



## **Call for Proposals**

# Secure File System (SFS) for a collective of journalists

Submission deadline: 5 December 2021, 11.59 PM CET

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# 1. Introduction

Free Press Unlimited (FPU) is an NGO that works to ensure that reliable news and information are and remain available to people across the globe, particularly for people in countries where there is little to no press freedom. By supporting local media professionals and journalists, Free Press Unlimited helps to enable as many people as possible to gain and keep access to the information they require to survive and develop.

FPU is - on behalf of a collective of journalists that FPU supports - looking for a partner to set-up a secure file system that will allow a geographically distributed team of journalists to effectively store and share highly sensitive data with each other, and provide technical support.

## Quick facts

<b>What</b>	<b>Secure File System (SFS) for remotely based users to share, store, and search highly sensitive files</b>
Commissioning party	Free Press Unlimited
End users	Collective of journalists
Proposal deadline	5 December 2021, 11.59 PM CET
Deliverables deadline:	SFS and short term tech support: March 2022
Continued tech support to client after delivery of products:	5-10 year horizon
Budget	<b>Competitive bid</b>
Deliverables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Secure File System deployment (installation+customisation) and maintenance</li> <li>- Tech support: built-in support systems, training tutorials and documentation</li> <li>- Security and user protocols for the use of the system</li> <li>- Provision of training to the journalists to use the Secure File System</li> </ul>

## 1.1 Purpose

The aim is to allow a group of remotely working journalists to start working more securely with the sensitive documents and enhance the remote collaboration efforts (exchange+storage+search) of their growing network of journalists. Free Press Unlimited

has budget available to set up an existing tool, and/or for improving/customising an existing solution to tailor to the needs of our partner (your future client for the next 5-10 years).<sup>1</sup>

This tender document is to attract a Third Party to present a proposal on how to develop the secure file system that meets the security settings, functionalities and desired user-friendliness as specified in this tender document.

Beside the installation/customisation of the proposed solution, we invite the tenderers to also present their approach for support and guidance in the use of the secure file system by developing manuals / protocols, and providing training to the users.

## 1.2 The client: a collective of journalists

Free Press Unlimited is tendering this assignment to cater to a group of journalists that undertakes cross-border investigations. They are multilingual (yet with English as their established common work language) and are geographically distributed. The journalists are investigative journalists (fieldwork and desk research) and are not data journalists working with large sets of data.

The envisioned product, a Secure File System (SFS), allows the journalists that are part of the collective to share (and search) documentation that includes articles, reports, interviews, videos, images, excel files, and other things. Most of the documents are text files, available in multiple worldwide languages. Since the research and documentation of this collective is sensitive (public/private adversaries), a portion of their data needs to be very well protected and it is important that the SFS has very high security standards.

Important aspect is that the objective of the SFS is *not* to collaboratively write articles; it is about the ability to exchange (remotely) files via a centralized system exchange and making documentation with appropriate search functionality accessible to a trusted group of journalists.

### **End-users: journalists**

The Secure File System will be used by a collective of (approx. 10) journalists. Some characteristics:

- This tender for the SFS focuses on finding the best solution for a small group of journalists working with **highly sensitive** information.
- The journalists sometimes work with large data sets, but they are primarily field-work journalists, working predominantly with text files.
- All journalists speak English. Documents that will be shared are mostly in European languages, yet also comprise other world languages such as Arabic.
- The “tech-savviness” of the journalists varies from little to very experienced; not all of the journalists are used to digital workflows. Consequently, the uploading of documents and applying search functionality should be easy or possible after instruction.
- The admin person should have a user-friendly dashboard for user account creation / management.

1) FPU is involved in the development phase of the secure file system on behalf of the client. Once it has been set-up, the client will be your customer when it comes to contractual agreements.

- The admin-persons will rely on external (your) technical support for upgrades/updates of the SFS. The tech support will likely be heavier during the first months after set-up.

The intention is that the collective of journalists will continue to use the SFS for the next 5-10 years, meaning that the collective will be your client for the coming years.

## 1.3 Tendering parties: who we are looking for

A Third Party that can do the software customization, installation, integration and implementation of the system, and developing protocols and training to work with the system.

Tenderers are allowed to form partnerships to ensure that all components of this assignment can be addressed.

After the initial set-up, the tendering party will have a conceived 5–10 year commitment to provide technical support to the collective to update/maintain the SFS system.

