

Grant Call – Support for an Independent Media Archive

LACLEARN invites US-based academic institutions to submit concept notes to identify, classify, and organize the work of independent media outlets throughout Latin America. This grant aims to facilitate access for journalists, researchers, and the public, enabling big data analysis to uncover patterns of corruption, impunity, and anti-democratic actions.

Grant proposals should cover the following elements:

- **Capacity Building and Technical Assistance:** Develop baseline for archival and preservation of independent media organizations across Latin America. This includes the provision of legal (intellectual property rights) and technical advisory to ensure integrity, preserve intellectual property rights and establish an appealing model for independent media outlets.
- **Advanced Search and Analysis Tools:** Implement advanced search and big data analysis tools within the digital platform. Proposals should describe data security, user accessibility, interoperability with other digital libraries or archives and other technological considerations. Applicants should note that LACLEARN may supplement technical expertise, such as Archival and Database Specialists, to support this objective.
- **Regional Archiving Expansion:** Broaden the archival reach to include more independent media organizations in LAC, with a special focus on Central America, ensuring a thorough preservation of journalistic content. LACLEARN is considering ways to amplify regional experiences and techniques that contribute to enhanced investigative journalism.
- **Collaboration with Freedom of Expression Networks:** Maintain active collaboration with regional and international networks supporting freedom of expression.

Resulting Illustrative Products May Include but are not limited to:

- **Launching a publicly accessible Independent Media Archive:** Support the recognition, parsing, and development of a robust search index for independent media within a regional archive. Providing Media and Legal/Intellectual Property Rights experts to establish a sound archiving model, encouraging other media outlets to participate.
- **Expanding users of the independent archive** to include major independent media outlets in the Latin American region with a special focus on Central America.
- **Defining Mechanisms for Sustainability:** Setting up a mechanism for regular database updates with media Points of Contact in each country.
- **Partnership and Community Building:** Creating a network of Central American journalists for the project and contributing to the archive.

About LACLEARN

The LACLEARN Grants Under Contract (GUC) Program is intended to support LACLEARN's objectives with complementary work in the LAC region. The grants funded through this program will contribute to the achievement of LACLEARN's programmatic objectives: 1. Provide support for rapid response to crisis situations, including short-term democracy, human rights, and governance (DRG) programming through local organizations to promote inclusion, participation, citizen-responsive approaches, and transparency/accountability during the transition phase. 2. Pilot innovative DRG technical approaches, implement research, disseminate DRG learnings, support democracy, human rights, and good governance, or other learning and analysis objectives. Additional information regarding

LACLEARN can be accessed here: <https://developmentpi.com/news/laclearn-fy24-annual-program-statement-for-grants-under-contract>.

Background

Over the past several years, Central America has witnessed a disturbing erosion of democratic institutions and an increase in attacks on freedom of the press. For example, the closure of *elPeriódico* de Guatemala, an independent media organization with 27 years of circulation, marks a significant setback for journalistic freedom in the region. In this instance, the organization faced an onslaught of political, legal, and economic pressures, including the illegal detention of its founder, Jose Rubén Zamora. After 10 months of relentless harassment and persecution, *elPeriódico* was compelled to cease operations on May 15, 2023.

Countries in Central America are grappling with a breakdown in the rule of law, and democratic institutions are under siege. Journalists face irregular detentions, confiscation of their work equipment, cancellation of information spaces, and even prison sentences for their reporting and questioning of government actions. In February 2023, Nicaragua's authoritarian regime expelled 222 political prisoners, including journalists, and stripped them of their nationality. In April, *elFaro*, a renowned Salvadoran news outlet, relocated to Costa Rica in response to years of political and legal persecution.

This assault on independent media outlets and the broader freedom of the press is emblematic of the democratic backsliding observed across Central America in recent years. The Organization of American States (OAS) Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression has raised alarms about state and private initiatives seeking to control information on the Internet, threatening its role as a free, autonomous, and plural space. The use of digital technologies to intimidate journalists, human rights defenders, and other public interest participants has become a worrisome trend.

With the closing civic space and targeted persecution of independent media in the region, investigative journalism is now at risk of being lost to historians, policy makers, researchers, and the citizenry. This highlights the urgent need for measures to protect and preserve independent journalism in the region.

Available Funds

Subject to the availability of funds, the total level of funding available for awards under this call for concept notes is up to \$100,000 for one grant to a US-based academic institution. The grant should span no more than six (6) months in duration. Concept note submission is voluntary and LACLEARN will not reimburse applicants for expenses incurred during concept note development.

If your organization is interested in submitting a concept note, please send to lacgrants@developmentpi.com.

DEADLINE: March 4, 2024