

REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS
AIR Network Fiscal Sponsor

**RFA No. : P2359-2025-011**

**Date of issuance:** January 15, 2024

**Due date for questions:** January 31, 2025

**Virtual briefing call:** January 23, 2025

**Release date for response to all questions:** February 5, 2025

**Closing date:** **February 14, 2025 by 11: 59 pm (Bangkok time).**

Application packages are due by February 14, 2025, 11:59 p.m. time via email to Thailand Procurement thailandprocurement@pactworld.org. section 8 for instructions on the required submission documents. Emailed submissions must contain the subject “**AIR Network Fiscal Sponsor – *name of organization submitting application****”.*

**Estimated award date:** March 4, 2025

Notifications for unsuccessful proposals are expected to be provided by March14, 2025**.**

# **Background on Pact**

# Pact is a global leader in building the capacity of non-government organizations, networks and intermediary organizations. Pact's mission is to help build strong communities globally that provide people with an opportunity to earn a dignified living, raise healthy families and participate in democratic life. Pact achieves this by strengthening the organizational and technical capacity of grassroots organizations, coalitions and networks and by forging linkages between government, business and citizens in order to achieve social, economic, and environmental justices.

# **2. Purpose Statement**

Pursuant to the authority granted under the USAID award 72048623LA00001, Pact is pleased to announce the release of a request for applications (RFA) for a Fiscal Sponsor for the USAID Empowering the Truth Tellers – Asia Investigative Reporting Network (AIR Network) project.

# AIR Network is a five-year, USAID-funded project to establish a locally led self-sustaining investigative journalism network in Southeast Asia. Its objectives are to strengthen cross-border investigative journalism, amplify the impact of investigative reporting, 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).

This RFA is issued as public notice to ensure that all interested, qualified, and eligible organizations have a fair opportunity to submit applications for funding. For the purposes of this RFA, “organizations” includes private and non-profit media organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations (CSOs), and community-based organizations (CBOs).

# **3. Award Description**

The AIR Network aims to select a legally registered organization, one with experience managing finance and administration for media and/or civil society projects, to act as the investigative journalists’ network (or the Network)’s Fiscal Sponsor.

The selected Fiscal Sponsor will receive funding to manage the Network’s funds, resources and operations on behalf of the Network leadership, which will consist of an Advisory Board and executive (or core) committee based throughout Southeast Asia. The Fiscal Sponsor will support the Network leadership as it coordinates cross-border investigations, capacity-building programs, events, and local Network chapters.

While the Fiscal Sponsor will work mainly for the Advisory Board and core committee, it will also receive support and relevant capacity development from Pact and its implementing partner, ICFJ.

## The work will be carried out for a minimum period of 12 months and may be renewed for up to four years.

## **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 Request for Application is open to organizations with legal registration in Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Cambodia.

## **3.3. Expected role of sub-awardee in the program**

The Fiscal Sponsor’s role is to manage finance and accounting for the Network, provide administrative support, and act as a proxy for official documents or agreements. Depending on the size of the Fiscal Sponsor’s organization at time of awarding, and the final scope of work, additional staff may need to be recruited.

The Network will not be registered as a legal entity. It will be run remotely by an Advisory Board and Executive Committee with members from the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, and Cambodia – hence the need for a Fiscal Sponsor.

The Advisory Board and executive committee will be given an annual budget of up to US$300,000 to implement programs and activities across multiple countries in Southeast Asia. The budget will be sub-awarded to the Fiscal Sponsor, who will administer it as directed by the leadership team.

The Fiscal Sponsor’s roles and responsibilities are as follows:

* Managing administrative, legal, and finance, including payments, fund disbursements, and urgent emergency support grants, for select Network activities.
* Managing financial reporting and grant management directly with the Advisory Board.
* Ensuring compliance with USAID regulations and other relevant laws in multiple Southeast Asian countries, especially in the AIR Network’s focus countries (currently the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, and Cambodia, but may extend to more in future project years).
* In collaboration with the AIR Network, providing budgeting and financial planning support to the journalists’ Network and the Advisory Board.
* Acting as the legal proxy for the Network (e.g. signing of contracts/agreements, registering for services, applying for grants, etc.)
* Handling tax-related matters for the to the journalists’ Network and the Advisory Board.
* Assisting with administrative tasks to facilitate the network's projects.