### Eligible tenderers

A tenderer may be a private entity, a non-governmental organization, or any combination of such entities whereby one partner is the lead-applicant. Natural persons are not eligible.

A tenderer found to have a conflict of interest shall be disqualified.

## 2. Scope of Assignment

### 2.1 Secure File System (SFS) for highly sensitive files

A large part of the files that the collective of journalists works with is public information, or does not contain any sensitive data. For these types of files, a 'low risk environment' is created to share, store and search these files. **However, the assignment for which the tender is written focuses on those files that are considered highly sensitive.** These files, if fallen into the wrong hands, could have serious consequences for those involved and should therefore be subject to the highest level of security. More information on what types of files this includes can be found in Annex I. Potential adversaries of the journalist collective include governmental/private actors and criminal networks.

The highly sensitive files will only be accessible to a group of approx. 10 journalists in the so-called 'high risk environment'. So far, no consensus has been reached on how exactly this high risk secure files system should be designed beyond the requirements as listed below. Therefore, those responding to this tender are invited to propose their best solution to this issue. In the following sections you will find more information about the specific requirements of this secure file system for highly sensitive documents.

### 2.2 Scope of tender

The assignment is quite straightforward: create a centralized digital environment in which the journalists can safely share and store highly sensitive information.

Many tools and software solutions exist that already solve this problem in one way or another. Interested parties are encouraged to think about existing tools that would be suitable for their situation and the functionalities and security level. If there is indeed an existing software solution ready-to-go, then the focus of this assignment will shift towards drafting protocols and the provision of training to journalists in digital security practices and in using the identified tools, rather than spending much time in developing something completely new.

## 2.3 SFS requirements: technical/security, functional & other

For the purpose of this tender, the following requirements are identified based on security (dealing with highly sensitive files), functionality (needs expressed by journalists that fit their work), and some additional requirements that will help guarantee a product will be a long-term (financially) feasible solution for the journalists.

### 2.3.1 Technical/security requirements

The following technical/security requirements should also be in place for the Secure File System (SFS):

- The software (open/closed source) should undergo regular security audits; audit reports should be accessible for the client
- No Third Party access to data; no Third Party monitoring
- Provider should be able to show legitimate purpose associated with any form of metadata collection. Metadata collection should be limited to functional metadata only.
- No form of automated scanning of the data or metadata associated with the SFS for analytics or otherwise should be permitted.
- Hosting should be provided in a dedicated (non shared) server. The client reserves the right to select or refuse the choice of a host
- The hosting company as well as the physical servers should be domiciled in either one of the following jurisdictions: The Netherlands, Sweden or Germany.
- It should be a *centralized* file sharing system (to avoid security breaches on the local devices), with *client side encryption*
- Multi factor authentication required to log in for its users
- Access control: user management by project admin person
- Access control: automatic reporting of data breaches or security incidents; access to activity logs by the project admin person
- Data storage: expected 100 GB; option to expand on demand must be available
- Fully developed solution, beyond beta-testing phase
- Deployable as soon as possible (within 3 months)
- High degree of automation for upgrades / updates.  
Otherwise, the provision of tech support needs to be available to install updates/upgrades at low cost by the service provider.

## 2.3.2 Functionality & other requirements

The following requirements are defined that are desired by the journalists for the file sharing system.

### Must-haves functionalities:

- Exchange among remotely working journalists is possible via centralized **storage** (upload and viewing of documents).  
Journalists will *not* need to do edits inside the document (no joint/collaborative writing); 'read-only' of documents is sufficient, and a download function should be disabled to avoid storage on local devices.
- **Search** functionality for the files that are stored in the system:
  - For each file that the journalist uploads, a metadata tag description needs to be added by the journalist: a short description providing the context needed to properly register, manage (search) and interpret data inside the file.
  - In case that is not possible, then elastic search functionality for 'full text search'
  - Search functionality that is limited to the title of the document is considered insufficient.
- **User friendly** tool: a self-intuitive 'customer journey' e.g. via easy dashboard, or convenience in uploading, searching documents and drafting the metadata descriptions for each file
- System in English, yet data search in multiple languages
- Access control: project admin will control who has access to the system and which files/folders

### Nice-to-haves functionalities:

- Annotation system: to have an option to add comments inside documents
- Optical Character Recognition (OCR) which converts images with text into characters, allowing journalists to search images and scanned PDF-docs
- Allow access to the SFS when the journalists have poor internet connection or when offline.

