



Call for Research Grant Applications

USAID Basiki ni Tagne Kunafoni Activity

Summary

USAID Basiki ni Tagne Kunafoni, a media literacy activity, seeks applications to support the activity to identify and validate causal pathways focused on information integrity and resilience in select communities in Mali. All applications must include a partnership between one or more Malian researchers and one or more researchers from another country. Pact expects to fund co-designed research awards that range from \$50,000 to 100,000. Research activities will be connected to program activities implemented by Pact and its partners. A full research design is not required at this stage; the research will be co-designed with the successful applicant(s) after award. The anticipated period of the award is 15 months, beginning in June 2024. Interested applicants or offerors must submit complete applications to Laura Adams (ladams@pactworld.org) by May 6, 2024, 12:00 Bamako time.

A) Background

The USAID Basiki ni Tagne Kunafoni (Information for Peace and Development) Activity supports information integrity actors including journalists and media analysts to increase their ability to recognize and address manipulative information within the Malian information ecosystem so that independent media, community influencers, and Malian people can create and access high quality, verifiable information. The overall goal of this Activity is to address information integrity in the Malian information ecosystem. USAID Basiki ni Tagne Kunafoni is implemented by Pact in a consortium with Accountability Lab (AL) Mali and Code for Africa (CfA). Activities designed to improve resilience include: media interventions; diminishing the harm of influence campaigns; mitigating harm through information integrity; promoting media literacy; optimizing the reach of high quality, accurate, verifiable information; promoting media veracity; countering unreliable information/ inaccurate information; and providing verifiable alternatives to low quality, misleading information. While some aspects of the project focus on the national media ecosystem, other activities are concentrated in particular communities in Mopti and Segou. The Basiki ni Tagne Kunafoni implementation period ends in September 2025.

B) Purpose and Scope of Research

USAID Basiki ni Tagne Kunafoni will issue up to two research grants or contracts to identify and validate causal pathways related to how project activities in Mopti and

Segou interact to build greater community-level information resilience. The hypothesized pathways will be used by the project team to inform activities and will be tested through rigorous research activities spanning the life of the project. The research design (including sampling strategy, data collection, data analysis, and security and ethics protocols) will be co-designed with the researchers, Pact, and its Malian partners. A secondary purpose of the research is to enrich the international network of Malian researchers; therefore, the applicant must propose a partnership between one or more Malian researchers and one or more researchers based in another country. The full team may involve subcontracts with data collectors and other types of research assistants who should be included in the budget. The application must be submitted as a collaborative effort and outline roles and responsibilities of each team.

The research activity, including finalizing the deliverables, is expected to take place over 15 months, concluding in September 2025.

The final research questions will be determined collaboratively, but the focus is on the activities of community-based intermediaries (journalists, artists, religious leaders, grins, griots, and others) who are working with the project. The overarching research question and sub-questions are as follows:

1. Did the community-based intermediaries contribute to greater community information resilience, as defined by members of those communities?
 - a. If so, how? What are the causal pathways that link their activities to changes in their communities?
 - b. If not, why not? What were the mistaken assumptions or obstacles?
 - c. What other factors contributed to changes (positive, negative, or neutral) in the information resilience in that community?

C) Methodology

The application does NOT require a proposed research design. The successful applicant will work with the project team to identify a hypothesized causal pathway, fully describe the pathway, determine the most appropriate methodology to test that pathway, and collect and analyze data to determine whether or not the hypothesized causal pathway was realized and what other aspects of the context interacted with that causal pathway. For more information on causal pathway methodologies, see: <https://www.causalpathways.org/>. While quantitative data may be part of the research design, the overall logic of inquiry should follow principles associated with qualitative field research and process tracing, such as iterative improvement of priors, sampling

that increases the likelihood of identifying confirmatory and disconfirmatory evidence, etc. For more information on qualitative process tracing methods, see: <https://polisci.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/people/u3827/Understanding%2520Process%2520Tracing.pdf&ved=2ahUKEwjb5KXynKSFAxWdFVkJFHbOEByIQFnoECAyQAQ&usg=AOvVawOR8w3jOpoWyaOxfiqeWpkW>

Expected Activities

Pact expects that each research grant or contract will require the following activities. Please budget time for all your team members accordingly.:

1.

Number	Activities
1	Desk review of all relevant project documents
2	Design and lead a participatory workshop with the project team and stakeholders to fully detail a priority, hypothesized causal pathway
3	Participate in research design workshops, led by Pact, to explore the range of methodological options available to test the causal pathway
4	Develop a proposed methodology to validate the causal pathway and draft a research design plan including initial data collection strategy, data analysis plan, and human subjects and data security protocols
5	Revise the research design plan with input from Pact and finalize
6	Conduct field research in each of the selected communities. This should be done iteratively over several months, refining the priors, questions, and data collection strategy each time. The research team should plan to undertake 3 data collection efforts, each spanning approximately 10 days
7	Provide a midterm update in the form of a short report or verbal briefing, including changes made to the data collection strategy and the proposed plan for analysis and interpretation of the data
8	Conduct any additional fieldwork
9	Write a practitioner-oriented research report (no more than 40 pages) and revise after feedback
10	Present on the findings with Pact and other stakeholders

Methods

While the exact method and sources will depend on the final causal pathway selected for validation, Pact anticipates that this will be primarily an ethnographic study drawing on observation, interviews, and the analysis of other primary data. However, since the point of the research is to test particular causal pathways, Pact requires a research team

that is experienced in one or more methods of causal inference that links activities/ interventions and outcomes. For example, process tracing, contribution analysis, contribution tracing, qualitative comparative analysis, causal pathway analysis, and/or causal link mapping.

