

4 January 2021

Funding Request to the IMI

1. Background and goals

1.1 General context

As a result of digitization, traditional media companies are faced with many critical challenges that threaten their existence and force them to undergo a profound transformation: media convergence, growing competition from platforms, changes in audience consumption habits, mistrust of the public towards the media, acceleration of technology advancement, etc. The scale of these challenges requires imagining novel multidisciplinary approaches that involve the industry, social and human sciences and engineering sciences, in a combined effort to seek out solutions based on collaborations between both professional and academic parties.

By supporting research projects, the IMI intends to defend the principle of applied research allowing for media partners to carry on their digital transformation and their quest for sustainable solutions, and for scientific institutions to pursue novel research in their domains.

1.2 High-priority issues

The IMI encourages the submission of any applied research project that fits into the general context of the media (1.1), corresponding to the types of research project expected (1.3) and corresponding to the criteria and conditions (1.4 et 2). While they are by no means exclusive, the following issues are of high priority:

- Ensure the quality and diversity of information.
- Evolve traditional business models.
- Ensure accessibility to the media, to all audiences, while adapting to new ways in which audiences consume information (user experience, interface design, accessibility, etc.).
- Leverage the potential of artificial intelligence while protecting users' privacy (personalization, content recommendation, automated writing, automatic video creation, social network analysis, content delivery optimization, information verification, etc.).
- Create a relationship of trust with the public and encourage audience engagement and participation.
- Explore formats and narratives that promote interactivity with the public.
- Better understand audience behavior and provide a deeper insight into the audience and its evolution to meet their new expectations.

- Ensure the independence of the media, particularly in a context of political and economic pressure and the role played by major platforms in the distribution of and access to information.

1.3 Types of research projects expected

The IMI supports the following types of projects:

- Applied and experimental research projects beneficial to media organizations, by offering, for example, prototypes for possible solutions, tools, or practical approaches which could be tested and integrated into their workflow and implemented on their digital platforms.
- Multidisciplinary research projects covering professional practices, narratives, economic issues, audiences, etc.
- Exploratory research projects, which may involve some risk taking, and which may serve as a foundation for the development of more applied projects.

In all cases, collaborations with media organizations which are members of the IMI are expected to facilitate this process.

Furthermore, projects should build on the knowledge of initiatives, tools or experiences already carried out elsewhere, in Switzerland but also internationally. Project coordinators are invited to clarify this aspect in the application document (state of the art, benchmark, best practices, etc.), and possibly to establish prior contact with potential international partners.

1.4 Length, budget and beginning of projects

The IMI will only consider project proposals which respect the following criteria:

- The IMI aims to fund projects of varying duration:
 - Short-term projects: usually as a proof of concept for new approaches, methods or application ideas over a period of a few months.
 - Medium-term projects: typically over a 12-month period in order to achieve a concrete result.
 - Longer-term projects: more ambitious research, over a maximum period of 3 years, aimed at certain priority issues that are motivated by one or more media organizations that are involved in the project. For projects of 2 years or more, an annual evaluation by the IMI Scientific Committee will decide whether or not the project may continue according to the compliance of the intermediate deliverables to be provided (see 2.2).
- The amount allocated per project should in principle not exceed CHF 120,000 per year, omitting overheads.

- The budget allocated by the IMI are primarily intended for salaries related to scientific research (post-doc, scientific collaborator, etc.), to which some operating costs may be added, as well as overheads conforming to the regulations of the project coordinator's institution. The budget outline must be drafted in accordance with the template provided in Appendix 1 and must reflect the intended collaborations.
- The funding allocated by the IMI shall be managed by the project coordinator belonging to a scientific institution which is a member of the IMI (see 2.1) who then has the possibility of allocating part of it to potential academic, media or industry partners.
- The budget can therefore include contributions that are provided by the media partner/s in the framework of the project, beyond the exchange of know-how and project tracking.
- The IMI encourages the use of additional funding from third parties in the context of the projects it supports. In this case, the project coordinator must first discuss the matter with the IMI, in particular for issues related to intellectual property and access to results.
- Projects must in principle start no later than 3 months after the decision of the IMI to grant a subsidy (see 4.3).