The ideal solution for the SFS would include a search function that does not impede usability nor security.

### Other requirements:

Beside having a functional, secure system for file sharing, there are also activities that relate to successful use of the system:

- Creating a manual for administrators (or organizing training for admins and trainers)
- Providing protocols / tutorials for users (the journalists) on how to work with the system, and do so in a secure manner
- Provide a training session to the journalists on the use of the system<sup>2</sup>
- Due to the nature of the client, the annual recurring costs (annual fee, maintenance, tech support etc) should be relatively low.

2) Details on how to organize this part of the assignment can be provided once an adequate solution has been identified.

## 3. Tender procedures

Interested parties should submit their proposals using a specific format (section 3.1), which will be reviewed against predefined process (section 3.2) and criteria (see Annex II).

### 3.1 Format for Submission

#### *General rules for submission*

Language:	Tenderers need to submit proposals in English
Currency:	EUR
Contract type:	Company Contract
Confidentiality:	Information about the product and client obtained as a result of participating in this tender process should not be shared with other parties.
Template:	Follow the structures/templates as set out below
Font, size:	11-point Arial

#### **A. Proposal: tool solution for Secure File Sharing**

Present a proposal for the secure solution that describes how the following components will be implemented:

#### **Introduction (max. 0.5 page)**

About the tendering party – with reference to Annex 3 Organization (see below).

#### **Chapter 1: SFS implementation (max. 6 pages)**

Describe the proposed tool solution demonstrating that it meets the functional and technical (security) requirements as listed in this document.

The descriptions will show technical specifications on:

- Technical installation
- Server environment and hosting (incl jurisdiction for hosting/servers and metadata collection<sup>3</sup>)
- Security checks (specify your security auditing policy and any process by which the provider insures that its infrastructure and processes remain immune from attack: e.g. history of pen tests, international quality certifications obtained, etc.)

If applicable: describe the customisation that is needed to ensure that an existing tool is tailored in such a way that it meets the needs of the journalists, e.g. by customizing the UI and/or add the installation of other functionalities

- Custom interface
- Enable/disable modules
- Extended dashboard

#### **Chapter 2: Technical support: (max. 3 pages)**

Once the SFS is set-up, the end-users (the collective's admin plus journalists) need support to become familiar with the system, and to start using it.

3) In case a lawsuit forces the service provider to release information, how much of the data is exposed?



\* Describe your approach in short-term deliverables: (Jan-March 2022)

- User testing (UX)
- Development of manual for admin
- Development of Protocols for users (journalists)
- Provision of training to journalists (date will be selected in due time)

\* Describe your Tech support plan for medium term activities (5-10 year horizon):

- Standard tech support toward the client/users
- Response time for tech support
- Degree of automation of updates/upgrades and/or additional support required
- Interactive safety checks during process

## **B. Annexes**

- **Annex 1: Timeline** (Jan-March 2022)

Present a timeline for the setting-up of the proposed SFS solution with customisation, and the short-term technical support to ensure that the client (and the journalists) can work with the SFS.

- **Annex 2: Budget (in excel)**

Present a detailed budget (incl VAT) for initial set-up, customisation and implementation (incl tech support activities on the short-term).

*Template (.xls):* The budget should be as detailed as possible: a breakdown of costs per budget line, including description, unit, # of units, cost per unit, and total amount in EUR.

Do not forget to include the expected annual recurring costs (mid-term) that will have to be made after the initial set-up and training has been completed.

Include the costs for expanding beyond 100 GB storage capacity.

- **Annex 3: Organisation (max. 3 pages):**

- Track record:
  - Overview of capacity/experience of tendering party/ies managing similar projects.
  - Add references for the projects.
- Staff profiles (short bio description, and LinkedIn profile) of those leading the SFS implementation and tech support, protocols/training
- Security audit procedures, and any additional security procedures/policies.

Text that exceeds the maximum number of pages for the components of your proposal (as indicated above) will not be taken into consideration for the assessment.

Please check the 'Evaluation criteria' in Annex II before submitting your proposal.

