

**REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS**  
**AIR Network Newsroom Grants**

Date of issuance: August 20, 2024

Due date for questions: August 27, 2024

Grant solicitation workshop: August 29, 2024

Release date for response to all questions: Sept 2, 2024

Closing date: **Applications are due by 11:59pm (Bangkok time) Sept 20**.

Estimated award date: September 27, 2024

# 1. Background on AIR Network

# AIR Network is a five-year USAID-funded project to establish a self-sustaining investigative journalism network in Southeast Asia. Its objectives are to strengthen cross-border investigative journalism, amplify the impact of investigative projects, and advance the safety and security of investigative journalists in the region. The project is jointly implemented by Pact and the International Center For Journalists (ICFJ).

# 2. Purpose Statement

Pursuant to the authority granted under USAID award 72048623LA00001, ICFJ is pleased to announce the release of a request for applications (RFA) for funding under its AIR Network Newsroom Grants program.   
  
This RFA is issued as a public notice to ensure that all interested, qualified, and eligible newsrooms have a fair opportunity to submit applications for funding. For the purposes of this RFA, “newsrooms” are defined as media organizations that primarily produce journalism-based content, and “organizations” are defined as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations (CSOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), or faith-based organizations (FBOs).

# 3. Program Description

The AIR Network Newsroom Grants provides up to $9,000 in funding for newsrooms in Southeast Asia to develop and implement a collaborative project with the AIR Network.

The proposed projects should support the AIR Network’s objectives of strengthening investigative journalism, amplifying the impact of investigative journalism, and advancing safety and security for investigative journalists.

## 3.1. Program background

Investigative journalism plays a critical role as a watchdog for the public interest. In-depth, fact-based investigations by journalists and media institutions expose abuses of power, including crime, corruption, and corrosive capital, resulting in a public that is more informed.

At the same time, the media are often the first target of authoritarian leaders and other illiberal actors in their efforts to consolidate power, making it increasingly difficult and dangerous for investigative journalists to continue their important work.

The AIR Network addresses these challenges by establishing a support network for investigative journalists in the region. The AIR Network has three objectives:

1. **Objective 1: Strengthen Networks**  
   Locally led investigative journalism networks are supported and strengthened.
2. **Objective 2: Amplify Reporting**  
   Investigative reporting has enhanced engagement, is amplified through relevant channels, and delivers impact
3. **Objective 3: Advance Safety and Security**  
   More proactive, comprehensive approaches to safety and security for journalists are developed and advanced

## 3.2. Geographic area

The Grant is open to newsrooms based in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand. Exiled media based in these countries are eligible.

## 3.3. Intended impact

Investigative journalism in Southeast Asia is strengthened through strategic projects developed and implemented by local newsrooms in collaboration with the AIR Network.

## 3.4. Intended target audience

Newsrooms, journalists, and civil society organizations in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand.

## 3.5. Expected role of sub-awardee in the program

* Develop and refine their proposed projects based on feedback from the AIR Network activity team.
* Review their proposed projects to ensure it will be implemented in a way that is inclusive of women and marginalized communities.
* Conduct risk assessments before project implementation.
* Full implementation of the proposed projects.
* Monitoring and evaluation to determine the effectiveness of the project.
* Providing monthly project updates via email to the AIR Network activity team.
* Providing a final project report upon completion of the Grant deliverables.

Illustrative examples of projects that the Grant is looking to fund:

* Training and capacity-building programs for AIR Network members
* Building resources or educational content for investigative journalists or newsrooms
* Creating an AIR Network “community of practice” to produce investigative journalism on specific topics/issues
* Projects that increase gender equality and social inclusion of marginalized communities in investigative journalism
* Projects that improve media viability of investigative newsrooms
* Projects that improve safety & security for investigative journalists (including physical, digital, legal, and psychosocial safety)

Examples of projects the Grant will **not** fund:

* Investigations that do not involve elements of regional collaboration, community-building, and capacity-building (the AIR Network has a separate investigative grant).
* Reporting projects where the sole output is media content (stories, documentaries, books, podcasts, etc.).
* Academic research

## 3.6. Program indicators and data reporting for partners

Below is the list of program indicators to which sub-awardees under this RFA will contribute. A proposed project may address some or most of the indicators.

* Number of journalists or newsrooms with increased skills, knowledge, and overall capacity to conduct investigative journalism
* Number of investigative journalists or newsrooms with increased access to resources and support networks
* Number of journalists or newsrooms with increased viability to perform investigative journalism

# 4. Application Submission

## 4.1. Grantee eligibility

This competition is open to any newsroom based in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand. Exiled media based in these countries are also eligible.

To be minimally eligible for funding, applicants must provide full, accurate, and complete information and comply with the following conditions. Organizations must:

* Be legally registered or otherwise authorized to conduct business in their country or countries of operation
* Be able to complete implementation within the stated timeframe of September 23, 2024 to March 31, 2025.
* Have experience in producing investigative journalism for at least three years.