## **3.4. Success indicators and reporting**

Below is the list of success indicators for the AIR Network Fiscal Sponsor.

* Number of fund transactions completed according to specified timelines
* Number of financial reports delivered according to specified timelines
* Audits completed with no major findings or compliance issues
* Number of administrative requests completed according to specified timelines
* Stakeholder satisfaction scores from feedback mechanisms developed by the fiscal sponsor in collaboration with Network leadership
* Regular and timely communication with Network leadership, ICFJ and Pact on accounting, finance, and administrative issues

# **4. Application Submission**

## **4.1. Grantee eligibility**

This call is open to selected organizations that are either non-profit, not-for-profit, or for-profit entities that are not established in the United States. 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 Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, and Cambodia.
* Have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number, which is required for all US-government-managing funded subawards. A UEI number is not required at the application stage but will be required for receipt of the award.
* Be able to deliver on the roles and success indicators specified in section 3 for a minimum period of 12 months with the ability to efficiently start-up implementation.
* Have a minimum of 5 years’ experience in managing finance and administration for donor-funded development or democracy and governance programs.
* Must follow all instructions provided in this RFA;
* Be submitted by the deadline as stated in the RFA.

## **4.2. Funding**

Pact/ICFJ anticipates the award will be a cost-reimbursable award or a fixed-amount award based on the program description and the results of the partner’s pre-award risk assessment, which Pact/ICFJ will conduct prior to the issuance of the award.

Subject to the availability of funds, Pact/ICFJ anticipates awarding to a successful applicant with an estimated budget up to US$300,000 to implement programs and activities across multiple countries in Southeast Asia, of which up to US$80,000 may be used for operating costs, for a period of performance of up to twelve months. The award amount is flexible and will be finalized based on the final and agreed-upon full scope of work.

Applicants will be required to demonstrate successful past performance and management of comparable budget amounts with respect to their applications to this RFA. Applicants may be required to submit evidence of previous awards received that will help determine the maximum amount of any award made to successful applicants under this RFA.

Pact/ICFJ reserves the right to award any or none of the applications submitted and for lower or higher amounts than the above-mentioned estimates. Negotiations will be conducted with successful applicants only.

## **4.3. Application submission deadline**

Applications must be submitted by February 14, 2025 at 11:59 pm.

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

At Pact/ICFJ’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/ICFJ having to re-evaluate selection of a potential applicant.

## **4.6. Submission method for questions**

Submit questions electronically to Thailand Procurement thailandprocurement@pactworld.org. The email subject line should read “Questions - AIR Network Fiscal Sponsor – n*ame of organization submitting application*.”

The deadline for questions is **Friday, January 31, 2025, at 17:00 Bangkok Time.**

All questions and answers will be shared with all qualified applicants by **February 5, 2025 by 17:00 Bangkok Time.**

## **4.7. Submission method for final application**

Submit applications electronically to Thailand Procurement thailandprocurement@pactworld.org. A complete application would include the full set of documentation noted in section 5.4. Pact/ICFJ is not receiving paper applications for this RFA.

The email subject line should read “AIR Network Fiscal Sponsor – name of organization submitting application.” Technical applications and attachments must be submitted in Microsoft Word and Budgets must be submitted in Microsoft Excel.

## **4.8. Grant solicitation workshop**

**Date(s):** A grant solicitation workshop will be held January 23, 2025 at 2pm (Bangkok time, UTC +7). All applicants are encouraged to attend, but no more than two people from one organization.

