**APPLICATION GUIDELINES**

2016

**BALKAN FELLOWSHIP FOR JOURNALISTICE EXCELLENCE: BACKGROUND AND AIMS**

The Balkan news media are increasingly required to report on complex reform issues with regional and European dimensions. Journalists, however, are under-prepared to tackle these, lacking resources for appropriate training and foreign travel.

To encourage regional networking among journalists and advance balanced coverage of topics that are central to the region as well as to the EU, ERSTE Foundation and the Open Society Foundations are supporting the Balkan Fellowship for Journalistic Excellence programme in cooperation with the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network.

**The programme**

Ten fellows from Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia will be selected on the basis of applications submitted. The fellowship will run from **April** until **December 2016** and three winners shall be selected during the final seminar held at the end of the year.

Fellows are expected during this period to produce one in-depth journalistic article of around 2,500 words, based on the research proposal they submit. Editorial guidance and control shall be provided by BIRN.

The fellowship programme involves the following elements:

1. Fellowship bursary of €2,000 per selected fellow
2. Introductory seminar in Vienna, with regional and international speakers (April 2016)
3. Grant of up to €2,000 for research expenses, including one regional trip and one trip within the EU, with guidance and organisational support provided by programme partners
4. On-going mentoring and support from programme editor and BIRN representatives in Balkan countries
5. Two-day editing sessions in the region (September /October 2016)
6. Final evaluation seminar and award ceremony in the region (December 2016)
7. Worldwide publication of reports in all local languages and English (November /December 2016)
8. Membership of fellowship alumni network

**Award**

The selection committee judges the quality of the reports and awards prizes to three fellows. The top prize-winner will win €4,000, the second will receive €3,000 and the third €1,000.

**FELLOWSHIP RULES**

**1. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA**

**1.1. Who can participate?**

Individuals from Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia with demonstrable journalistic experience are eligible to apply for the Balkan Fellowship for Journalistic Excellence. Applicants should have citizenship of one of the countries covered by the programme. Applicants should be proficient in English (speaking, reading and comprehension), although reports may be written in local languages.

**1.2 Employer consent**

Applicants must be able to dedicate adequate time to the fellowship, in terms of research, trips, attending the opening and closing seminars, writing and attending publicity events. To that end, any necessary permission from the applicant’s employer to participate in the fellowship should be secured in advance.

**2. THEME OF THE 2016 FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMME: TRUST**

The theme for this year's fellowship is Trust. Use this topic to inspire a new idea for a story. Or think of a story you've wanted to write and see if you can link it to the topic.

Your story proposal must have a connection to the theme, even if it is a loose one. The theme is deliberately broad to allow a wide a range of story ideas.

You might want to write about a breach or breakdown of trust - for example, between a state institution and citizens, between a company and its shareholders or customers, or between communities. How did this happen and who is responsible?

For you as a journalist, public distrust of media outlets might be an issue. Or lack of trust between politicians and journalists. You might want to explore possible reasons behind this, such as the ownership of media organisations.

You may know a story of people finding that their trust was misplaced. Sometimes a loss of trust occurs when people feel their physical or economic security is under threat. Do they look elsewhere for someone or something they can trust?

Or you may have a story of efforts to rebuild trust - between nations, communities, organisations or individuals. How is this being done? What difficulties have people had to overcome?

A trust can also be an organisation that manages assets for the public good. Charities can be trusts too. Perhaps you have a story about an organisation like this? And a trust in the sense of "anti-trust legislation" can be a company that has or tries to gain a monopoly in a particular market. Do you know a good example of this?

Whatever your idea, remember that you must explore it not just in your home country. The fellowship offers the chance to examine an issue in different countries in the region and in the European Union. Do some research to see how the experiences of other countries fit into your story.

Your story should have an investigative or analytical element.

It should also be topical, reflecting a current issue, and it should tell the reader something new - something that has not been widely reported. If you want to tackle an issue that has already had a lot of coverage, think of a new angle, an element that has been neglected in media reports so far.

In your proposal, make sure you answer the usual journalistic questions (who? when? where? why? how?) and also "so what?" - why should readers be interested in this story? Explain what makes this story relevant and interesting.

**3. ELIGIBILITY AND COMPULSORY ACTIVITIES**

**3.1 Project idea and implementation**

The theme of the Balkan Fellowship for Journalistic Excellence 2016 is TRUST (see section 2 above). The submitted project proposal must refer to this theme and demonstrate an original approach to researching and reporting an important aspect of the topic. The project should also seek to enhance information and dialogue among the countries of south-eastern Europe, SEE, and between SEE and the EU.

Appropriate research should be conducted in order to produce an article of around 2,500 words. The article should feature fresh information and interviews, and be analytical or investigative in nature.

The report may be written in a local language or English, at the fellows’ discretion. Editorial support will NOT be available in the local language, but only in English.

Applicants’ proposals should refer primarily to the country where they normally reside, but include plans to conduct useful cross border research in other country in the SEE region and/or EU member state.

Research and travel costs provided by this programme shall not exceed €2,000. Practical support shall be provided by programme partners to help organise research trips and access information and sources.

Fellows may carry out all forms of journalistic research necessary to further their approved project. Illegal means of gathering information or trips without relevance to the fellowship will not be approved and should not be carried out.

Fellows must attend the opening and closing programme seminars, and work cooperatively with the BIRN editor/trainers throughout the training, research, reporting and editorial phases. During the programme, fellows must keep in touch with, and respond promptly to requests of the appointed local BIRN editor/trainer and programme manager.

Fellows must cooperate with the programme’s editorial team throughout the editorial phase to resolve outstanding issues and prepare the submitted report for publication.

