

RATIONALE FOR COLLECTIVE BARGAINING SYSTEM IN TEAM-BASED COLLABORATIVE INVESTIGATIONS

By Ruona Meyer - 2024

Wage imbalances have been cited in funded investigations between:

- A. Media outlets that receive funding versus outlets that are part of the same investigation but are not funded
- B. Investigative team members who are based in/working from high-income countries versus team members based in or having to work from low-income countries
- C. Male team members versus female team members working on the same investigations
- D. Coordinators/Editors of Investigations who will only work remotely versus investigative reporters who are on-the-ground working the highest number of hours and taking on the highest level of risks.

For these cases where all members in an investigative team are not paid the same amount, a collective bargaining framework is proposed for cross-border networks of journalists working in freelance, hybrid and commissioned networks.

The framework is targeted at pay equality for team members in low-to-lower income countries, and ensures that proposed budgets include considerations for each journalist's living and professional conditions. The aim is to create a culture of inclusive pay transparency within teams, whilst enabling Journalismfund to eradicate and audit wage disparities in cross-border investigative journalism production.

IDENTIFIED SCENARIOS (all names and countries have been changed)

- A. A small media outlet in Romania, is invited to partake in a Europe-wide investigation, by one of Denmark's largest newspapers. Though Denmark has secured grant funding for the investigation, the media outlet in Romania receives no funding for the work its journalists will do over several weeks/months.
- B. Antoine is a white, male freelance journalist receiving a grant to report on a story in an African country. He has been told that he will be paid according to the local rates in the country he is based in. The reality is that Antoine will need to spend beyond local rates to hire security officers and prevent the risk of kidnap or getting his filming equipment stolen.
- C. Thabo is a male South African journalist, while Celeste, female, is in Cameroon. Both are commissioned by a grantee outlet to work on the same global cross-border investigation affecting their countries. While Shola gets paid expenses for the entire period, Celeste is not paid any wages; she is expected to have her wages covered under her usual salary. The reality is that Celeste's media house usually owes salaries for months. Despite this, Celeste must meet the deadlines of the cross-border team. Being female, it also costs Celeste more to travel safely at certain times of the day, or in certain areas.

- D. Mercy is a freelancer in Germany who pitches an investigation. She will work remotely from Germany, co-writing and editing the stories. Mercy's budget reveals that team members Tina and David from Comoros Island will receive salaries that are five times less, even though Tina and David will do the bulk of the work, and have more years of experience than Mercy.

Proposed Framework

When team members are not being paid the same amount, team budgets should be based on, and adjusted to reflect the following:

- A. Current living wage, not the minimum wage, which is usually not able to cover living costs, even if legal
- B. Incidental financial needs caused by Gender
- C. Incidental financial needs caused by Race or Other Personal Circumstances (e.g Disability)
- D. Incidental financial needs caused by professional status
- E. Incidental financial needs caused by essential but expensive tools for work (laptop, access to databases, photography and video/sound equipment, etc).

It is expected that all team members discuss together, fill the forms and have budgets proposed to the grantor organization that reflect a common understanding, and pay transparency.

See below for sample Collective Bargaining Forms, and Post-Publication Audit Forms

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING FORM (to be filled by reporting Team members)

Kindly fill this form if team members will be paid different wages

Title of Investigation:		
Team Member Name:		
Current city and Country of Residence		
Expected Task/Work Duties	Location of Task	Task Duration (hours, weeks, etc)
Additional costs based on Gender		
Additional costs based on Race/Other Personal Circumstances		
Additional costs based on Essential Tools for work		
Date and Signature:		

What else would you like to suggest?

Date and Signature:

POST-PUBLICATION AUDIT SURVEY (if implemented by donor's staff as a survey interview with Teams)

Title of Investigation:

Name of Interviewer:

Name of Interviewee:

1. Were all team members included in discussions about pay using the collective bargaining system? (Please circle an option)

YES

NO

Please briefly state any reasons for your previous answer

2. Did all team members sign off on completed Collective Bargaining forms showing what every colleague would be paid?

YES

NO

3. What reasons brought additional costs to team wages?

Additional Costs based on Gender

**Additional Costs based on Race/Other
Personal Circumstances**

**Additional Costs based on Essential
work tools**

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What were the advantages (if any) of using the CB system?		
What were the disadvantages (if any) of using the CB system?		
What else would you like to suggest?		
Date and Signature of Interviewer:		

ACCOMPANYING TEXT FOR GRANT APPLICATION ADVERTS

In advertising the grants, the donor may include a statement asking all team members to have implemented collective bargaining prior to submitting an application. The donor may also add information that an audit will also be performed. A template for both statements is as follows:

Donor's Pre-Funding Implementation statement*

- A. All investigating team members are required to fill and sign the Collective Bargaining Form provided.
- B. All team members are required to sign complete forms that state clearly what every colleague is being paid.
- C. For accessibility purposes, audio signatures in any European language are permitted (e.g sent as voice notes stating the name and consent of each team member)

Donor's Post-Investigation Auditing statement**

- A. Each team coordinator (and preferably all team members) will be required to fill in the Post-Publication Audit Form provided. OR each team coordinator (and team members) commits to being available for a 15-minute conversation for a Post-Publication Audit Survey.

- B. If team members are not involved in the post-investigation Audit process, then the Team Coordinator must commit to sharing all details of the survey, in the spirit of full transparency.
- C. Journalismfund Europe may anonymously contact team members to corroborate answers from their team coordinator regarding pay transparency.
- D. Any team where members were convinced/coerced to sign incomplete budget forms will be automatically cited for non-compliance...
OR
- E. Coordinators of teams where members were made to sign incomplete budget forms or where pay information was proven to be withheld, will be blacklisted from future editions of the grant application process.

DEFINITIONS

- **Hybrid Networks:** Teams made up of investigative journalists in full-time and freelance roles
- **Freelance Networks:** Teams made up of only freelance investigative journalists
- **Commissioned Networks:** Teams of journalists commissioned by a second-party grantee to undertake investigations coordinated by the grantee

NOTES

***Pre-Funding Implementation** may also include an “Ask Me Anything” session to clarify the rationale behind Collective Bargaining, especially because some journalists at DataHarvest 2024 said in confidence that colleagues are being added to grant applications without their knowledge until the grant is won.

****Post-Investigation Auditing statements** may serve more as a reason for teams to proactively implement Collective Bargaining, and if donor personnel resources are limited, auditing may be randomly applied to some, not all teams. However, full auditing is recommended for the first few grant cycles, to provide awareness and make transparency in wages more of a routine.

*****In Low-income countries**, Collective Bargaining is advised for teams with freelance journalists in low- income countries because they have no formal union representation, yet are expected to be active, maintain sources, collaborate and pitch stories while regular work is not guaranteed.