**Location:** Teams

[**Join the meeting now**](https://teams.microsoft.com/l/meetup-join/19%3Ameeting_ZjAxNzlkMTYtMzAyNS00YzY5LTkwOTgtYTM2ZDBmNmY2YjQ4%40thread.v2/0?context=%7b%22Tid%22%3a%223973ea96-6d90-46bf-8605-43454d6905fc%22%2c%22Oid%22%3a%222f745d5e-872a-486c-8075-f9b14b65f1cf%22%7d) ([https://teams.microsoft.com/l/meetup-join/19%3ameeting\_ZjAxNzlkMTYtMzAyNS00YzY5LTkwOTgtYTM2ZDBmNmY2YjQ4%40thread.v2/0?context=%7b%22Tid%22%3a%223973ea96-6d90-46bf-8605-43454d6905fc%22%2c%22Oid%22%3a%222f745d5e-872a-486c-8075-f9b14b65f1cf%22%7d](https://teams.microsoft.com/l/meetup-join/19%3Ameeting_ZjAxNzlkMTYtMzAyNS00YzY5LTkwOTgtYTM2ZDBmNmY2YjQ4%40thread.v2/0?context=%7b%22Tid%22%3a%223973ea96-6d90-46bf-8605-43454d6905fc%22%2c%22Oid%22%3a%222f745d5e-872a-486c-8075-f9b14b65f1cf%22%7d))

**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 experience, and their determination of activities that would be feasible and successful. Applicants shall clearly explain the rationale for the proposed approaches presented in their application.

To facilitate the competitive review of the applications, Pact/ICFJ will only consider applications conforming to the following:

* The application narrative should be clear, concise, and properly organized.
* The document should be in 11-point Times New Roman font, single-spaced.
* Full applications must adhere to the page limits in the templates provided
* 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.
* Technical applications should be submitted as Microsoft Word files, not PDFs.

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**

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. Annex B provides a template that must be utilized by applicants.

**I. Sub-Awardee Risk and Responsibility Assessment Cover Page/Snapshot**

**II. Technical Approach**

* The applicant’s technical approach should include:
* A description of the applicant’s prior work as it pertains to the Fiscal Sponsor role described in Section 3.3
* A description of how the applicant aims to fulfill its roles and responsibilities described in Section 3.3. This may include any details deemed necessary by the applicant, such as:
	+ The applicant’s available tools, resources, and staff
	+ The applicant’s proposed approach to disbursing funds to multiple Southeast Asian countries
	+ The applicant’s proposed approach to communicating regularly and effectively with the AIR Network team and implementing partners (i.e. the Advisory Board, Executive Committee, Pact, and ICFJ)
	+ The applicant’s proposed approach to financial reporting and auditing
* The applicant’s proposed mechanisms to solicit feedback from stakeholders Anticipated results based on the success indicators in Section 3.4

**III. Management and Staffing Plan**

* The management and staffing plan should show the roles and responsibilities of all staff who will participate in the implementation of the project.
* How you plan to ensure diversity, equity, and inclusivity in the project team.
* Applicants should provide the CV of the Program Manager (or most senior project staff member) (this is optional and not included in the page limit).

**IV. Past Performance**

* Describe the organization’s previous experience managing finance and administration, grant management, and support/managing networks or NGOs.
* Describe the organization’s track record on promoting gender equality and social inclusion.
* Submit a summary of other funded projects over the past three years, including documentation to confirm the highest budget amount awarded to the organization in the past three years (this is not included in the page limit).

**V. Monitoring and Evaluation Plan**

* Describe how the project will collect data and feedback for the success indicators/target in Section 3.4.

**VI. Work Plan**

* Provide a detailed work plan and timeline for at least 12 months
* Include suggested reporting timelines and engagements with AIR Network leadership.
* Work plan should include a co-creation phase for the applicant, Pact, and ICFJ following selection. The co-creation phase will provide the successful applicant and AIR Network the time and opportunity to refine the technical and budgetary aspects.

## **5.3. Cost application**

Pact provided a budget template in Excel spreadsheet with tabs with connected formulas. The tabs can be used for providing ‘indicative’ sub-award budgets or indicative specific activity budgets, that are linked to the Detailed Budget tab. Pact/ICFJ will not fund office start-up costs or proposal development costs.