2. Conditions and terms of engagement regarding IMI projects

2.1 Modalities to participate in research projects

In its pursuit of promoting applied research, the IMI will consider project proposals based on the following framework:

- Any project funded by the IMI must be conducted by at least one scientific institution which is a member of the IMI (EPFL, University of Geneva, University of Lausanne, University of Neuchâtel, HES-SO Valais-Wallis) and must be managed by a project coordinator affiliated with one of these institutions.
- Collaborations between the scientific and media sectors are expected as part of these projects, through the participation of at least one media organization which is a member of the IMI (among the following groups: Ringier/Ringier Axel Springer and SRG) and with which the coordinator will have to establish a partnership.
- A project may also be submitted by one or more media organizations which are members of the IMI, through joint coordination with a scientific institution.
- Project coordinators are invited to build these partnerships before submitting the project proposal (see 3). Prior to this, project coordinators are encouraged to contact the IMI to facilitate this process.
- Collaborations with institutions outside of the IMI (including international collaborations) are encouraged, be they with academia, a media organization or an industry partner.

- There are no limits to the number of projects submitted by institution or by person.

2.2 Commitments of the project coordinator and of the IMI

Each project coordinator commits to:

- Make a brief mid-term (projects of less than 2 years) or annual (projects of 2 years or more) financial and scientific report to be reviewed by the IMI Scientific Committee according to the terms of the research contract (see 2.3). For projects of 2 years or more, the annual evaluation will decide more specifically whether or not the project may continue according to the compliance of the intermediate deliverables to be provided. At most 2 months after the end of the financing period, he/she must submit a final financial and scientific report, also for the benefit of the IMI Scientific Committee. The financial report must describe how the allocated funds were used. The scientific report will detail, in particular, the accomplishments and results of the project, as well as possible perspectives for continuation (incubation, development, etc.).
- Participate in events showcasing the accomplishments of the various projects funded by the IMI.
- Promote free access to project results and in particular to any scientific publications, and possibly even to some technical developments (source code, datasets, etc.).
- Offer the possibility to one or more members of the IMI who would wish to pursue the project, bilaterally, under conditions to be jointly defined.

The IMI commits to:

- Ensure that each project coordinator and each participant of the project remains the sole proprietor of the obtained results during the execution of the project and retains all the intellectual property and usage rights associated with them.
- Ensure that every researcher and any academic institution involved in the project can benefit from total freedom of research, instruction and publication.
- Ensure that any media organization involved in the project can benefit from total freedom of information and editorial freedom.

2.3 Research contract

Each project coordinator, via their institution, will have the obligation of signing a Grant Agreement prior to obtaining a subsidy from the IMI. This agreement will regulate, among other things, the timetable for payments, the reports to provide, scientific publications and establishes intellectual property rights and the modalities of result usage.

3. Submission of project proposals

Project proposals, maximum 12 pages long, written in English or in French, must be sent by email to projects@media-initiative.ch after an initial contact with the IMI for a preliminary discussion (see 4.3) and must include:

1. The title of the project.
2. A summary (max. 300 words) including key words (max. 6).
3. A full description of the project: state-of-the-art, goals, methods and expected results.
4. Benefits for academic research:
 - a. How does the proposed project benefit academic research?
 - b. A description outlining the multidisciplinary dimension of the project.
5. Innovation for media organizations:
 - a. How does the proposed project benefit the media sector?
 - b. What are the expected practical benefits for the media partner/s associated with the project (usability), and more generally for all media organizations which are members of the IMI (replicability, sustainability)?
6. The details on the deliverables of the project (conception and implementation of tools, scientific publications, etc.).
7. The timetable for the project and the main steps.
8. A detailed budget outline (detailing if the funding is full or partial and what other sources of financing are involved, if any) according to the template provided in Appendix 1. The budget outline must also reflect the intended collaborations.
9. A description of the societal impact of the project.
10. A presentation of the project coordinator or co-coordinators (please attach the CVs to the submission) as well as the names, positions and contributions to the project of academic, media and industry partners.
11. An evaluation of the tasks to be carried out by the media organization/s associated with the project in order to assess the workload required.
12. A letter of support from each media organization associated with the project, describing the objectives they wish to achieve through the partnership.
13. Additional observations you wish to communicate to the reviewers (intellectual property rights, patent applications, etc.).

