time you invest in the application process!

We appreciate the effort organizations put into their application and we recognize that this can be a particular challenge for smaller and younger initiatives. We sincerely thank all applicants for their commitment.

Everything about the call for application

To the FAQs

3

Focus: General Funding Line (GEN)

At a glance:
With our funding, we hope to assist media organizations to strengthen their financial sustainability, allowing them to take their organization and journalistic work to the next level of development.

In detail:
Our focus is on projects which contribute to the growth of an existing offering, format, distribution channel or revenue stream and which …

Ideally:
… close a gap in reporting.

… can create transformative added value in the media sector through the use of new approaches.

… have a particular focus on reaching target audiences that have thus far been underserved by the news media.

The Media Forward Fund is therefore not aimed at organizations that are merely seeking to secure their continued existence or obtain one-time seed funding. You can find examples of previously supported projects on our website.
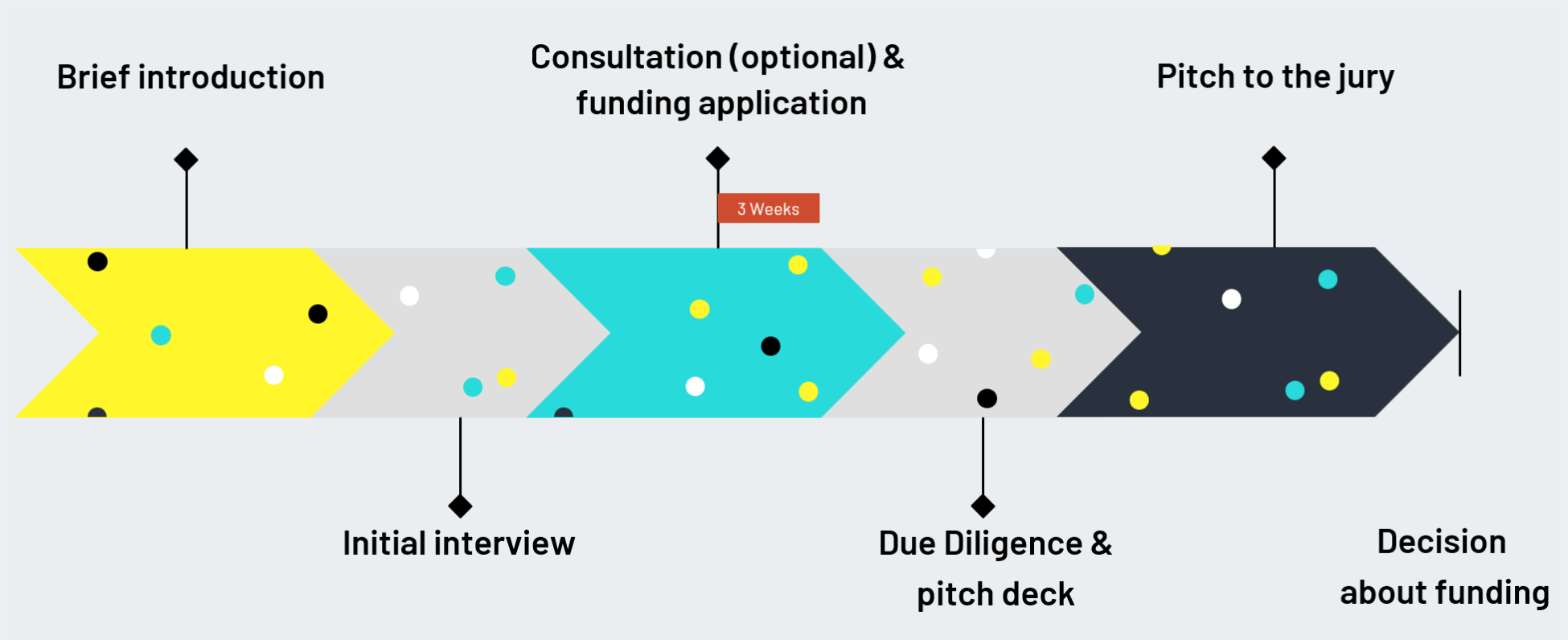
To the projects

Must-haves checklist

You must meet the following requirements in order to be eligible for funding:

1) The registered headquarters of your overall organization is in Germany, Austria or Switzerland.