## 4.2. Funding

AIR Network anticipates these awards will be a fixed amount award. Grant type may change based on the results of the partner’s pre-award risk assessment, which AIR Network will conduct prior to issuance of the award. Subject to the availability of funds, AIR Network intends to award between $5,000 and $9,000 in total funding for up to six months. Pact anticipates awarding up to 4 grant awards to successful applicants. Negotiations will be conducted with successful applicants only. AIR Network reserves the right to award any or none of the applications submitted.

## 4.3. Application submission deadline

Applications must be submitted by September 20, 2024 at 11:59pm.

## 4.4. Late submissions, modifications, and withdrawals of application

At AIR Network’s discretion, any application received after the exact date and time specified for receipt may be considered ineligible for consideration. Applications may be withdrawn by written notice via email or in person by an organization or the authorized representative.

## 4.5. Conflict of interest clause

Applicants must provide disclosure of any past, present, or future relationships with any parties associated with the issuance, review or management of this solicitation and anticipated award. Failure to provide full and open disclosure may result in Pact having to re-evaluate selection of a potential applicant.

## 4.6. Submission method for questions

Submit questions electronically to Ian Yee (iyee@icfj.org), with copies to Sher Khashimov (skhashimov@icfj.org). The deadline for questions is August 27, 2024 at 11:59pm.

The email subject line should read “Questions - AIR Network Newsroom Grants – *name of organization submitting application*.”

All questions and answers will be shared with all interested applicants.

## 4.7. Submission method for final application

Submit applications electronically to Ian Yee (iyee@icfj.org), with copies to Sher Khashimov (skhashimov@icfj.org). AIR Network Newsroom Grants is not receiving paper applications for this RFA.

The email subject line should read “AIR Network Newsroom Grants – *name of organization submitting application*.” Technical applications and attachments must be submitted in Microsoft Word or Adobe PDF. Budgets must be submitted in Microsoft Excel.

## 4.8. Grant solicitation workshop

Date(s): A grant solicitation workshop will be held on August 29, 2024 at 2:00pm (Bangkok time, UTC +7). All applicants are encouraged to attend, but no more than two people from one organization.

Location: Zoom (https://icfj-org.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZ0qc-GhrTwoHNxtWR9Znzzuf3myNXTUB\_iO). [Click here for the link](https://icfj-org.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZ0qc-GhrTwoHNxtWR9Znzzuf3myNXTUB_iO).

Confirmation: An email confirming attendance must be sent to [iyee@icfj.org](mailto:iyee@icfj.org).

Language: The workshop will be held in English.

# 5. Application Format

## 5.1. Overall requirements

Applicants will develop their applications based on their understanding of needs, their prior institutional experience, and their determination of the approaches that would be feasible and successful.

In all cases, applicants shall clearly explain the rationale for the proposed approaches chosen. To facilitate the competitive review of the applications, Pact only will consider applications conforming to the following:

* The application narrative should be clear, concise, and properly organized.
* The document should be in 12-point Times New Roman font, single spaced.
* Full applications should not exceed 7 pages; page maximums for specific parts are provided in sections 5.2 and 5.3.
* Applications should be written in English.
* Paper copies of the applications will not be accepted.
* Please note that technical and cost applications should be separate files.

All applications received by the deadline will be reviewed for responsiveness to the specifications outlined in these guidelines and the application format. Applications should take into account the evaluation criteria.

## 5.2. Technical application

Applicants must submit the following:

I. Sub-Awardee Risk and Responsibility Assessment Form (provided by AIR Network)

* Applicants must complete the form provided by AIR Network.
* The form does not count towards the 7-page limit for applications.

II. Technical Approach and Feasibility of Program Design (max. two pages)

* The applicant’s technical approach should include:
* A description of the applicant’s prior work as it pertains to the project objective
* A description of the activities to be undertaken.
* Anticipated results

III. Management and Staffing Plan (max. one page)

* The management and staffing plan should show the roles and responsibilities of all staff who will participate in the program.
* Applicants should provide the CV of the Program Manager.

IV. Past Performance (max. one page)

* Describe the organization’s previous experience with investigative journalism.
* Demonstrate experience in building the capacity of local organizations, local government institutions, research, networks, and initiatives.

V. Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (max. one page)

* Describe how the project will collect data and ensure data quality of the relevant indicators from Section 3.5 of this RFA.
* The applicant should provide additional indicators and targets.

VI. Work Plan (max. two pages)

* Provide a detailed work plan for activities identified in the program description and the applicable time frames.
* Provide a summary of proposed activities to sustain the project after the Grant period.

## 5.3. Cost application

Limit of three (3) pages.

Please use the templates in attachment 2 and 3 for a detailed and summary budget. The summary budget should include all costs anticipated within the following line items:

* Salaries: all costs associated with employees working under the proposed project, including the level of effort expected from each salaried employee and the costs of fringe benefits
* Travel: travel, lodging, and per diem for staff need to implement the project
* Equipment rental: equipment that must be rented (e.g. vehicles) to enable program implementation
* Supplies: basic supplies (e.g. stationery, collaterals, event supplies) that are needed to enable program implementation
* Contractual: external contractor fees
* Events/activities: other direct costs associated with implementing activities under the project (e.g. program development costs, venue rental, F&B, web development)

## 5.4. Relevant documents

Applicants are required to provide registration or other relevant documents, such as letters of support and recognition from local governments/authorities. These documents do not count toward the technical and cost application page limits.