Instead of a full project proposal, project coordinators may submit a pre-project proposal, consisting of a maximum of 3 pages, in English or in French, outlining the main aspects of the project, its timetable and the requested budget, in order to obtain a preliminary advice from the IMI before submitting a full project proposal.

4. Process, evaluation criteria and timetable

4.1 Process

The project proposals submitted to the IMI will be evaluated by the IMI Scientific Committee, which will in turn submit recommendations to the IMI Board on the projects which will receive a subsidy.

4.2 Evaluation criteria

The main evaluation criteria are the following:

- Relevance in at least one of the high-priority issues of the IMI (1.2).
- Collaboration between the academic, media and industry sectors.
- Potential for innovation and for academic research (project quality and scientific relevance).
- Multidisciplinary nature of the project.
- Potential for innovation and exploitation for the media sector.
- Benefits for IMI members (usability, replicability, sustainability).
- Expertise of the project coordinator and of the partners involved.
- Societal impacts of the project.
- Objectives (realistic).
- Calendar (manageable).
- Budget (reasonable).

4.3 Timetable

As of January 2021, grant applications may be submitted at any time after an initial contact with the IMI for a preliminary discussion. The evaluation procedure usually takes up to 3 months, after which the IMI contacts the project coordinators in writing to inform them of the decision made by the IMI Board. Projects must in principle start no later than 3 months after the decision of the IMI to grant a subsidy.



5 About the IMI

5.1 Description

The IMI is a consortium of academic, public and private partners that was created in January 2018 in an effort to support and develop innovation in the media and IT sector. The aim of this alliance is to initiate research projects with partner universities and to conduct activities to support innovation, in particular through the organization of events and the creation of a community that brings together researchers, media professionals and investors.

To this end, the IMI founding members which are EPFL, SRG, Ringier and Triangle Azur—a cooperation network between the Universities of Geneva, Lausanne and Neuchâtel—as well as the IMI affiliate members such as the HES-SO Valais-Wallis, maintain an innovation support fund with an annual budget of CHF 700,000. The Federal Office of Communications (OFCOM) is also supporting projects under this initiative. The IMI is open to all private and public organizations, in Switzerland or abroad, who wish to join and are active in the relevant fields.



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7 Appendix 1: Project budget template

Direct costs

Direct personnel costs (salaries)

Title, first name, last name	Institution / organization	Project role ¹	Involvement (%)	Duration (month)	Total cost ²

Other direct costs

Description	Total cost ³
Research / field costs	
Web hosting / computation costs	
Publication / dissemination costs	
Travel costs	
Consultant / subcontractor fees	
Other operating costs	

Total direct costs (a)	
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Indirect costs

Overheads

Projects carried out by a scientific institution may be subject to overheads, in accordance with the rules laid down by the institution in this respect. These overheads cover part of the indirect costs (in particular infrastructure and management costs) related to research activities. When several institutions collaborate on a project, each institution may claim its overheads separately according to the funding it receives.

¹ Postdoc, PhD student, scientific collaborator, assistant, student, developer, etc.

² Including social contributions.

³ The project coordinator is invited to describe and justify each of these costs if they are not made explicit in the project proposal.



Total direct costs involved	Overheads (%)	Overheads amount

Total indirect costs (b)	
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Total funding requested (a+b)	
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