2) Your organization must serve the common good. That means that the revenues produced by your work are predominantly generated with the intention of strengthening journalism in its social mission of promoting public education and strengthening democracy.

3) Your work is based on recognized journalistic/editorial standards, which you document publicly (or plan to do so). You are committed to the principles of the press code in your country.

4) You have a distinct structural and personnel separation between editorial and business management. If your company is younger than five years old and has fewer than 10 full-time equivalent employees (FTEs), there must be a demonstrable intention to implement this separation in the future.

5) You already have a working business model aimed at serving the common good. Consequently, you can demonstrate a proof-of-concept for your journalistic offering in addition to a product/market fit, confirmed by initial revenues generated from several sources primarily from the DACH region.

6) The focus of the project is on growing revenue sources that serve the common good, rather than merely applying to secure the continued existence of an organization (business-as-usual).

Selection process overview

The selection process is divided into five stages:

Brief introduction

Consultation (optional) & funding application

3 Weeks

Pitch to the jury

Initial interview

Due Diligence & pitch deck

Decision about funding

Brief introduction

The brief introduction is an online form which, for technical reasons, can only be called up once. Your answers to the questions cannot be cached. It is best to prepare your answers in advance using the brief introduction preview and then copy them all at once into the form before submission. Because of the large number of applications we receive, we are unable to send confirmation of receipt.

The aim of the brief introduction is to determine your eligibility and organization size based on the information provided and to gain a first impression of your organization, your journalistic work and your idea for using the grant. For this reason, most of the questions are single-choice questions. The number of characters for open answers is limited, as the focus should be on the essential information and therefore short, concise answers are initially sufficient.

By completing the brief introduction, you start the application process. You confirm that you meet our basic eligibility criteria based on our six must-haves (see page 5), introduce yourselves and your journalistic work, provide quantitative information about the size of your organization and the reach of your work – and most importantly: you present your project in a clear and convincing way.

We are particularly interested in learning:

1. How you specifically wish to use the funding and who you intend to reach
2. What effect your project will have on your long-term strategy and development of your organization, particularly the growth of your business model focused on the common good
3. To what extent your project intends to rely on approaches that differ from existing methods in Germany, Austria and Switzerland (DACH region) and/or in your market and/or meet a specific need
4. And whether your project targets communities that have thus far been underserved by the news media

Furthermore, we would also like to know how much funding you will need and for how long.

Preview short intro

Please note that in the brief introduction, we also ask whether the applicant organization is dependent on an affiliated entity (e.g. corporate group) or is under the control of a third party (e.g. parent company or companies). Only one organization per corporate group may apply in each funding round. This aspect of affiliation with other organizations is relevant for assessing the size of your organization. If your organization is part of a larger overall organization, the size determination is not based on the applicant organization, but on the entire overall organization. If the overall organization has more than 30 full-time equivalent employees (FTEs), it is considered large and is thus only eligible for project financing.
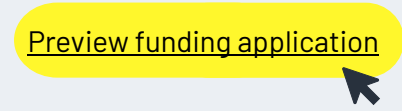
Once your eligibility for funding has been established by the information provided in the brief introduction and if your project fits with our funding goals, we would like to get to know you better by way of a telephone call or video call lasting a maximum of 30 minutes. No additional preparation is required for the initial interview.

Funding application

Once your eligibility for funding has been established by the information provided in the brief introduction and during the initial interview, you will be permitted to submit your funding application within **three weeks** through a form in our funding portal.

The initial interview, as an intermediate step between the brief introduction and the funding application, is intended to ensure that only organizations or projects with a real chance of success invest the time and effort needed for the application.

Eligible organizations will receive a registration link from us by e-mail, which they can use to register and access the relevant application form. The upload function for the required attachments can also be found at the end of the form. Before you begin preparing your application, however, you have the option of participating in a consultation discussion to clarify formal and content-related questions with us and to exchange ideas for the design of a suitable project.

The aim of your funding application is to provide us with a comprehensive picture of your organization, your journalistic work and your idea for using the grant. The structure of the application form reflects these focus areas: Section 2, "Your Organization," and Section 3, "Business Model and Journalistic Work," relate to your current situation, while Section 4, "Your Project," and Section 5, "Impact," focus on the initiative you are seeking funding for.