The summary budget should include all costs anticipated within the following line items:

* **Salaries/fringe benefits:** 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 and per diem:** travel, lodging, and per diem for staff to implement the project
* **Equipment rental:** equipment that must be rented (i.e., vehicles) to enable program implementation
* **Other Direct Costs:** Consultants, supplies
* **Operating/Administrative costs:** office rent, communications, electricity, telephone, and office supplies
* **Project Activities:** (example – training workshops, dialogue sessions, etc.): include the breakdown of workshops, development of information materials, studies, information dissemination, etc.; other direct costs associated with implementing activities
* **Indirect cost-** Direct allocation, De minimis rate, Overhead cost or NICRA as appropriate.

 All costs application to be charged to the sub-award will be evaluated and approved in accordance with 2 CFR 200 Subpart E Cost Principles. The below indicates ineligible and restricted commodities and services which Pact/ICFJ cannot support under this RFA:

**(1) Ineligible Commodities and Services:** Military equipment, Surveillance, equipment, Commodities and services for support of police or other law enforcement activities, Abortion equipment and services, Luxury goods and gambling equipment, or Weather modification equipment.

**(2) Ineligible Suppliers.** Any firms or individuals that do not comply with the requirements in Standard Provision “**Debarment and Suspension**” and Standard Provision “Preventing Transactions with, or the Provision of Resources or Support to, Sanctioned Groups and Individuals”.

**(3) Restricted Commodities:** Agricultural commodities, Motor vehicles, Pharmaceuticals, Pesticides, Used equipment, U.S. Government-owned excess property, or Fertilizer.

**(4) Construction costs:** Construction is not eligible under this RFA.

**5.4. Application and Relevant documents**

Applicants must submit the following documents as part of the application and provide registration or other relevant documents, such as letters of support and recognition from local governments/authorities. These documents are not included in the technical application page limits.

* SRRA Snapshot form provided by Pact.
* Technical application template provided by Pact.
* Indicative work plan - use the applicant’s own format.
* Indicative MEL Plan template provided by Pact.
* Budget template and budget notes provided by Pact.
* Registration certificate.

All forms and templates provided by Pact can be found in Section 8: Attachments.

# **6. Evaluation of Applications**

## **6.1. Review process**

AIR Network will establish a Selection review committee that includes representatives from ICFJ and Pact, and all members will be subjected to a screening process to eliminate any conflict of interest. Evaluation and scoring are based on the criteria outlined in section 6.2. The initial review process will be completed within approximately 15 to 20 business days. The review panel, using the criteria detailed below, will rate applications and agree on applicants to prioritize in a co-creation or negotiation phase.

The potential and shortlisted applicants will be invited to an interview with the selection review committee via video call, where they will have a final chance to review and adjust their scores.

Selected applicants determined to have sufficient merit will then move to the co-creation and negotiation stage with Pact/ICFJ. The determination of sufficient merit means that the proposal is seen to fit the objectives under the RFA. Pact/ICFJ will thereafter organize meetings with applicants to finalize the technical proposal and the budget. The goal of this stage is for Pact/ICFJ to work with applicants to clearly define and agree upon activities, outputs, targets, work plan, staffing, and budget for the award.

Pact/ICFJ reserves the right to determine the resulting level of funding for the grants being selected for funding under this RFA, regardless of what the applicant submits in the cost application

## **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 the success indicators in Section 3.4.  | 30 |
| **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 the roles outlined in Section 3.3. Reviewers will assess whether the organization has proposed sufficient level of effort to achieve stated results, and whether staffing was planned with gender equality and social inclusion in mind. | 15 |
| **III. Past Performance**Reviewers will evaluate whether the organization has managed successful projects of similar size and scope in the geographic areas specified, and how it has promoted gender equality and social inclusion. | 10 |
| **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 3.4 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. | 10 |
| **V. Work Plan**Reviewers will assess the proposed plan and timeline for implementing proposed activities for feasibility.  | 15 |
| **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. | 20 |
| **Total** | **100** |

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

Applicants 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>.
* Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) and anti-trafficking requirements

## **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:

* **Annex A:** Sub-awardee Risk and Responsibility Assessment Snapshot Form.
* **Annex B**: Technical application template.
* **Annex C**: Indicative MEL Plan template.
* **Annex D**: Budget and Budget note template.
* **Annex E**: Indicative work plan - use applicant’s own format.
* Registration certificate.