D) Deliverables

Payment is contingent on the following approved deliverables:

1. Completion of participatory workshop
2. Participation in methodology workshop
3. Hypothesized causal pathway in graphical form and research plan outlining proposed validation methodology.
4. Raw data from data collection efforts
5. Midterm verbal or written update
6. Draft report
7. Final report
8. Slide deck presentation of summarized report.

E) Contract/Grant Mechanism and Payment Schedules

The contract/grant mechanism and payment schedule will be determined upon approval of the proposals/applications received and initial due diligence conducted by Pact. Adjustments within the budget may be made before the final budget is approved, but the total amount should not exceed the amount requested in the application.

F) Minimum and preferred qualifications

The following are required minimum qualifications of the applicant:

1. At least one researcher partner must have a certificate or diploma recognized in research and studies (Master degree in communication/ Journalism, educational science, sociology and related fields)
2. A team comprised of researchers located in Mali and researchers located outside Mali with a document of recognition in Mali and outside Mali.
3. At least one research partner must have significant experience conducting research in Mali.
4. At least one research partner should be fluent in French AND either Bambara or Fulfulde
5. At least one research partner must have professional working fluency in English.
6. Demonstrated expertise in qualitative research methods.

The following are preferred qualifications:

1. Experience studying or working to mitigate disinformation and to advance information resilience.
2. Experience with causal pathway research.
3. Knowledge of Mali's ethics committee would be an asset.

G) Application Requirements

To apply, please include the following by May 6, 2024, 12:00 Bamako time:

1. 2-page cover letter containing:
 - a. The names and home institutions of the proposed principal investigators
 - b. Motivation for/interest in this project
 - c. An overview of the PIs' experience in (i) conducting re, (ii) researching information integrity, and (iii) conducting field research in Mali (including working languages)
 - d. The division of responsibility between Malian and non-Malian partners
 - e. Number of individuals supporting the research with brief descriptions of their experience and proposed role in the research
 - f. Description of additional support for the team that the researchers' home institutions will provide beyond the grant (e.g. salary, library and office resources, student assistance)
 - g. Confirmation that the proposed research team can support this activity between June 2024 and September 2025.
2. CV(s) of proposed principal investigator(s)
3. At least two documents (publications, evaluation reports) that are examples of previous research experience working on causal pathway analysis and/or demonstrating capacity to undertake advanced qualitative and quantitative methodologies.
4. Proposed budget using our template, informed by daily rates of key staff as appropriate, and including international travel for non-Malian researchers. The maximum budget request is \$100,000 but reasonableness of the budget will be one of the evaluation criteria. Awardees may revise their final budget before approval, but the total amount may not exceed the amount requested in the proposed budget.

H) Application Process

Questions about this opportunity can be sent to Laura Adams (ladams@pactworld.org).

Applications are due 6 May 2024, 12:00 Bamako time to Laura Adams (ladams@pactworld.org). A confirmation of receipt will be shared. If no confirmation of receipt is received within 3 business days, applicants are invited to send a follow-up email.

Pact will review each application against the following review criteria. Applicants that meet minimum requirements will be invited to a virtual interview.

Review criteria:

Criterion	Weight
Qualifications of the proposed research team to conduct causal pathway analysis of information integrity interventions in Mali	50%
Reasonableness of budget, including sufficient detail to evaluate reasonableness of salaries, travel, etc. See note below.	30%
Ability to meet project schedule	20%

Note: Cost share from the home institution factors into the evaluation of the reasonableness of the budget. If the applicants' home institutions charge overhead, the institution will be *required* to document cost share contributions (such as staff salary, student assistance, etc.) coming from non-U.S. government sources.

I) Disclaimers

- Pact may cancel this call and not award any funds.
- Pact may reject any or all applications received.
- Issuance of solicitation does not constitute award commitment by Pact.
- Pact reserves the right to disqualify any application based on applicant's failure to follow solicitation instructions.
- Pact will not compensate applicants for their response to the solicitation.
- Pact reserves the right to issue an award based on initial evaluation of applications without further discussion.
- Pact may choose to award only part of the activities in the solicitation or to issue multiple awards based on the solicitation activities.

- Pact reserves the right to waive minor application deficiencies that can be corrected prior to award determination to promote competition.
- Pact may contact applicants to confirm contact person, address, and that the application was submitted for this solicitation.
- Pact may contact listed past performance references without notice to the applicant. Pact also reserves the right to contact other past performance information sources that the applicant did not list in the application.
- By submitting an application/proposal, the applicants confirm they understand the terms and conditions.

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