



Request for Applications

Mekong Connections: Supporting Governance, Transparency and Local Voices - Civil Society Grant Cohort 2

RFA No.: RFA-2022-001

Date of issuance: May 16, 2022

Due date for questions: June 6, 2022

Release date for response to all questions: June 13, 2022

Live online Roadshow: June 8, 2022 at 10:00 AM and June 10, 2022 at 1 PM

Closing date: June 30, 2022

Application (including technical proposal and budget) are due by 16:00 – June 30, 2022, Bangkok time via email to thailandprocurement@pactworld.org. Emailed submissions must contain the subject “Mekong Connections – *name of organization submitting application.*”.

Estimated award date: August 31, 2022

1. Background on Pact

Pact is a 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 United States Department of State, or State Department (DOS) award SLMAQM20CA2434, Pact is pleased to announce the release of a request for applications (RFA) for funding provided to support Pact's implementation of Mekong Connections: Governance, Transparency, and Local Voices (Mekong Connections). This funding is provided to create a network focused on governance and transparency projects from the perspectives of community actors; enhance and develop regional networks to connect community perspectives to central policy debates in the Mekong region and further support Mekong civic and policy leaders; and share global lessons learned and best practices on transboundary challenges in the region and beyond and propose concrete policy approaches to address the challenges discussed. This RFA is issued as a 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" are defined as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations (CSOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), or faith-based organizations (FBOs).

3. Program Description

Civil society organizations play a key role in protecting and managing critical resources, and in representing marginalized groups. However, they often lack adequate space and resources to contribute to public decision-making processes. The Mekong region's diverse ethnic, linguistic and political landscape also means it is difficult for civil society to coordinate action on transboundary issues. The rise of social media has opened space for the expression of diverse perspectives, but these are often not reflected in the mass media. The perspectives of vulnerable, resource-dependent communities should be part of the policy dialogue and national policies should be informed by a range of perspectives. Mekong Connections seeks to spark Mekong-wide networks and conversations that will strengthen the policy-making process.

Access to information, public participation in environmental decision making, and access to justice are crucial in safeguarding people's ability to advocate for healthy environments.¹ These goals can be met through support for a strong and vocal civil society that can generate and share reliable information about the impacts of development and bring their perspectives to the public arena.

Under Mekong Connections, Pact will create an engagement network of individuals, community voices, and actors having an impact throughout the Mekong sub-region, to enhance and develop regional networks and further support transboundary collaboration and information-sharing among local voices on key policy challenges facing the Mekong.

The primary objectives of this program are to (i) create a network focused on governance and transparency projects from the perspectives of community actors; (ii) enhance and develop regional networks to connect community perspectives to central policy debates in the Mekong and further support Mekong civic and policy leaders; and (iii) share lessons learned and best practices on transboundary challenges in the region and beyond and propose concrete policy approaches to topics discussed.

3.1. Program background

Pact is a 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.

Mekong Connections is a three-year program that seeks to strengthen civil society's role in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam. The program is supported by the U.S. Department of State and the Mekong-U.S. Partnership and focuses on governance and transparency in public decision making in three areas:

- Water and water-related ecosystems of Mekong, Ayeyarwady, and other rivers;
- Combating conservation crimes, including wildlife and timber trafficking; and,
- Improving health security, increasing the region's ability to prevent, detect, and respond to infectious disease threats, especially using the 'One Health' approach that recognizes the interdependence of human, animal, plant, and ecosystem health.

Mekong Connections will provide financial and capacity-building resources to civil society organizations and individuals working on these issues. In line with the Mekong-U.S. Partnership, Mekong Connections' goal is to advance cooperation between the five countries of the Mekong.

3.2. Geographic area

Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam

3.3. Intended impact

The expected end result is that sub-awardees funded through this call will strengthen community voices and civil society directly through community engagement projects and proposed policy solutions, strengthening cross-border and regional Mekong networks.

3.4. Intended target audience

Mekong Connections seeks to partner with sub-awardees that are able to demonstrate a coherent technical proposal that aligns with project priorities, meets the selection criteria agreed to with DOS, and has sufficient financial management capacity in place to manage the award according to grant conditions. All sub-awardees must also maintain cross-cutting focuses on equitable inclusion of women, youth, and people with disabilities.