Based on a set of 13 questions, we want to learn more about the skills in your team, the current state of your organization and your strategy for the next three years. We also want to gain a better understanding of your business model and how your project will contribute to strengthening your financial sustainability. In addition, we are interested in the composition and needs of your target audience. Finally, we are interested in how your project stands out from existing developments and thus not only strengthens your unique selling point but also can create transformative added value in the media sector.

Preview funding application

For two of the questions, your answers will be automatically taken from the brief introduction so that you can use them as a basis for specifying your statements.

We have set guidelines for the number of characters per response. However, there is no default character limit so that you do not need to shorten sentences. Nevertheless, we recommend sticking to the suggested character maximum as orientation. You can shorten the time needed to complete the application by answering the designated questions in bullet points.

Timeline

Your funding application must also include a timeline in tabular form (e.g. in Excel) based on clearly defined milestones (15-20 milestones) that are to be achieved within the funding period.

Milestones should be seen as results-oriented sets of steps that lead to one or more verifiable partial result(s) (milestones). We suggest assigning each milestone a title, a deadline (e.g. month or quarter of a year), a description and a possible proof of fulfillment. Milestones can also be structured according to categories (e.g. recruiting, strategy planning, development, etc.)

Please ensure that the milestones reflect your goals when it comes to the further development of your organization, your journalistic work and, especially, the growth of your business model focused on the common good.

Preview milestones

Financing overview and planning

Your funding application must also include a financing overview and plan. The main purpose of the overview is to allow us to assess the relationship between costs and the expected impact, to verify whether you have the necessary proprietary resources (project funding for large media) and to understand what difference the grant can make to your organization.

The detailed overview should be submitted in tabular form (Excel) and should depict your budgetary planning for the current year as well as your planned cost and revenue development for the next three years, including the expenses covered by the grant applied for.

The overview should clearly demonstrate what difference the grant will make in terms of enabling your organization to generate (additional) revenue. If necessary, several scenarios (max. three) can be submitted within the same Excel sheet. Further explanations can be added in the form of notes below the tables.

With regard to expenses, please differentiate between the various types of expenses e.g. personnel costs, office and administrative expenses, costs for services, etc. There should be a balanced ratio between editorial and distribution-related expenses., if applicable, please also indicate all planned project-related revenues and other sources of income.

Information can be provided in either euros or Swiss francs. Only the total amount of funding requested along with specific details should be provided in euros in the designated spaces.

Please observe the instructions in the sample templates for the financing overview and finance planning as there are differences in tax law between for-profit media organizations and non-profit media organizations.

In the case of a cooperation with a for-profit media organization, the financial contribution made by the Fund to the cooperation partner is subject to VAT. Since, as a German non-profit organization, the Media Forward Fund is unable to deduct the VAT incurred, the VAT has the effect of increasing costs.

If the for-profit media organization is based in Austria or Switzerland, the "reverse charge" rule is in effect, whereby only the net amount can be paid out to the for-profit media organization.

Eligible costs

	Organizational funding	Project financing
Personnel costs Wages that are neither paid out directly nor regularly, such as special payments, benefits in kind, bonuses, and other services as well as severance payments, are not eligible for funding.	- Employees (full and part-time)	- Employees (full and part-time)
Office and administrative costs	- Office rent - Office material - General accounting - IT systems - Communication (e.g. telecommunications)	/
Travel and accommodation costs Travel expenses are based on the Federal Travel Expenses Act and the overview of accommodation allowances 2024/2025 abroad of the Federal Ministry of Finance	- Travel by public transport and airplane - Car rental - Accommodation costs	**max. 10% of the requested funding amount** - Travel by public transport and airplane - Car rental - Accommodation costs

