



Digital News Transformation Fund (DNTF)

Funding Policy

Effective Date: 4 August 2025

1. Definitions

The following terms are used in this FUNDING POLICY:

Applicant: Any organisation/s applying for funding from the DNTF.

Adjudication Committee: A group of independent experts reviewing and scoring applications for funding approvals.

Collective Beneficiaries: Groups or coalitions of eligible publishers or support organisations submitting a joint proposal.

DNTF: The Digital News Transformation Fund forms part of the Tshikululu Trust and aims to promote access to media and a free press in South Africa in a non-profit manner and with an altruistic or philanthropic intent, by supporting digital transformation and sustainability. To achieve this the Fund aims to support the sustainability, innovation, and digital transformation of small and medium local independent media organisations in South Africa. This funding policy establishes the criteria, application framework, and project focus areas to ensure the fund's objectives are met effectively.

Funder: The donor providing financial support to the DNTF.

GenAI / AGI: Generative and general artificial intelligence tools used to support journalistic production, automation, or business model innovation.

Impact Report: A qualitative and quantitative report submitted after project completion to evaluate results and learning.

Local: News organisations that primarily serve specific geographic communities such as towns, districts or provinces, especially outside major cities.

Oversight and Advisory Board (Board): A multi-stakeholder body overseeing governance, strategic funding priorities, and the strategic alignment of the decisions of the Adjudication Committee with the defined strategy of the Fund, reporting its findings to the Trustees.

Press Council: The Press Council of South Africa, responsible for upholding journalistic ethics.

Public-interest journalism: Journalistic activity that is central to the democratic function and the protection and promotion of the South African Constitution, including



investigative journalism, reporting on the daily affairs of public institutions, and local journalism focused on the news coverage of towns and villages and underserved rural areas.

POPIA: Protection of Personal Information Act, 4 of 2013.

PBO: Public Benefit Organisation in terms of the Income Tax Act.

Trustees: The trustees for the time being of the Tshikululu Trust.

Tshikululu: Tshikululu Social Investments NPC, being the appointed administrator of the Tshikululu Trust and accordingly, the DNTF, as per the mandate given to it by the Trustees.

Tshikululu Trust: The Tshikululu Trust, a discretionary inter vivos trust and registered PBO, with Master's reference number IT 2067/2009 (G), and acting through its Trustees.

2. Purpose and objective

The objectives of the DNTF are to support editorial processes and the development of sustainable business models and practices for digital news products:

1. To support local and independent news publishers to (i) enable or improve their digital development to increase their audience and reach, and (ii) to achieve tangible technological or commercial goals.
2. To promote transformation, equity, diversity, and inclusion in local and independent news publishers in South Africa.
3. To encourage strategies aimed at the sustainability of journalism, including the use of technology and adoption of both GenAI and artificial general intelligence (AGI) in support of editorial processes and the development of sustainable business models and practices.
4. To support local and independent news publishers to access or build fact checking initiatives to combat mis- and disinformation.
5. To support and promote original public-interest journalism.
6. To promote audience engagement and development, diversity, advertising revenue, and/or reader revenue objectives.
7. To have a product-agnostic approach.

This funding policy outlines the procedures for the management, assessment, adjudication, and reporting of grants provided by the DNTF. It ensures consistency,



transparency, and accountability in all activities related to the DNTF. A publicly accessible list of beneficiaries, funding amounts, and project details will be maintained.

Tshikululu will ensure all disbursements comply with its tax-exempt status and internal governance framework. This does not affect the eligibility of for-profit or non-profit applicants, as defined in this policy.

3. Scope

This funding policy applies to all Tshikululu staff involved with Tshikululu's administrative duties in respect of the Tshikululu Trust and with specific reference to the DNTF, Oversight and Advisory Board members, adjudication committee members, and other stakeholders involved in the DNTF funding lifecycle, including application processing, evaluation, disbursement, monitoring, and reporting.

4. Eligibility criteria

In order to be considered for funding, individual or collective applicants must:

1. Be a legally registered South African entity (e.g., non-profit company, trust, voluntary association, or private company). Where an individual or informal collective applies, a documented partnership with a legally registered umbrella/fiscal host organisation that will administer funds is required. (For-profit and non-profit entities are eligible.)
2. Be subscriber members of the Press Council of South Africa in good standing and compliant with its Code of Ethics. Support/industry bodies may apply where the funded activities directly benefit publishers that meet (or will, through the project, meet) this requirement;
3. Be a micro, small to medium-sized independent media outlet focused on original, public-interest journalism, or an organisation supporting the news media ecosystem or intend to serve their audiences through digital channels;
4. Be publishers or industry bodies with a digital news focus or product or intending to develop a digital product or publishers with a digital product with fewer than one million unique monthly visitors to their website, or publishers with more than one million unique monthly visitors who have been disqualified for a Google News Showcase Agreement due to language or other restrictions;



5. Be able to demonstrate a clear and tangible commitment to digital transformation;
6. Be tax compliant;
7. Be committed to monitoring and reporting on funded project outputs, outcomes and impact;
8. Be structured so that funded activities align with the DNTF's mandate to support digital transformation and sustainability in independent journalism, including activities by for-profit entities.

