

**USAID Civil Society and Media Activity
Public Acceleration Challenge Fund
Call for Applications**

The Civil Society and Media (CSM) Activity is a five-year program (2022-2027) funded by USAID in Nepal through the CSM-STAND-LWA, with The Asia Foundation as the lead implementer. USAID CSM supports independent civil society and media led by and for women, youth, and marginalized communities to advance public interest, fundamental freedoms, and accountability. Most activities will focus on Lumbini and Madhesh Provinces, with some implemented in Kathmandu. Qualified civil society organizations (CSOs) can now submit their applications for the **Public Acceleration Challenge Fund**.

Submission Deadline: 5:00 PM NST, August 25, 2023

Public Acceleration Challenge Fund

In Nepal, civil society has played a significant role in political and social movements such as restoring democracy and transitioning into a federal republic. These movements were significant as they advocated for freedom of expression, the right to association, and other fundamental rights. Nepal has seen the emergence of a vibrant civil society especially after the restoration of democracy in 1990, be it in the form of media watchdogs, or different associations, rights-based networks and coalitions, professional associations, federations, and even formal and informal groups. These civil society organizations (CSOs), which are often used interchangeably with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have contributed to the preservation of democratic values in Nepal.

Though a vibrant civil society is important for democracy, Nepal has seen the shrinking of civic spaces in the recent years and dominance of NGOs primarily in Kathmandu, with the centralization of governing practice and funding patterns. The centralized approach has overlooked the diverse needs and priorities of marginalized communities in the sub-national level, leading to distrust of mainstream CSOs by historically marginalized groups. Similarly, the unavailability of sustained funding mechanisms has prevented spontaneous movements and initiatives from establishing themselves as long-term organizations. This highlights the need for funding mechanisms and sustainable initiatives at the subnational level especially in the provinces (Lumbini and Madhesh) that can provide continuous support to these movements and initiatives.

The Public Acceleration Challenge Fund aims to bridge these gaps by providing financial resources, technical and other related skills, and expertise support to CSOs interested in expanding and diversifying networks or partnerships to further the interests of WYM groups. This Challenge Fund will encourage collaboration between CSOs, fostering an inclusive and innovative approach mostly utilizing local resources. The core of this challenge fund is to address the diverse needs of marginalized communities and accelerate access to diverse resources via networks, coalitions, or alliances. Moreover, the challenge fund will work to promote the transformational relationship

between the state and citizenry which will help to recognize the importance of citizen's ability to make and enforce collective decisions through inclusive and deliberative mechanisms.

Theme of the Public Acceleration Challenge Fund:

The Public Acceleration Challenge Fund will support CSOs in building, expanding and augmenting networks, coalitions, and groups to strengthen civic spaces. The outcome of the fund will be to advance public interest and address issues and concerns of WYM communities. The networks, coalitions, and groups are expected to lead to generating collective voices, prompting advocacy and activism, and resolving the public issues.

1. Objectives of the Challenge Fund

The challenge fund is an opportunity to design and deliver support for public accelerators which has following three interrelated objectives:

- To address the public issues of women, youth, and marginalized communities through strengthening local voices and linking it to the relevant networks.
- To accelerate the civil society landscape through networking and coalition building among the civic actors and building capacity of grassroots civil society organizations around the provinces to advance the public interests.
- To facilitate the longevity and sustainability of issue-based networks and coalitions promoted by civic actors and civil society organizations collectively.

2. Funding Source Information

USAID Nepal funds the Challenge Fund through the Civil Society and Media - Strengthened Together and Advancing in New Directions (CSM-STAND) Leaders with Associates (LWA) Award. Challenge Fund opportunities complement the Government of Nepal's (GON) efforts and private sector innovations that strengthen inclusive governance and democratic principles.

3. Award Information

3.1. Estimated Funding Level. Applicants can apply for grants up to USD 50,000 not exceeding (NPR 6,605,000). The Asia Foundation has no preference for funding level, and applications will be evaluated on the merit of the program with no prejudice to the levels of funding sought.

3.2. Award Implementation Period. The grant implementation period should not exceed twelve months. The implementation period is to be driven by the logic of the program and no other consideration.

3.3. Award Type. All awards under this Call for Applications will be cost-reimbursable grants.

4. Eligibility Information

- Network, coalition-based and other civil society organizations working on the issues of women, youth, and marginalized communities.
- Civil society organizations working in and are preparing to work on advocacy, and activism which aims to extend their works.
- Associations, Federations, and groups working on the issues of women, youth, and marginalized communities.
- Civil society organizations which are looking to expand their networks to and from the Madhesh and Lumbini provinces.
- Organizations led by women, youth, and marginalized communities will be prioritized.

Please follow the instructions below carefully. Applications that do not meet the requirements of this announcement or fail to furnish or comply with the stated requirements will be ineligible.

5. Content and Form of Application Submission

- The concept note should clearly highlight the specific activities.
- Applications can be submitted in English or Nepali.
- All budgets should be in local currency.
- All pages should be numbered.
- All documents should be formatted to A4 paper.

Applicants are **encouraged (not mandatory for the first submission)** to secure authoritative alphanumeric 12 digits Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number created in SAM.GOV. Since securing UEI can take around a week, applicants are encouraged to apply for a UEI number by registering under <https://sam.gov/content/home> before applying.

Application Process:

Please follow the following process while applying for the Challenge Fund.

