

Call for Proposals

The Impact of National Relief Funds for COVID-19 on Civic Freedoms in the Indo-Pacific

The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) seeks individuals or organizations to undertake research and a report on national relief or government-run disaster/humanitarian funds designated for COVID-19 relief in the Indo-Pacific. The consultancy period is December 15, 2021 to March 15, 2022. Applications are due December 10, 2021, but will be accepted on a rolling basis until available funds are depleted.

Scope of Research

Government relief funds are philanthropic funds that accept both public and private donations but are established and managed by governments, often for the purpose of meeting national disaster or humanitarian needs. They have existed in certain contexts and regions (for instance, in South Asia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia) for some time, but are not well-documented or understood – particularly as concerns these funds' impact on civil society. The COVID-19 pandemic has ushered in yet more examples of such disaster relief funds being established, this time for the alleged purpose of pandemic relief.

In certain cases, government-run relief funds have been criticized for lacking transparency and public accountability, while enjoying exemptions from taxation, reporting, and other regulatory requirements. In India, for example, the Prime Minister, for the first time in the country's history, registered a government fund as a trust, which is not subject to ordinary procurement and disclosure rules. The fund, PM CARES, has been criticized for lack of transparency and siphoning resources away from civil society.

As the world in general and the Indo-Pacific region specifically enter an era of increasing humanitarian disasters, exemplified by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as climate and environmental disasters, there is an increasing need to scrutinize the impact of such national disaster relief funds on CSOs, civic freedoms, and the public at-large, and, consequently on the ability of nations to respond effectively to humanitarian crises. There is also a need to explore the origins of such funds, their legal status, and any additional authority for their existence under international law.

ICNL is seeking an individual or organizational researcher to conduct a study to gather information and evaluate national relief funds that have been in use throughout the COVID-19

pandemic. The study should focus on examples in Asia (e.g. India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and others); however, the study should also include some description of other examples (e.g. Bulgaria, Armenia) and ideally a sense of how many funds exist worldwide. This study should be a ‘deep-dive’ look into how such funds operate in the region, and how they have directly and/or indirectly impacted civil society and civic freedoms – with special focus on their impact on civil society resources (either positive or negative). Proposed research methodologies should be included in the proposal, and can be finalized in collaboration with ICNL. Example research questions to be addressed in the study could include the following:

- Whether money from such funds is used to fund government projects, to fund CSOs, or to provide compensation directly to victims;
- Whether these funds are permanent or disaster/COVID-19 specific;
- How these funds are governed – whether the executive has total discretion over the fund or whether choices are made in conjunction with other branches/legislators, civil society, etc.;
- Whether there are donation incentives for donors to the fund – e.g. same or enhanced tax deduction as other charitable donations, or other regulatory incentives - and how this creates competition with the rest of civil society;
- Whether there are issues around transparency or corruption – e.g. are there allegations of donations being used to garner the good graces of the government?
- Similarly, whether the funds are used in a politicized manner (to help out only those in vote bank districts, etc.);
- Whether such funds are aimed at receiving donations from citizens or the diaspora.

This list is non-exhaustive; we welcome additions and other ideas.

Scope of Work

The individual or organizational consultant will be responsible for:

1. Conducting comprehensive research on national COVID relief funds that have been implemented, with a focus on Asia but with mention of examples from other countries. Case studies from the Indo-Pacific should examine the impact of these funds on civil society and civic freedoms in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.
2. Developing a report/study highlighting the key findings of the research, providing in-depth case studies of countries in South and Southeast Asia. The report should also include a section exploring the legal basis for such funds, including any relevant findings from international law, as well as the domestic mechanisms allowing for such funds (the latter could be incorporated into the country case studies).

Content of Proposal

Interested applicants should submit a proposal, of no more than 4 pages, addressing the following topics:

- Describe the scope of the research to be undertaken, including all research methodologies to be employed. Please include any revisions to the Scope of Research presented above, the methodology for conducting the research, and the timeline, including interim benchmarks and drafts of the report as well as follow-up activities, recognizing that activities must be completed no later than March 15, 2022.
- Describe applicant's experience dealing with the laws, policies, and regulations affecting philanthropy and civil society, as well as undertaking legal and case study research and writing reports.
- If more than one person will be involved in this project, describe who will undertake different aspects of the project. ICNL reserves the right to approve or reject the use of any personnel.
- The cost proposal/line-item budget for this consultancy (does not count towards the 4-page limit). The pricing for the cost proposal must be in USD and fully itemized. For personnel costs, please list each person to be involved in this project, the proposed day rate(s) and number of days. All other costs, if any, should be listed and explained. The proposed price should be inclusive of all taxes. ICNL expects to issue one Firm Fixed Price contract, with a ceiling of USD \$9,000.

Selection Criteria

Applications will be evaluated based on the following factors:

- Compliance with eligibility requirements and application procedures.
- Demonstrated experience of the applicant in conducting quantitative and qualitative research.
- Demonstrated commitment of the applicant to improving civic space.
- Quality of proposed project, including the project's innovations, the proposed methodology/design, and feasibility of the project (e.g., activities are targeted to achieve stated results, and anticipated results are realistic and attainable).
- Proposed budget and value for money.
- Inclusion of reasonable indicators to measure project success.

How to Apply

To apply for this consultancy, applicants must submit the following items by **December 10, 2021**:

- Proposal of no more than four pages;
- Line-item budget;
- Resume or curriculum vitae (cv) for individuals undertaking the research and writing the report;
- Background information about the applicant organization if relevant (e.g., website links or informational materials).

Applications should be sent to asia@icnl.org, with reference made to “National Funds Consultancy Application 2021” in the subject line. All application materials should be submitted in English. Questions related to this consultancy can be emailed to asia@icnl.org.

Deadline

Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis until December 10, 2021. Only shortlisted candidates will be contacted.