Prior to award all applications will be approved by DOS.

3.5. Expected role of sub-awardee in the program

Sub-awardees will foster learning through action to achieve concrete results in improved transboundary governance and transparency across the three topic areas: water and water-related ecosystems of Mekong, Ayeyarwady, and other rivers; illegal trade in wildlife; and health security, based on the 'One Health' approach that recognizes the interdependence of human, animal, plant, and ecosystem health.

All sub-awardees' approaches must include policy engagement in the topic area(s) selected in their application. The expected result of this engagement is policy recommendations (e.g., policy briefs, memorandum) which are developed with input from other organizations, academics, and non-state actors. Sub-awardees will be required to submit the recommendation(s) prepared for specific decision-making bodies to Pact with the aim of receiving confirmation from Lower Mekong country governments that the recommendations has been recognized or will be considered. At least one op-ed or news article on the recommendation(s) must be developed and disseminated to the public.

In addition to policy engagement, applicants must design a project that aims to raise awareness and citizen engagement; engage in research benefiting local/national/regional Mekong communities, and/or incubate new tools and approaches for transparency and accountability. Mekong Connections is also open to other approaches proposed by applicants so long as they support transboundary governance and transparency of public decision making on one or more of the three topic areas.

Illustrative examples of the types of activities that might be considered include:

- Research carried out in collaboration with a transboundary academic institution on animal-to-human transmission in communities bordering forests, which results in a white paper the sub-awardee uses in coordination with community engagement to develop policy recommendations for a national health body
- Combating illegal trade in wildlife across the region through awareness-raising and citizen engagement around incentives for wildlife stewardship, which results in policy recommendation for promoting more investment in engaging local communities at the national or regional level
- Developing and piloting a new tool for measuring waterborne diseases in Mekong Ayeyarwady, and other rivers to identify hot spots for disease outbreaks, which results in policy recommendations on improved water management

As a condition of the award all sub-awardees must allocate sufficient budget and time in their proposal for the following programmatic activities:

- Kick off meeting (in Bangkok, Thailand or online as necessary)
- Necessary capacity development to implement the proposed activities, including at least one op-ed or news article on the recommendation(s) must be developed and disseminated to the public.
- Monthly Progress Reports
- Workshop participation

3.6. Program indicators and data reporting for partners

Mekong Connections has identified several program monitoring indicators to inform achievement of the program results. Applicants should design programs that demonstrate how they will support the program's capacity and activities.

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 policy recommendations (e.g., policy briefs, memorandum) which are developed with input from other organizations, academics, and non-state actors, and submitted to governing bodies
- Number of Lower Mekong country government policies influenced by submitted policy recommendations
- Expansion and strengthening of sub-awardees network
- Gender parity of organization's representatives who attended the regional project workshops

4. Application Submission

4.1. Sub-awardee eligibility

This call is open to any non-governmental organization that is either a non-profit or not-for-profit, with preference for locally established organizations. 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
- Have a DUNS number (a nine-digit identification number required for all procurement-related activities). A DUNS number is not required for application, but will be required for receipt of award
- Be able to complete implementation within the stated timeframe September 2022 to August 2023
- Have current geographic coverage where program activities will take place or prior experience in that area with the ability to quickly start up implementation

4.2. Funding

Pact anticipates that these awards will be cost-reimbursable or fixed amount award grants. Grant type will be based on the program description and the results of the partner's pre-award risk assessment, which Pact will conduct prior to issuance of the award. Subject to the availability of funds, Pact intends to award multiple awards up to \$24,999 USD in total funding for 12 months. Proposals in excess of this amount or period of time will not be considered. Negotiations will be conducted with successful applicants only. Pact reserves the right to make an award to any or none of the applicant organizations.

4.3. Application submission deadline

Applications must be submitted by June 30, 2022 at 16:00 Bangkok time.

4.4. Late submissions, modifications, and withdrawals of application

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 re-evaluating selection of a potential applicant.

