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Contact: Amadou Mahtar Ba, Chief Executive  
Telephone: +254 20 269 4004,  
Email: [info@africanmediainitiative.org](mailto:info@africanmediainitiative.org)

## **Leading African Media Organization Announces \$1 Million Fund for News Innovation**

The [African Media Initiative](#) (AMI), the continent's largest association of media owners and operators, has announced a \$1 million fund to spur innovation in the news industry.

The new African News Innovation Challenge (ANIC) is designed to encourage experimentation in digital technologies and support the best innovations that strengthen African news organizations.

AMI Chief Executive Amadou Mahtar Ba first announced the fund at the 4<sup>th</sup> [African Media Leaders Forum](#) in Tunisia on November 10. This week, Ba confirmed that [Omidyar Network](#), [Google](#), the [John S. and James L. Knight Foundation](#), [Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung](#), and the [U.S. Department of State](#) have all pledged either funding or technical support for the initiative.

The [World Association of Newspapers & News Publishers](#) has also committed expert business mentorship and marketing support for ANIC winners.

“Traditional media are still growing in Africa, but media organizations know that they need to go digital and mobile to prepare for the future. Many, however, don’t have the resources to experiment or take risks, especially in this economic climate,” says Ba. “This competition is our way of saying: ‘We’re here to help. If you come up with an innovative idea to improve the African media landscape, we’ll help make it happen.’”

Winners in the annual contest will get seed grants ranging from \$12,500 to a maximum of \$100,000 for more ambitious projects. To build robust business models, the grantees will also receive technical advice and start-up support, as well as one-on-one mentoring from some of the world’s leading media experts.

“We’re trying to nurture a culture of innovation in African media,” said AMI’s digital strategist and ANIC project manager Justin Arenstein. “We want the winners to get their products to the market quickly and we want to remove as much risk as possible. These pioneers will have access to experts that most media simply do not have.”

Arenstein is working with AMI as part of a Knight International Journalism Fellowship administered by the [International Center for Journalists](#) (ICFJ), with funds from the [John S. and James L. Knight Foundation](#) and the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#).



The contest will target solutions to technology challenges facing African media, including ways to strengthen investigative reporting using data journalism and other digital tools, plus new ways to improve audience engagement, mobile news distribution, data visualization, new revenue streams and better workflow systems.

“We’re casting the net as wide as possible,” said Arenstein. “As long as the solution is scalable and appropriate to local market conditions, we’re happy to consider it.”

The competition is modeled after Knight Foundation’s highly successful [Knight News Challenge](#), which has seeded news media innovation across the globe over the past five years. “We will work closely with Knight Foundation to incorporate the best practices and technology for a digital news contest designed to solve problems and stimulate new thinking,” said Joyce Barnathan, president of the International Center for Journalists.

AMI will launch the contest website in December 2011. In the first phase, African journalists and publishers will be asked to identify the most pressing challenges facing the industry. Once these have been identified, AMI will issue a call for applications targeting these issues in February 2012.

Winners will be chosen through a rigorous two-phase judging process, consisting of public voting and a review of finalists by a panel of experts. The top contenders will receive a combination of cash and technical support.

Winners will then test their innovations in AMI member-newsrooms and showcase projects at international media gatherings.

The African innovation contest is part of AMI’s broader initiative to build digital entrepreneurship within traditional media. AMI is also supporting a new network of HacksHackers.com chapters across Africa that will bring technologists together with journalists to help pilot projects in digital media. The HacksHackers chapters will host smaller, more frequent innovation challenges, hackathons, and skills workshops to help build strong teams with proven successes for the ANIC and similar global contests.

### **About AMI**

The **African Media Initiative** is the continent’s primary umbrella association of African media owners, top executives, and other industry stakeholders. AMI represents media across all traditional platforms plus newer digital formats. AMI’s mandate is to serve as a catalyst for strengthening African media, by building the tools, knowledge resources, and technical capacity for African media to overcome key constraints so that they can play an effective public interest role in society. This mandate includes assisting with the development of professional standards, financial



sustainability, technological adaptability, and civic engagement. AMI seeks to achieve its mandate through partnerships, advocacy and strategic projects.

### **About ICFJ**

The International Center for Journalists is a non-profit organization that advances quality journalism worldwide. Our programs combine the best professional standards with the latest digital innovations. We believe that independent, vigorous media are crucial in improving the human condition.