HORIZON-CL2-2026-01-DEMOCRACY-04: Sustainable paths to media viability

Key Dates

Call Opening Date: May 12, 2026

Submission deadline: Sep 23, 2026

Evaluation Period/Expected Results: TBD (typically 5 months after deadline)

Estimated Project Start: TBD (typically 8–10 months after deadline)

Basic Information

Call Title: Sustainable paths to media viability

Funding Programme/Cluster: Horizon Europe – Cluster 2: Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society

Call Topic ID/Reference Code: HORIZON-CL2-2026-01-DEMOCRACY-04

Work Programme: Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society 2026

Link to Official Call Document: https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/wp-call/2026-2027/wp-5-culture-creativity-and-inclusive-society_horizon-2026-2027_en.pdf

Objectives

This call aims to strengthen the economic sustainability, digital transformation, and democratic role of European news media by supporting innovation actions that develop new business models, AI-enabled tools, recommender systems, trust indicators, and pan-European media solutions. Projects should help journalism remain viable, visible, and trustworthy in AI-driven and platform-mediated information ecosystems, while empowering citizens—especially disadvantaged groups—to make informed democratic choices.

Scope summary

Democracies are weakened when independent journalism lacks sustainable financing. Newsrooms face severe economic pressure due to platform competition, AI-driven content distribution, declining advertising revenues, and information disorder.

The call supports solution-driven innovation to:

- Distinguish professional journalism from opinion, misinformation, and low-quality content

- Promote journalistic standards (accuracy, independence, pluralism, inclusivity)

- Develop AI-enabled, user-centric, and revenue-generating media services

- Strengthen Europe's media ecosystem through cross-border collaboration and interoperability

Projects must work with news media organisations from the outset and focus on deployable, scalable solutions within the project lifetime.

Outcomes	Description
Name	Reinforced digital tra... sustainable business ... institutional framewo...
Name	Empowered citizens, ... better equipped to re... enhancing the media'...
Name	Add description

Key Priorities and Challenges

Priorities	Challenges
Sustainable and innovative revenue models for journalism	Economic pressure on newsrooms and declining revenues
AI-enabled tools aligned with journalistic standards	Competition with social media and infotainment platforms

Priorities	Challenges
Visibility and prominence of trusted news in digital and AI-mediated environments	Loss of visibility in AI-driven search and recommender systems
Cross-border and pan-European media collaboration	Distinguishing professional journalism from misinformation
User-centric, inclusive media design	Maintaining pluralism and democratic debate online

Eligibility & Consortium Requirements

Eligible Organisation Types: Research and academic institutions (e.g. media studies, information science); Technology companies (e.g. AI, ad-tech, recommender systems)

Minimum Consortium Rules: Standard Horizon Europe IA rules (General Annex B); Mandatory participation of at least one news media organisation as beneficiary or affiliated entity

Geographic Requirements: Horizon Europe eligible countries
Any Special Eligibility Notes: Subject to restrictions for the protection of European communication networks

Budget & Funding Structure

- **Total Call Budget:** EUR 12.00 million
- **Indicative Project Budget Range:** EUR 3.50 – 4.00 million
- **Funding Rate:** Up to 100% of eligible costs (Innovation Action)
- **Cost Model:** Lump sum funding
- **Typical Project Duration:** 36–48 months (expected)

Application Requirements

- **Proposal Template Needed:** Horizon Europe Innovation Action template
- **Required Sections / Documents:**
    - Excellence
    - Impact
    - Implementation
    - Consortium & Management
    - Ethics / Security
- **TRL (Technology Readiness Level), if applicable:** Mid to high TRLs expected (prototype development, testing, roll-out)

Evaluation Criteria Highlights

- **Scientific Excellence:**
    - Quality and credibility of innovative solutions
    - Integration of journalistic standards into technical design
    - Co-creation with news media organisations
- **Innovation / Market Potential:**
    - Viability of business models and revenue mechanisms
    - Scalability and pan-European relevance
    - Deployment of working prototypes (e.g. recommender systems, paywalls, ad systems)
- **Socioeconomic / Sustainability Impact:**

- Contribution to media sustainability and democratic resilience
- Citizen empowerment and exposure to plural viewpoints
- Strengthening trustworthy information ecosystems

Additional Notes

- Strong encouragement for:

  - Cross-border collaboration

  - Media industry federation and joint innovation agendas

  - Use of EOSC, European Research Infrastructures, and relevant Data Spaces

  - Clustering and cooperation among funded projects

Actions for Interested Researchers

- **Internal Expression of Interest Deadline:** TBC (organisation-specific)

- **Next Steps:**

  - Identify media partners early
  - Define concrete, deployable prototypes
  - Build a balanced consortium (media + research + tech)
  - Monitor Funding & Tenders Portal for official publication and dates