The following Applicants are ineligible for receiving funding from the DNTF:

1. Content aggregators, general-interest magazines without public-interest content and broadcasting services;
2. Consultants applying in a private capacity unless the beneficiaries of their project comply with the eligibility criteria;
3. Publishers who qualify for or are currently benefiting from Google News Showcase agreements.
4. Any activity or project that does not align with the DNTF's objectives of supporting digital transformation, sustainability, and public-interest journalism in South Africa's independent media sector.

Funding will not be provided to:

1. Support political parties or individual candidates;
2. Promote political propaganda;
3. Influence legislation outside of legally permissible, non-partisan advocacy efforts;
4. Any project that is implemented out of South Africa except where the beneficiaries of the project are based in South Africa;
5. Unregistered or non-compliant entities;
6. Organisations unable to demonstrate the minimum governance, financial controls or reporting capacity as defined in 5.1;
7. Recipients who cannot commit to the mandated monitoring and evaluation requirements;
8. Activities already completed (retrospective funding);



9. Expenses already covered by another donor (unless through agreed co-funding).

5. Submission of applications

Applications must be submitted through the DNTF online portal or via the designated email address during the published application window. Applications from both for-profit and non-profit organisations are welcomed, provided they meet the strategic intent of the DNTF. Applicants must provide relevant founding documents and tax compliance information appropriate to their legal form.

Submissions must include the following:

1. A completed application form;
2. Press Council membership;
4. Proof of entity's registration;
5. Proof of entity's physical address;
6. Founding document (e.g. trust deed, memorandum of incorporation, constitution, act of parliament);
7. Confirmation of the entity's governance structure and appointed officers members (e.g. Letters of Authority, CIPC confirmation of directors);
8. Proof of identity and proof of address for each member of the entity's governance structure;
9. Tax compliance PIN for verification with SARS. PBOs may additionally submit a Section 18A certificate where applicable;
10. Financial documentation (pick the option that applies to you):
 - A. Standard case:
 - Audited (or independently reviewed) annual financial statements for the most recently completed financial year, not older than 18 months, and
 - Bank statements for the last 6 months.
 - B. New or early-stage entities (younger than 18 months or no audit cycle completed yet):
 - Year-to-date management accounts (income statement, balance sheet, and cash flow statement) signed by the accounting officer/CFO, and
 - Bank statements for the last 6 months.

C. If your audited/independently reviewed financials are older than 12 months but still within 18 months:

- Submit those financials plus interim management accounts up to the most recent month-end.

6. Application process

6.1 Call for Applications:

1. Tshikululu will publish calls for applications on the Fund website: <https://dntfund.org.za/>.
2. Deadlines and guidelines will be clearly stated.

6.2 Initial Screening

1. Tshikululu will screen for completeness and eligibility.
2. Incomplete applications will be declined, with reasons for the rejection provided to the applicant where feasible.
3. Applicants who do not meet all eligibility criteria but demonstrate strong potential and public-interest impact may be referred to a capacity support stream for developmental assistance and future resubmission.

6.3 Adjudication

1. Applications are scored by an independent Adjudication Committee as per the scoring matrix explained below.
2. Evaluation is based on criteria such as relevance, innovation, feasibility, and alignment with DNTF goals.

6.4 Recommendation and Approval

1. Shortlisted applications are submitted to the Adjudication Committee who will make recommendations for ratification by the Board.
2. Following ratification by the Board, approved applicants will be notified and proceed to contracting.
3. No grant funding will be paid to an approved applicant unless a grant agreement has been entered into between the approved applicant and the Trustees, and grant funding will be paid strictly in accordance with the provisions of such agreement.



7. Funding Tiers for Individual and Collective Beneficiaries

Applications for funding may be made by individual beneficiaries or collectives of publishers and/or supporters of the news media ecosystem to enable industry-wide projects.

Projects may be funded up to the maximum per band, per project, per year, up to a maximum of three years, with a preference for funding longer-term projects aimed at innovation and sustainability. Multi-year funding will be subject to annual review and the availability of funds.

Build:

1. Target: Individual and collective beneficiaries with little or no online presence.
2. Objective: To establish a solid digital foundation and strengthen financial and operational sustainability.
3. Up to R380,000 annually for foundational digital initiatives.