4.6. Submission method for questions

Applicants must submit questions electronically to thailandprocurement@pactworld.org. The deadline for questions is June 6, 2022 at 16:00 Bangkok time.

The email subject line should read “Questions - Mekong Connections – *name of organization*.”

All questions and answers will be shared publicly via <https://www.pactworld.org/country/thailand/procurement>.

4.7. Submission method for final application

Applicants must submit applications electronically to thailandprocurement@pactworld.org. Paper applications for this RFA will not be accepted.

The email subject line should read “Mekong Connections – *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.

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 according to section 5.2 and 5.3.
- The document should be in 12-point Times New Roman font, single spaced, with 1 inch/2.5 cm margins.
- Full applications should not exceed 13 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

Limit of eleven (11) pages, including:

Sub-Awardee Risk and Responsibility Assessment Cover Page (one page)

I. Technical Approach and Feasibility of Program Design (five 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, organized by thematic area
 - Anticipated results
 - The proposed approach to achieving each thematic area
- The application should discuss the applicant's approach for engaging with local actors, building partnerships with key stakeholders, and creating linkages with other relevant development activities/programs.

II. Management and Staffing Plan (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.

III. Past Performance (one page)

- Describe the organization's past experience in general.
- Demonstrate experience in building the capacity of local organizations, local government institutions, research, networks, and initiatives.

IV. Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (one page)

- Describe how the project will collect data and ensure data quality of the relevant indicators from Section 3.6 of this RFA.
- The applicant should provide any additional indicators and targets that are relevant to their proposed work plan.

V. Work Plan (two pages)

- Provide a detailed Year 1 work plan for activities clearly identified in the program description and the applicable time frames.
- Provide a summary of proposed activities for subsequent years, as applicable.

5.3. Cost application

Limit of two (2) pages.

Please use the templates in Attachments 2 and 3 for a detailed and summary budget. 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 needed to implement the project
- **Equipment rental:** equipment that must be rented (i.e., vehicles) to enable program implementation
- **Workshops/training/events:** workshops, development of information materials, studies, information dissemination, etc.; other direct costs associated with implementing activities under the project

- **Operating/administrative costs:** rent, communications, electricity, telephone, audit, and office supplies; Mekong Connections will not fund office start-up costs or proposal development costs.

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

Mekong Connections will establish a technical review committee that includes representatives from various Pact departments and external staff. All technical reviewers will be subjected to a screening process 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 review panel, using the criteria detailed below, will rate applications and make funding recommendations to the program’s grants management unit.

Pact reserves the right to make any number of awards or none at all. Pact 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, Pact 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. Pact will instruct the technical review committee to evaluate all applications according to the criteria as established and weighted in the following table.

Applications which include transboundary partnership(s) are not required but will be positively viewed.

Evaluation Criteria	Points
I. Technical Approach and Feasibility of Program Design The review team considers a strong technical design to be one that is informed by local circumstances and needs with a cross-border and regional focus. It should demonstrate coordination with other efforts or ongoing processes. Proposals must be in line with the technical areas outlined in section 3.	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 proposed activities responsive to this RFA. Reviewers will assess whether the organization has proposed sufficient level of effort to achieve stated results.	16
III. Past Performance Reviewers will evaluate whether the organization has managed successful projects of similar size and scope in the geographic areas specified.	13

Evaluation Criteria	Points
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 3.6 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.	13
V. Work Plan Reviewers will assess the proposed timeline for implementing proposed activities for feasibility.	18
VI. Cost Application The cost application will be evaluated for reasonableness, allocability, allowability, cost effectiveness, realism, and financial feasibility. Pact 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 organization will be required to complete a Financial Pre-Award Assessment in order for Pact to determine whether 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 may be asked to submit additional documentation to illustrate that the organization has the capability to implement the grant. Site visits may be conducted by Pact 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.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/U.S.-Department-of-State-Standard-Terms-and-Conditions-10-01-2019508.pdf> . Printed versions of these provisions are available upon request.

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

- Pact may cancel the solicitation 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, 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 cover page
2. Partner Budget template

Attachment 1 - Sub-awardee Risk and Responsibility Assessment cover page

See attached word document

Attachment 2. – Partner Budget template

See attached excel sheet