



SUMERNET 4 All (S4A): Media-Research Partnership Fund

Call for applications

The Sustainable Mekong Research Network (SUMERNET) is an initiative for research and policy engagement bringing together research partners working on sustainable development in the countries of the Mekong Region: Cambodia, China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam.

In its current phase of work titled **SUMERNET 4 All (S4A)**, SUMERNET is focusing on “water insecurity” by conducting collaborative research, engaging in the policy process, and promoting scientifically sound research and innovation.

In order to build and strengthen partnerships among media and researchers, **eight grants** worth not more than US\$2,800 each will be awarded to selected applicants who need to be either citizens of, (or if other nationalities, need to be based in) the countries in the Mekong Region. We encourage early-career or beginner media professionals to take advantage of this opportunity.

SUMERNET research and media partnership for environmental policy

The media in the Mekong Region is a critical partner for SUMERNET in reporting environmental stories and reaching out to key policy audiences.

A powerful political actor, the media functions as the primary conduit between those who want to influence policy, and policymakers who decide the scope of political discourse, including solutions and adoption. Journalists and news editors play an important role in shaping policy agendas by steering the conversation on critical issues towards the immediate attention of, and action by, policymakers.

Environmental sustainability is one of the key issues being covered by the media. But media often face a multitude of challenges when it comes to environmental reporting. Journalists do not always have environmental and scientific training that is necessary to unpack and report on complex environmental stories. Media outlets may face constraints to support extensive environmental reporting.

Our researchers aim to produce co-knowledge and scientific evidence on the causes, impacts and solutions to address environment and development challenges in the Mekong Region. But they do not always have the capacity, networks and connections to effectively communicate their science to non-academic audiences.

It is crucial to build and strengthen partnerships among media and researchers to enhance the media’s capacity to report on environmental issues. Researchers can provide networking opportunities and exchange of knowledge as well as capacity building. The media, in turn, can help in disseminating scientific knowledge on critical sustainability issues such as climate change, ecosystem degradation and poverty to the policymakers and public in the Mekong Region.

Working together, media and researchers can develop narratives and ground scientific research to achieve environmental sustainability at local, national and regional levels.

Call for media collaboration with SUMERNET researchers in the Mekong Region

This media-research partnership fund is envisaged to benefit both journalists and researchers in the Mekong Region. Under SUMERNET 4 All, researchers aim to deliver on non-academic products such as op-eds, blogs, videos and podcasts as well as scientific journal papers. As part of this effort, SUMERNET provides opportunities for enhancing research capacity in communicating with non-academic audiences.

The media-research partnership fund seeks to enable collaboration and close interactions between SUMERNET researchers and the journalists.

The media needs to publish their outputs to the general public, they need to provide writing and multimedia on science. Yet they also need complex scientific topics to be simplified. Journalists often do not have much time or resources, or a deep scientific background to unpack scientific topics that can often be complex. The researchers can help provide the media with the science but will also learn from the media what the needs of non-academic audiences are, how to simplify issues and topics, and how they can “package” scientific findings to reach a general audience through their non-academic products.

For example, when a journalist writes a story about urban floods, there are many angles to choose from such as gender, more vulnerable communities, urban infrastructure, policy gaps, and so on. This media-research partnership fund aims to help both researchers and journalists collaborate better, to seek common understanding of what kind of “stories” can be made from S4A’s ongoing research projects. This, in turn, is expected to enable researchers to build their capacity at communicating and producing non-scientific outputs.

The interactions in the media-research partnership fund will be different from “trainings” which are often short-term, and after the training, the journalist is not always available to help researchers apply what they learnt. The partnership fund aims to create a close, on-the-ground, and longer-term cooperation between the media and the researchers in specific project teams, so that both sides can get an enhanced appreciation and understanding of each other’s work, science communication challenges, and suitable story solutions.

Through this partnership fund, we expect more media stories could be published from the results of the research projects under S4A. The quality of non-academic products that the research project teams need to produce could be enhanced. Apart from linking the journalists with the research project teams, the journalists could get to know SUMERNET network and S4A work. Some aspects of S4A work could also be promoted beyond the individual research projects where appropriate.

1. Objectives

- Strengthen the media-research partnership to help further sharing of knowledge and evidence on critical sustainability issues to policymakers and the general public
- Enhance the capacity of the researchers on communicating with non-academic audiences
- Build media capacity on contextual and in-depth reporting of environmental topics
- Raise the visibility of S4A and promote the network’s work in the Mekong Region.



2. Who can apply?

Journalists (in particular younger, early-career media persons) based in the Mekong Region are eligible to apply for this fund.

The selected applicants who need to be either citizens of, or if other nationalities need to be based in, the countries in the Mekong Region. We encourage early-career or beginner media professionals to take advantage of this opportunity.

- **Journalists (beginner to mid-career, freelancers* or groups of beginner journalists who wish to collaborate).**
- **Multimedia producers (young, early-career) that work with photography, audio, video, and/or animation**
- **The cover letter (see selection criteria below) is expected to demonstrate why SUMERNET should award the proposed story, how the profile of the journalist fits well with the proposed story, and indicate the external outlet in the Mekong Region where the story will be published.**

*Freelance journalists are encouraged to provide a supporting letter of intent from an outlet or organization that will disseminate their work.

Each applicant is requested to review the table of S4A projects ([see the link](#)) and **identify the top three projects that he/she is interested in to build a partnership with** the S4A research teams, to produce their proposed media output.

3. Selection criteria for the grants

The journalists will be selected through an open call and competitive process. **The application should be submitted along with the CV, cover letter, and story proposal.** The cover letter is expected to demonstrate the news or web outlet where the story will be published.

