

USD1 Million innovateAFRICA Fund for digital media launched

The new innovateAFRICA Fund is offering media pioneers on the continent \$1 million in support for leapfrog technologies or digital innovation. The support programme offers a combination of seed funding, technology support and expert mentorship.



Image by 123RF

It is open to both mainstream media organisations and individual innovators. The deadline for applications is 01 December 2016.

Project proposals that focus on strengthening audience engagement with African civic media are of particular interest, along with improved models for digital news distribution, and initiatives that explore new revenue models for African storytelling.

“African media are experimenting with digital journalism, but the steadily worsening market situation facing mainstream media often has a chilling influence on the really big ideas. innovateAFRICA is meant to help newsrooms leapfrog obstacles, by giving the types of support that neither media companies nor traditional donors can provide themselves,” says Code for Africa (CfAfrica) director, Justin Arenstein.

Africa. Arenstein is an ICFJ Knight International Journalism Fellow.

innovateAFRICA will provide grants from \$12,500 to \$100,000 for projects judged to have the best chance to strengthen and transform African news media. Grantees will also receive technical advice from civic technology laboratories across the continent, along with startup support and one-on-one mentoring from the world's top media experts.

Projects can range from new 'digitally native' journalism startups, to ideas for improving the reach and impact of legacy media operations. Projects that tackle journalism's changing role as a civic watchdog will receive special attention.

"Citizens need reliable and actionable information to make informed decisions. A strong media remains amongst the most effective ways for giving citizens both information and a voice, and we are therefore keen to help journalists be as digitally savvy as possible," explains Arenstein.

innovateAFRICA runs alongside a \$500,000 companion fund, impactAFRICA, which makes story grants of up to \$20,000 for journalists to get out into the field for pioneering digital reporting projects. impactAFRICA launched in February 2016, and is currently offering its second round of grants for investigative data driven journalism stories.

Both initiatives have partnered with CFI, the French agency for media cooperation, to boost involvement of digital pioneers across Francophone Africa through a series of digital journalism and civic technology workshops. Participants at the events, including similar bootcamps hosted by Hacks/Hackers in Anglophone Africa, receive help to build project teams and to develop project ideas. Both organisations will continue to offer assistance in the runup to the submission deadline.

innovateAFRICA's partners include Omidyar Network, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the CFI, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the Media Development Investment Fund (MDIF), the Global Editors' Network (GEN) and the World Bank.

"Through all of ICFJ's work in Africa, we are constantly encountering visionaries with great ideas for how digital innovation in media can improve societies," says ICFJ President Joyce Barnathan. "This contest will provide funding, tech support and mentoring to turn their ideas into action."

Application process

Entries must be submitted to the innovateAFRICA website by midnight (Central African Time) on December 1, 2016. Proposals may be submitted by digital news pioneers from anywhere in the world, but entries must have an African media partner who will help co-develop and test the innovation and who will deploy the project for African audiences.

Citizens need reliable, actionable information to make informed decisions. Africa's watchdog media remains amongst the most effective civic 'infomediaries' for giving citizens both information and a voice.

innovateAFRICA is therefore seeking new ways to create, discuss and share news and make quality journalism sustainable. This could include new revenue or production models, new ways to gather, produce or distribute news. Ideas that can be scaled up across the continent or replicated elsewhere are of particular interest. Preference will be given to ideas that solve bottlenecks facing Africa's media.

Winning projects will be selected by an international jury of digital journalism and civic technology experts, following public voting and shortlisting by a team of technology and digital engagement experts.

A detailed set of responses to 'Frequently Asked Questions' can be found [here](#).

Code for Africa is the custodian of innovateAFRICA and is the continent's largest independent digital journalism and civic technology initiative. It operates as a federation of autonomous country based digital innovation organisations that support 'citizen labs' in five countries and major projects in a further 15 countries.

CfAfrica runs Africa's OpenGov Fellowships and also embeds innovation fellows into newsrooms and social justice organisations to help liberate data of public interest, or to build tools that help empower citizens.

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