Research and training should result in the timely submission of an article of around 2,500 words (see schedule below, section 3.4).

**3.2 Editorial control**

BIRN editors shall edit all fellows’ reports. While fellows retain the right to approve the version of the report which is published, BIRN editing shall be compulsory.

The English-language edition shall be the definitive version, with other language versions provided by translating it.

Guidance and training in editorial style and standards shall be provided at the introductory seminar, and supplemented by the BIRN programme team throughout the project phases.

**3.3 Publication**

Reports shall be published exclusively by BIRN. Further media outlets shall be encouraged to republish them, providing they inform BIRN and credit the fellow-author and the Fellowship programme.

BIRN shall retain all rights to the reports, in all language versions and formats in which they are published.

Fellows may not use, promote or publish versions of the reports other than the approved BIRN edit.

**3.4 Duration and location**

The fellowship programme officially begins in **April 2016** with a four-day seminar in Vienna but fellows are obliged to conduct some research and submit travel and interview plans, in writing, before the opening seminar.

The research phase, during which time research travel must be completed, lasts until the end of **July 2016**. First drafts of reports must be submitted by **July 14, 2016.** This will befollowed by a three-week period in which fellows address editors’ comments and submit their article, which will be judged by the Selection Committee and also go through a detailed editing process.

The editing phase lasts from **September to** **the end of** **November 2016**. The articles are published during November/December and programme promotion take place during **December 2016** across the region.

The three-day final seminar shall take place in **December 2016** in a regional country covered by the programme.

**3.5 Number of applications**

Applicants should complete and submit only one application with one research proposal. Multiple applications by individuals and joint applications by more than one individual are not eligible.

**4. AWARDS FOR FELLOWS’ ARTICLES**

The top prize-winning fellow shall receive €4,000, the second €3,000 and the third €1,000. Winning articles will be selected by members of the selection committee, based on transparent evaluation criteria. Selection committee members will be judging original, unedited, versions of articles submitted by fellows.

**5. FINANCIAL TERMS AND CONDITIONS**

* Fellows shall receive their €2,000 fellowship bursary at the project’s outset
* Research and travel expenses of up to €1,000 shall be given in advance
* Research and travel expenses of up to €1,000 shall be reimbursed in arrears
* Research expenses shall only be reimbursed upon provision of adequate receipts and approval by BIRN
* Eligible expenses include: travel costs incurred on the basis of approved travel plans; per diem costs according to official scale; reasonable accommodation costs; reasonable telecommunications costs; costs incurred to access databases; reasonable representation costs.
* Further details of eligible costs and receipts shall be provided to fellows at the programme’s introductory seminar.
* Fellows should include the cost of travel insurance as a research expense. Balkan Fellowship for Journalistic Excellence programme shall not be held liable for fellows’ health, safety or security during the programme
* Should research costs amount to less than €2,000, the balance shall not be provided to fellows
* Should any fellow fail to make appropriate efforts to participate in the programme and complete his/her report, the award and travel expenses shall be returned to BIRN

**6. HOW TO APPLY**

**6.1. Application form**

The proposal for a fellowship reporting project must be submitted using the Balkan Fellowship for Journalistic Excellence application form. It must be accompanied by the signed declaration of the applicant.

In order to be properly assessed, all parts of the application form should be filled in as carefully and clearly as possible. Any additional information attached to the application must be clearly marked and included in the same e-mail in which the application is submitted.

The application must be in English.

Applicants are encouraged to read the following advice online to maximise their chances of a successful application: <https://fellowship.birn.eu.com/en/fellowship-programme/seven-tips-for-a-strong-bfje-application>

**6.2. Example of applicant’s work**

Applicants shall provide at least one relevant example of their writing. Samples may be provided in English or local languages.

**6.3. Deadline for applications**

The deadline for applications is **March 1, 2016**. BIRN will advise applicants if they have any questions about their applications.

**6.4. Where and how to send the application?**

Completed applications should be sent as electronic files by email to: [fellowship@birn.eu.com](mailto:fellowship@birn.eu.com).

Or by post to:

Balkan Fellowship for Journalistic Excellence - Application

c/o: BIRN

Kolarceva str. 7/V

11000 Beograd

Serbia

Applicants will receive an email acknowledging receipt.

**7. EVALUATION AND SELECTION OF APPLICATIONS**

Considering the large number of applications received every year, the programme editor, in cooperation with BIRN editors throughout the region, will prepare a shortlist of recommended applications for the international Selection Committee. This shortlist is advisory and committee members retain the right to examine and select other applications.

To be able to assess the submitted applications in a transparent way, members of the SC will use the following evaluation criteria**.**

The 10 best applications for research and reporting projects will be chosen on the basis of scores submitted by SC members.

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| **Fellow Selection** | **Reference to questions on the application form** | **Maximum score** |
| **PROJECT PROPOSAL CONTENT** | * Relevance * Feasibility * Originality | **60** |
| **CANDIDATE** | * Professional qualifications * Motivation * Journalistic approach | **60** |
| **Maximum total score** |  | **120** |

**8. NOTIFICATION OF SELECTED PROJECT PROPOSALS**

Successful candidates will be informed by email about the results of the evaluation and awarded project proposals by the end of **March 2016.**

**Information and coordination**

For Information about the fellowship and application documents visit:  [fellowship.birn.eu.com](http://www.birn.eu.com/fellowship).

Information on ERSTE Foundation: [www.erstestiftung.org](http://www.erstestiftung.org)

Information on the Open Society Foundations: www.opensocietyfoundations.org

Information on BIRN: [www.birn.eu.com](http://www.birn.eu.com)