Please note the following selection criteria for the application.

Knowledge exchange/partnership: The applicant must demonstrate his/her wiliness to exchange and share knowledge and build the partnership with the research teams through this partnership opportunity. This fund is designed so that the journalists can play an important role to enhance researchers' capacity in communicating their research to the wider public.

Relevance: The story proposal must be relevant to at least one of three S4A projects selected by the applicant ([detailed information about individual S4A projects can be found through this link](#)). It must explain why the chosen topic is relevant to water insecurity issues in the grantee's country or in the Mekong Region as a whole.

Angle: If the central topic has already been addressed, then the story should highlight how it is different and focus on a new worthwhile aspect of the environmental issues. Journalists are encouraged to report on these environmental issues with a science or policy lens.

Impact: The story must inform, encourage discourse and urge policy action.



Feasibility: All facets of the story proposal must be realistic and achievable within the given timeline.

Diversity: The story proposal should include as much gender, ethnic, linguistic, geographic, and cultural diversity as possible

Publishing: The applicants will need to propose where their stories (or multimedia) will be published indicating the names of the respective website or news outlet. While we realize a “guarantee” of publishing is not possible, we at least want to ensure the proposal can show a *venue* for publishing of the final output. All stories whether published in an external outlet or not, will also be republished (with permissions) in the SUMERNET website. But we encourage publishing in an external outlet as a requirement for the grant and to maximize the media outreach.

4. Linking the media grantees and the S4A research projects

Each applicant is requested to review the S4A project profiles including the 19 projects that are being implemented under S4A ([see the link](#)) and **choose the top three projects that he/she is interested in to build a partnership with** the S4A research teams, to produce the required media output as described above. The projects selected by the applicant should be those that include a study site in the applicant’s country or base of work. This is to ensure that the media can visit the study sites without any need to travel across borders given the challenge of cross-border travel during the pandemic.

If your proposal is awarded a grant, the Secretariat will approach the research teams that you have identified according to your ranking order to see if they would have a common interest in this media-research partnership opportunity. At the end, the journalist will need to work with one or two research teams. S4A reserves the right to identify another research team for the journalist if none of his/her selected teams can cooperate on this partnership.

5. Key outputs and activities under the grant

5.1 Induction webinar

Once the eight grantees are selected, SUMERNET will host an induction webinar for both the grantees and researchers to introduce this grant, SUMERNET programme and expectations for this partnership. All the selected grantees will be required to attend this induction webinar.

5.2 Field visit and knowledge exchange

Since the aim of this grant is to enhance media collaboration with our researchers, we expect the researchers and journalists to share and exchange their expertise and knowledge during the grant period.

Currently, S4A is supporting 19 projects across 5 countries in the Mekong Region related to three research themes: 1. Water access, rights & allocation in times of scarcity; 2. Governance and management of flood disaster risks; 3. Transboundary interactions with water systems.

SUMERNET Secretariat based in Bangkok will support the **grantees in linking with the S4A research teams who have a shared interest to cooperate with this partnership and provide their scientific research to support the production of the media products.** The SUMERNET Steering Committee members residing in the country of those relevant research projects will provide the partnership with advisory support.

We encourage the grantee journalists to guide our researchers on how to simplify complicated topics or key findings to make it suitable for a non-technical audience and to produce non-academic products. In turn, the researchers will provide the insights from research projects by sharing knowledge from their projects and providing coordination and support for the visit of the journalist to the project sites where the research teams conduct the field study. Moreover, the media can also attend any other key events that are being held during the period of the grant in consultation with the research teams.

5.3 Outputs by media grantees**

Based on the knowledge gained through this partnership, the journalist needs to produce at least one of the below.

- **Text-based stories with accompanying images: 1,000-3,000 words**
- **Short films or video interviews (6-10 minutes) with 200-word written summary**
- **Audio podcast: Not more than 20 minutes with 200-word written summary**

While the story must relate to the overall theme of work from one or more research or joint action projects in SUMERNET 4 All (S4A), the journalist can maintain their independence in choosing the focus/angle of his/her story.

**The outputs can be either in English and/or a local Mekong Region language publication (but if produced in another language, English translations are expected to be provided by the journalist).

5.4 Outputs by S4A researchers

A reflection report will be prepared by the S4A researchers (not the media grantees) participating in this media-partnership fund. But the media grantees are encouraged to work with the researchers if possible, to note the key lessons learnt from this media-research partnership. This report can highlight the results of this partnership describing the experience in engaging with the journalists and how this has helped the researcher in enhancing their capacity to produce or communicate their research activities and findings to reach non-academic audiences.

6. Grant payment and procedures

Selected journalist will be awarded not more than US\$2,800 per grant. This comprises an honorarium of US\$2,000 (that will be provided in two tranches) and not more than US\$800 to cover actual travel and related costs to meet researchers and visit field sites.

The grant amount is designed to recognize that the journalist will spend at least 20 working days on the media-research collaboration.

At the end of the granting period, we will require the journalist to submit a financial report (we will provide a template) along with the needed receipts or supporting documents for reimbursement.

Proposed timeline: April - November 2021

Activity	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Call for media-research partnership fund									
Selection of grantees and contracting process									
Induction webinar									
Field visit and knowledge exchange									
Story production									
Preparation of reflection report									
Submission of final products:									
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflection report by researchers • Stories to news outlets by journalists 									

7. Application process

The journalists interested in applying for this fund should submit their cover letter, CV and story proposal via online system by **Sunday 23 May 2021, 23:59 (Bangkok local time)**. Email applications will not be accepted.

For more information on the grant or S4A work, please contact: rajesh.daniel@sei.org; agus.nugroho@sei.org.