Costs for services Fees for freelancers, consulting, contractual work Contributions to the <u>Künstlersozialkasse</u> (Artists' Social Security Fund) are not eligible for funding.	- Completion of studies or surveys (e.g. evaluations, strategies, concept papers, planning concepts, handbooks) - Development, modifications and modernization of IT systems and websites - Legal consulting and notary services, technical and financial expertise - Auditing services - Services related to the organization and holding of events or conferences (e.g. translation services, moderation, fees / expenses for experts, speakers, facilitators, entrance staff, technicians) - Translations	- Services in connection with conception, analyses and evaluation - Legal consulting pertaining to the project - Services related to the organization and holding of events or conferences (e.g. translation services, moderation, fees / expenses for experts, speakers, facilitators, entrance staff, technicians) - Translations
Costs related to own events or meetings (with the exception of service providers, see above)	- Catering - Rent for event/convention space	- Catering - Rent for event/convention space
Training and further education	- Fees for training courses - Entry fees for events	- Fees for training courses - Entry fees for events
Costs for the purchase of technical equipment and machinery, particularly capitalizable investments in tangible fixed assets	- Office equipment - IT hardware and software - Furniture and equipment - Machinery and instruments	/
Contingency category "unforeseen consts"	**max. 2 % of the requested funding amount**	/

Please also note that we are unable to finance costs at non-profit media organizations that are attributable to commercial business operations. Such costs include, for example, expenses for the operation or development of an online shop for the marketing of products or the sale of food or drinks as part of the organization's own events.

In cooperations with for-profit media organizations, we are unable to provide support for activities that boost the commercial sales activities of that for-profit company (e.g. a newsletter that is only sent to paying customers or published content that is behind a paywall). In addition, no assets can be financed by the Media Forward Fund that become the property of the for-profit organization free of charge (e.g. the programming of an app that boosts the sales value of the app and thus of the company, or the development of an online platform).

Traffic and audience marketing plan

Along with your funding application, you are also required to submit a traffic and audience marketing plan for the current year. This refers to your plans to achieve your growth targets with regard to reach and the revenues earned through your users. Should you not yet have a traffic and audience marketing plan, we would request that you develop such a plan for the first funding year.

Traffic and audience marketing plan

The The plan may include the following information:

- Website: Unique users and monthly visits
- Newsletter: Subscriber number and opening rates
- Social Media: Engagement
- Podcast: Downloads per month across all platforms

Application attachment checklist

Project timeline based on milestones

Financing overview and planning (incl. current year operating budget)

Traffic and audience marketing plan for the current year

Annual financial statement or preliminary financial statement of preceding fiscal year

Extract from the register of associations or commercial register incl. list of shareholders

Only for non-profit organizations based in Austria or Switzerland**:** Completed and signed form confirming non-profit status, including the required supporting document

Only for charitable organizations based in Germany: Proof of charitable status - depending on legal form and date of establishment, this may be either the annex to the corporate tax notice, the exemption notice, or the notice confirming compliance with the statutory requirements pursuant to § 60a (1) (if the organization has not yet received an exemption notice or annex to the tax notice).

Latest annual report relevant to the grant project (optional)

Editorial code of conduct (optional)

Strategic plan or business plan (optional)

Evaluation report(s)(optional)

Due diligence

After reviewing the applications, we continue the selection process with the most promising projects by deepening the due diligence process on your organization.

The due diligence process is integrated in the entire selection process and is finalized before we send your application to the jury.

The assessment is based on the information you have provided, desk research, internal documents you have submitted (attachments to the funding application) and one or two reference interviews, which we will conduct following the review of your application. In your funding application, you are asked to provide two references who will be willing to provide detailed and candid feedback on your work and your organization. We also reserve the right to ask members of our expert council to evaluate you and your project.

Should we determine that the internal documents submitted with your funding application are insufficient, we will request additional information in a timely manner.

Once due diligence has been completed, results will be summarized in a short report, which will further inform the jury's decision, along with the Media Forward Fund team's funding recommendation and your pitch.

Pitch deck

As we in the Media Forward Fund team complete the due diligence process for your organization, you will be preparing your pitch for the jury by working on your pitch deck.

The pitch deck, completed in PowerPoint format with approx. 10 – 15 slides, should reflect the most important information from your funding application. We suggest an overarching structure with three parts:

1) About us
2) Our work and where we currently stand
3) Where we want to go with our project

Further details and recommendations regarding the structure and formalities will be sent to organizations admitted to the pitch by e-mail. These are not mandatory requirements, but rather a guideline to help you structure and design your pitch deck.

It is important to note here that it is the information on the slides that counts first and foremost, and not the appearance of the presentation. We are aware that many organizations do not employ their own graphic designers.

On the basis of the first draft of your pitch deck, we conduct a feedback meeting that lasts approximately one hour. Afterwards, you will have sufficient time to revise your pitch deck so that it is finished in time for pitch day.