



REPORTERS SHIELD FACT SHEET

Legal Protection for Investigative Reporting

Reporters Shield is a membership program that defends investigative reporting around the world from legal threats meant to silence critical voices. The program is for media outlets and NGOs that report in the public interest.

PROBLEM

Media around the world increasingly risk facing expensive, and sometimes existential, lawsuits for reporting the truth. In the past few years, the number of SLAPPs — strategic lawsuits against public participation — has grown significantly. These suits are filed specifically to threaten, intimidate, and financially burden journalists. As a result, media outlets may be forced to self-censor, avoid stories about litigious individuals, and remove stories from their websites upon receiving legal threats. This situation harms press freedom, democracy, and the free flow of information that the public has a right to receive.

"Prevent * Respond * Defend"

Experience shows that journalists usually win SLAPPs if the suit is brought in a country where there is rule of law and they have good legal representation. Reporters Shield works in partnership with members to prevent lawsuits, respond to legal threats, and defend them against defamation lawsuits.

Reporters Shield will help members to avoid lawsuits by providing training, resources, and pre-publication review in high-risk circumstances. The program will identify qualified lawyers to respond to legal threats and coordinate and cover legal representation up to a pre-agreed limit in the event of a lawsuit.

ELIGIBILITY

Reporters Shield is available to media outlets and NGOs reporting in the public interest. Certain criteria must be met to be eligible for membership. An organization should:

- Be legally registered
- Focus primarily on news, public interest, and/or investigative reporting
- Publish reporting in print and/or online
- Have non-profit status or transparent ownership
- Have editorial independence and adhere to professional editorial standards, such as the [IFJ Global Charter of Ethics for Journalists](#), or similar formal, published guidelines
- Be independent from political, commercial, or other undue influence or interference
- Have transparent, professional financial management
- Distinguish clearly between opinion and news reporting

HOW IT WORKS

Organizations participating in Reporters Shield pay reasonable annual fees to keep the program sustainable. Fees will be based on a number of factors, including the location of the outlet and how many stories they produce in a year.

An outlet can start the membership process by first filling out the form on the website: reporters-shield.org. Applications will be reviewed in a phased approach, with some regions launching benefits in the coming months, and others added later this year and in 2024.

The program is currently in Phase I of its rollout. Applications will be reviewed from most countries in South America, North America, Europe, and Central Asia. Phase 2 will expand benefits to organizations based in most countries in the Middle East/North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Caribbean, and Phase 3 will reach organizations based in most countries in South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia, and the Pacific.

BOLSTERING THE FIELD OF INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

- As a member of the non-profit Reporters Shield, media outlets save significant sums of money by not having to pay high insurance premiums or for expensive lawyers for their defense.
- Through training, members learn best practices and strategies to proactively guard their reporting against lawsuits, further encouraging quality and ethical journalism.
- By connecting across borders, sharing strategies, and building a network of their peers, members gain more power and knowledge to fight lawsuits and keep reporting freely.

ABOUT REPORTERS SHIELD

The Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project and the Cyrus R. Vance Center for International Justice developed Reporters Shield, with assistance and support from insurance specialists and USAID. The law firms of Proskauer; Primmer Piper Eggleston & Cramer PC; and Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP provided pro bono legal support.

Reporters Shield is a U.S.-based nonprofit organization. USAID, which has a long history of fostering the growth of independent media across the world, will work with Congress to contribute up to \$9 million in seed funding for the program. USAID's support will go to eligible organizations from countries where USAID operates and/or provides assistance. Private donor contributions fund the program to support U.S. media. For more information, visit reporters-shield.org or contact info@reporters-shield.org.