Step 1: Email challengefund.np@asiafoundation.org requesting the concept note and budget templates with the subject line mentioning “**Public Acceleration Challenge Fund**”.

Step 2: Submission of Application: Interested applicants must email the following while applying the application deadline:

- Concept Note:** Submit a concept note using the template provided in Annex 1. The concept note should include the overall activities cycle, clearly highlighting the thematic focus area and other components as mentioned in the template. The concept note can be submitted in the Nepali language as well.
- Budget Estimate:** Submit the budget using the template available in Annex 2. The instructions for the budget proposal are mentioned in the budget template.
- Other Documents:** Along with the concept note and budget, applicants are required to submit the following:
 - The organization’s registration certificate

- Organization’s Statute
- Copy of the audit report, if applicable
- List of organization’s board members and staff

Pre-bid Information Session

For more information, a virtual pre-bid session will be held on **August 17, 2023**. Interested organizations can register for the pre-bid session here: <https://forms.office.com/r/bDjDY4KryU> or send an email requesting a pre-bid session at challengefund.np@asiafoundation.org before **5:00 PM NST August 16, 2023**. Only registered organizations will have access to the meeting link.

Funding Restrictions

The Challenge Fund cannot be used for the following:

- **Construction:** This award does not allow for construction activities or costs.
- **Pre-award Costs:** Pre-award costs are not an allowable expense for this funding opportunity.
- **Program Activities:** Activities that are not typically funded include, but are not limited to:
 - profit-generating projects;
 - scholarships to support educational opportunities or study for individuals;
 - paying to complete activities begun with other funds;
 - financial support for fundraising or fund development projects;
 - projects that are inherently political in nature or that contain the appearance of partisanship/support to an individual or single party;
 - political party and lobbying activities;
 - projects that support specific religious activities; and,
 - microloans/microfinance projects, distribution of seed money for enterprises, and legal/land rights-focused programs.

Submission Date and Time

All applications shall be received no later than **5:00 PM Nepal Standard Time, August 25, 2023**. Applications submitted after the deadline will not be considered eligible.

All applications are encouraged to be submitted electronically to the following email address: challengefund.np@asiafoundation.org with the subject line mentioning “**Public Acceleration Challenge Fund**” The time stamp provided by the email service provider will be used to determine whether an application was submitted on time.

The issuance of this Call for Applications does not constitute an award or commitment on the part of the Foundation, nor does it commit the Foundation to pay for costs incurred in preparing and submitting an application.

The Foundation reserves the right to fund any or to make no awards as a result of this call if no application meets the objectives and criteria stated in this call.

6. Application Review Information

6.1. Selection Criteria:

Each application submitted will go through an evaluation process. Selected applications from the initial screening will be evaluated and rated by an independent Technical Evaluation Panel (TEP) based on an evaluation matrix detailed below. The criteria outlined in the matrix are designed to assess the quality of the concept note and to determine the likelihood of its success. Applications will be reviewed based on their innovative approach, coherence, viability, clarity, and attention to detail.

6.1.1. Concept Note Evaluation Matrix:

Criteria	Explanation	Points
Quality of project idea and project planning	This relates to clarity of the problem statement considering the issues of women, youth, and marginalized (WYM) groups; innovativeness, geographical coverage, and alignment of the project idea/s with the broader objectives of the challenge fund.	40
Inclusivity	This relates to the inclusivity of the approach in the proposed activities.	20
Ability to achieve the project objective	This relates to how well the goals, objectives, activities, outputs, and outcomes are articulated and linked to the stated problems related to WYM issues and the project's viability.	20
Institution's track record and organizational capacity	This relates to the qualifications of the personnel deputed to oversee the project, the organization's capacity statement, the inclusivity in the team, the track record and capacity of its partner/s.	10
Value for money	This relates to the plan to deliver value, project costing, cost-effectiveness, personnel inputs, etc.	10

6.2. Review and Selection Process

- Submitted concept notes will be reviewed based on the submitted documents mentioned above and screened for eligibility and alignment with the objective/s of the Challenge Fund. Eligible concept notes will be forwarded to the TEP.
- Based on the Evaluation Matrix, the TEP will evaluate and rank the shortlisted concept notes.
- Once the refined concept notes and budget proposals are received, full-scale due diligence and budget negotiations will be conducted with shortlisted applicants. If the due diligence and budget negotiations are successful, the refined concept note, and the budget proposal shall be submitted for final approval.
- All applicants will be sent a written response on the outcome of their application.

6.2.1. Timeline

Activity	Deadline
Pre-bid Information session	August 17, 2023
Submission of the application package (concept note, budget, and organization documents)	August 25, 2023
Application Review and Awarding Grants Timeline	Approx. 1.5-2 months

Selected organizations shall be responsible for complying with the Government of Nepal’s requirements regarding the payment of taxes.

7. Branding and Marking

Organizations successfully selected to receive the Challenge Fund shall comply with the Branding and Marking Requirements of USAID for all activities, communication materials, and knowledge products produced under the fund as indicated in the approved Branding and Marking Plan for the USAID Civil Society and Media Activity.

Annexes

Annex 1: Concept Note Template

Annex 2: Budget Template

[Note: these annexes will be sent to interested applications once an email expressing interest to apply is received. Emails are to be sent to challengefund.np@asiafoundation.org with the subject line mentioning “**Public Acceleration Challenge Fund**”.