## 3.2 Review of tenders: process

- After the publication of the tender on 8 November, there will be 4 weeks for the tenderers to submit a proposal.
- Interested parties may submit questions up to 21 November *by email only* to [verbeek@freepressunlimited.org](mailto:verbeek@freepressunlimited.org).  
The questions and answers will be published publicly and remain accessible to all interested tendering parties until submission deadline on:  
<https://www.freepressunlimited.org/en/jobs/call-proposals-secure-file-system>
- Proposals may be submitted by email, no later than **5 December 2021, 11.59 PM CET** at [verbeek@freepressunlimited.org](mailto:verbeek@freepressunlimited.org)  
Postal submissions will not be considered in case a digital version is lacking.
- Opening of bids: 6 December 2021 in presence of least 2 FPU-staff members
- Evaluation of tenders and the procurement decision shall be handled by a minimum of two persons within FPU (Technology Officer and a program staff member), and two representatives from the Steering Committee for this journalism project.
- In the evaluation of tenders, consideration may only be given to criteria specified in the invitation to tender. The tender accepted shall be the one that is considered most advantageous when all the criteria are taken into consideration.
- The successful bidder shall be so informed in writing as soon as possible and in any event before the expiry of the period during which the tender is binding on the bidder.
- Unsuccessful bidders shall be informed as soon as possible.

## Timeline

Call for proposals published	8 November 2021
Deadline for Questions by interested tenders	14 + 21 November 2021 Answers will be published within 2 business days
<b>Deadline for submission</b>	<b>5 December 2021, 11.59 PM CET</b>
Opening of tender bids	6 December 2021
Review by evaluation committee	13 December 2021
Finalization of terms and price: contracting <sup>4</sup>	December 2021
<b>Deadline for deliverables:</b>	<b>March 2022</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Customisation + installation SFS:</li> <li>● Short-term tech support related to protocols + training:</li> </ul>	<i>[indication, tbc based on your detailed timeline]</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● January / February 2022</li> <li>● March 2022</li> </ul>

Technical support mid-term: 2022 onwards; contract will be directly with the client instead of Free Press Unlimited.

4) Expiry date of this Call for proposal and bids received by tenderers: 30 June 2022

# Annexes

## Annex I - Types of Files

This tender for the Secure File Sharing system aims at the highly sensitive documents that require a high security level. See below the type of information that is expected to be stored, shared, and searched.

<b>High sensitivity types of files</b>	<b>Usage during investigations (estimation)</b>
Background interview notes, audio and transcripts	50%
Contact information experts	50%
Direct leaks via social media, apps, email text and photos	35%
Field observations: audio, video photos	25%
Surveys anonymised via online survey software	10%
FOIA requests: only files that are not published publicly, nor drawn from public site	5%
Whistleblower info/files via whistleblowing platform	5%
Court case information from lawyers, prosecutors, predators and witnesses	5%
Social media network analyses	10%

## Annex II - Evaluation criteria

All applications will be assessed along the following criteria:

### **Proposal**

- Section A: proposal SFS implementation:
  - Feasibility and quality of the proposed solution
  - Level of meeting the technical/security requirements
  - Level of meeting the functionality/other requirements
  - Tech support delivery: short term (a.o. protocols, training provision)
  - Tech support delivery: medium term
  - Is the proposed solution sustainable (security, continuity, user-base, costs, etc)
- Section B: Annexes:
  - Timeline:
    - Realistic timeline for delivery of the SFS with tech-support
  - Budget (in excel)
    - Value for money
      - Short-term: deliverables on SFS and tech support on short-term
      - Mid-term proposition: continued tech support

### **Organization (Section B. Annexes)**

- Eligibility:
  - is the organization eligible, following the criteria specified in the section 'eligible tenderers'
- Historical performance:
  - experience in completing similar assignments
  - demonstrated capacity to create digital environments with high user-friendliness
  - demonstrated affinity with the topic of journalism
- Historical security performance: Does the organization have a good track record in privacy and security matters (e.g. hosting, performing security audits on tools)
- Personnel:
  - Does the organization have sufficient staff capacity to execute this project (development - if applicable, installation and implementation)

Text that exceeds the maximum number of pages for the components of your proposal (as indicated in section 3.1) will not be taken into consideration for the assessment.

The evaluation of tenders is made by the pre-selected members of the committee (scoring each criteria between 1-10).

The procurement decision is made after a consultation meeting between evaluation committee members.<sup>5</sup>

5) Pre-determined weighing (%) is not applicable to the above criteria.