Examples of Support:

1. Contributions to technology infrastructure (e.g., hardware and connected devices)
2. Ensuring adequate connectivity
3. Website development, domain registrations, and content management systems, mobile-first or offline-accessible platforms appropriate to low-connectivity environments
4. Adoption of GenAI and publishing tools (e.g., plugins)
5. Training and development of digital news specialists
6. Organisational development for those facing acute sustainability challenges, including:
 - Strategic and digital transformation planning
 - Training on digital tools and products
 - Management training and development
 - Market scoping and analysis

Grow:



1. Target: Individual and collective beneficiaries with a basic digital publishing product.
2. Objective: To expand reach and digital capability.
3. Up to R950,000 annually for expanding digital presence and capabilities.

Examples of Support:

1. Optimisation or expansion of websites, CMS, and publishing tools.
2. Development or expansion of content visibility programmes (e.g., SEO, newsletters, audio/video news).
3. Adoption and integration of GenAI tools.
4. Development of data and governance strategies.
5. Training and development of digital news specialists.

Engage:

1. Target: Digitally mature individual beneficiaries and collectives.
2. Objective: To invest in new technologies that improve online reach, engagement, and business models.
3. Up to R1,900,000 annually for advanced, scalable innovations.

Examples of Support:

1. Investments in audience engagement and reach (e.g., publisher and GenAI tools).
2. Improvements to ad performance.
3. Development or enhancement of reader revenue models.
4. Creation of data and digital governance strategies.
5. Training and development of digital news specialists.

8. Assessment Principles

Assessment of eligible applications will focus on:

1. Strategic alignment with digital transformation.
2. Original public-interest journalism.

3. Technical and financial feasibility.
4. Organisational capacity and sustainability.
5. Ethical and governance compliance.
6. Potential for sector-wide impact or innovation.

9. Scoring Matrix

All eligible applications will be scored by the Adjudication Committee using a standard matrix which may include:

1. Relevance to DNTF objectives
2. Innovation and use of technology
3. Feasibility and readiness
4. Organisational capacity and governance
5. Potential for impact and sustainability
6. Demonstration of editorial independence and safeguards for AI usage.

10. Monitoring and reporting

Grant recipients must:

1. Provide clear timelines and deliverables.
2. Submit biannual progress reports including milestones and deliverables in accordance with indicators provided by the Fund.
3. Submit accurate financial reports detailing use of funds.
4. Submit audited financial statements (for grants over R950,000). Where audited statements are unavailable, applicants may submit independently reviewed financial statements or appoint an external financial reviewer with support from the Fund.
5. Provide a comprehensive impact report upon completion aligned to the agreed indicators provided by the Fund.
6. Accept that the project outcomes may be shared publicly as case studies by the funder.
7. Adhere to the terms and conditions of the grant agreement entered into with the Trustees in respect of the grant funding.



8. Projects involving GenAI/AGI must report on measures taken to ensure ethical use and avoid compromising journalistic integrity.
9. Grant recipients who are first-time applicants or smaller community publishers will be eligible for capacity-building support in the form of mentorship, financial literacy training, and reporting templates.
10. Commit to the training and capacity-building provided by the Fund.

Tshikululu will conduct periodic reviews and site visits where applicable. In cases where site visits are not feasible, virtual check-ins or partner-verification methods may be employed.

11. Industry consultations on funding priorities

The Fund will on an annual basis engage with stakeholders on this funding policy, industry needs and funding priorities, to inform its funding objectives and approach to upcoming funding rounds.

12. Personal information and POPIA

Tshikululu will only collect, process, transfer and disclose your personal information for the purpose of rendering its services (either to you or in relation to you), complying with your instructions or the instructions of your mandated/authorised official or representative, verifying your identity, detecting fraud and preventing money laundering, compliance with laws and public duties, monitoring the services provided in order to accurately carry out your instruction or those of your mandated official, to assist in improving Tshikululu's service and in the interests of security and crime prevention and analysis in order to assess and improve Tshikululu's business or the business of Tshikululu associated entities and the services offered as well as for operational, audit, legal, and record keeping purposes. In addition, Tshikululu may collect necessary information from you directly, from your appointed mandated/authorised official or representative, any Regulator, or other third parties that may hold such information.

The type of information Tshikululu collects will depend on the purpose for which it is collected and used. Tshikululu will only collect information that we need for that purpose. Your personal information may be collected or passed to and used by companies and/or trusts within the Tshikululu group of companies and trusts (including its clients) ("Tshikululu Group"), and its agents and sub-contractors who administer or process information on its behalf for the purpose of services rendered. Tshikululu will not, without your consent, transfer or disclose your personal



information outside of the Tshikululu Group, its associated companies or agents, unless Tshikululu has a duty or right to disclose such information in terms of applicable law or industry codes or where it is necessary to protect Tshikululu's rights. Certain client and beneficiary organisation information is retained in perpetuity, and you hereby agree to be bound by this process.

13. Effective date and amendments

This funding policy is approved by the Board and will be effective as of 4 August 2025. Any proposed amendments may be submitted to Tshikululu and the DNTF Board for consideration and recommendation.