# 6. Evaluation of Applications

## 6.1. Review process

AIR Network will establish a technical review committee that includes representatives from ICFJ and Pact. All technical reviewers will be screened to eliminate any conflict of interest. Evaluation will be based on the criteria set forth in sections 6.2, 6.3, and 6.4. The process will be completed within approximately 10 to 15 business days. The review panel, using the criteria detailed below, will rate applications and make funding recommendations to the program’s grants management unit.

AIR Network reserves the right to make any number of awards or none at all. AIR Network is not responsible for any costs associated with the development of applications.

To facilitate the review of applications, applicants must organize the narrative sections of their applications with the same headings and in the same order as the selection criteria.

## 6.2. Evaluation criteria for the application

In evaluating the applications, AIR Network will examine overall merit and feasibility, as well as the specific criteria relevant to each component, as elaborated in the table below. Applicants should note that these criteria both serve as the standard against which all applicants will be evaluated and serve to identify the significant matters that applicants should address in their applications. AIR Network will instruct the technical review committee to evaluate all applications according to the criteria as established and weighted in the following table.

| **Evaluation Criteria** | **Points** |
| --- | --- |
| **I. Technical Approach and Feasibility of Program Design**  The review team considers a strong technical design to be one that clearly demonstrates an ability to meet the AIR Network’s objectives and is informed by local circumstances and needs. | 35 |
| **II. Management and Staffing Plan**  The review team will evaluate the extent to which the management and staffing plans demonstrate the applicant’s ability to effectively implement proposed activities responsive to this RFA. Reviewers will assess whether the organization has proposed sufficient level of effort to achieve stated results. | 10 |
| **III. Past Performance**  Reviewers will evaluate whether the organization has managed successful projects of similar size and scope in the geographic areas specified. | 5 |
| **IV. Monitoring and Evaluation Plan**  Reviewers will assess how the applicant intends to collect data, ensure data quality, and measure progress using the relevant indicators in section 3.5 and any additional custom indicators proposed by the applicant. Reviewers also will assess the feasibility of proposed indicator targets and consider the extent to which the application includes a plan to use the data for reflection and learning. | 5 |
| **V. Work Plan**  Reviewers will assess the proposed plan and timeline for implementing proposed activities for feasibility. | 35 |
| **VI. Cost Evaluation**  The cost application will be evaluated for reasonableness, allocability, allowability, cost effectiveness, realism, and financial feasibility.  AIR Network reserves the right to determine the resulting level of funding for the grants being selected for this RFA, regardless of what the applicant specifies in the cost application. | 10 |
| **Total** | **100** |

## 6.3. Supporting documentation for Pre-Award Assessment/site visits

After the application evaluation process, any selected firm will be required to complete a Subawardee Risk and Responsibility Assessment in order for AIR Network to determine if the organization has the capacity to perform successfully under the terms and conditions of the proposed grant. As part of the pre-award assessment process, Applicants will be asked to submit additional documentation to illustrate that the organization has the capability to implement the award. Site visits may be conducted by AIR Network staff to evaluate the organization in these areas.

# 7. Terms and Conditions

## 7.1. Standard provisions

The Standard Provisions for Non-U.S. Non-Governmental Organizations as applicable will apply to these grants. Applicants can find the provisions at <https://www.usaid.gov/about-us/agency-policy/series-300/references-chapter/303mab>.

## 7.2. Permission for use and disclosure

By submitting an application under this RFA, the applicant consents to the disclosure of the documents submitted by the applicant to the reviewers involved in the selection process. Please note that all reviewers are bound by non-disclosure agreements.

## 7.3. Disclaimers

* AIR Network may cancel the solicitation and not award any funds.
* AIR Network may reject any or all applications received.
* Issuance of solicitation does not constitute award commitment by AIR Network.
* AIR Network reserves the right to disqualify any application based on applicant’s failure to follow solicitation instructions.
* AIR Network will not compensate applicants for their response to the solicitation.
* AIR Network reserves the right to issue an award based on initial evaluation of applications without further discussion.
* AIR Network may choose to award only part of the activities in the solicitation or to issue multiple awards based on the solicitation activities.
* AIR Network reserves the right to waive minor application deficiencies that can be corrected prior to award determination to promote competition.
* AIR Network may contact applicants to confirm contact person, address, and that the application was submitted for this solicitation.
* AIR Network may contact listed past performance references without notice to the applicant. AIR Network also reserves the right to contact other past performance information sources that the applicant did not list in the application.
* By submitting an application, the applicants confirm they understand the terms and conditions.

# 8. Attachments

The following documents are considered part of this RFA:

1. Sub-awardee Risk and Responsibility Assessment
2. Budget template