

REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS (RFA)
for USAID Georgian Media Program

Issuance Date: November 25, 2024

Closing Date: December 16, 2024

Subject: Request for Applications (RFA) Number FY25-05

USAID Media Program

Reference: Issued Under an International Research and Exchange Board (IREX) USAID COAG Number 72011422CA000041

Competition Summary

To promote and strengthen investigative journalism nationwide, the USAID Georgia Media Program, implemented by IREX, invites applications from online media outlets. We seek proposals from media organizations and individual journalists committed to producing impartial, well-researched investigative content on high-interest public issues.

Applicants are expected to submit high-quality, accessible investigative pieces or series using diverse formats—such as long reads, investigative series, video investigations, and data journalism—on a broad range of topics, from current events to critical, ongoing issues like government accountability, justice, corruption, environmental challenges, and local matters. The USAID Media Program values creativity, innovation in media, digital journalism, visual storytelling, and collaborative efforts between media organizations both within Georgia and with regional and international news groups.

Through providing resources, IREX aims to empower Georgian media to explore essential topics in greater depth. Applicants, whether organizations or individuals, must demonstrate the capability to deliver detailed and thorough investigations, an established audience, a platform for dissemination, and rigorous editorial standards. The grant pool aims to expand and support independent, high-quality journalism that adheres to professional and ethical standards and does not fund advocacy campaigns.

Proposals should include primary and alternative topics that include a problem description explaining the issue's significance, and a preliminary plan detailing how the media outlet intends to cover the topic. A timeline for content dissemination and the platforms should also be provided.

The USAID Media Program has allocated a total of \$200,000 for this grant pool, with individual grants available for up to \$40,000 each, supporting projects with a duration of up to 12 months.

Proposal Instructions

Any questions concerning this RFA should be submitted in writing not later than 5 days prior to the closing date shown above to contact.mp.ge@irex.org. Applicants should retain for their records one copy of all the enclosures which accompany their application.

Complete applications must be received by the USAID Media Program no later than the closing date listed on the front page of this RFA. Pre-award costs are not allowable and will not be reimbursed. Applications should be submitted in electronic format to the following email address contact.mp.ge@irex.org with “Proposal submission under USAID Media Program **FY25-05** in the subject line.

If you do not receive a confirmation e-mail within 2 business days after applying, please reach out to echemia@irex.org or trukhadze@irex.org.

The complete application packet must include the required attachments:

A. Application For Funding REQUIRED

See attachment A for the application questions. Please limit responses to 10 pages maximum per application for Section A.

B. Budget and Budget Narrative REQUIRED

See attachment B for the budget form. Please note that this template contains multiple tabs for the line-item budget and budget narrative, both of which must be filled out.

Applicants should verify that the total amount will not exceed \$40,000. The budget form must include all projected expenses for the grant activities. Based on the individual application, IREX reserves the right to alter an applicant’s budget or to fund some, but not all, components of an application.

All budgets should include expenses for promotion and distribution of the complete work produced under the grant, to ensure it reaches the widest possible audience.

Based on the individual application, IREX reserves the right to alter an applicant’s budget or to fund some, but not all, components of an application.

C. Resumes/CV REQUIRED

Resumes for the primary staff who will be working on the project should be attached.

D. Editorial Policy and Practices REQUIRED

The editorial policy and self-regulatory editorial practices of the applicant must be provided. Where complaints of violations of journalistic principles against the applicant have been upheld by the council of the Georgian Charter for Journalistic Ethics in the last 2 years, the applicant should indicate how they have responded to address those findings. For individual content creators, a statement of editorial principles and practices should be provided.

Thank you for your interest in the USAID Media Program.

Sincerely,

Dianne Janes

Chief of Party, USAID Media Program

Request for Applications (RFA) Summary

This Request for Applications outlines the information required by the applicant for the development and submission of a proposal for consideration. The potential applicant is expected to review, understand, and conform with specifications contained in this RFA. Failure to do so will be at the applicant's own risk.

All reasonable, allocable, and allowable expenses, both direct and indirect, which are related to the Subaward program and are in accordance with applicable cost standards (2 CFR 200 Subpart E Cost Principles or the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) Part 31 for-profit organizations), may be charged under the Subaward. Construction is not eligible for reimbursement under this award.

For non-US organizations, the Standard Provisions for Non-US Nongovernmental Recipients will apply. (See Standard Provisions in Annex 1)

This RFA is being issued and consists of this cover letter, Schedule A, and Annexes.

Issuance of this RFA does not constitute an award commitment on the part of the USAID Media Program nor does it commit the USAID Media Program to pay for costs incurred in the preparation and submission of an application. The application is submitted at the risk of the applicant. All preparation and submission costs are at the applicant's expense.

SCHEDULE A

SECTION I: FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION:

The USAID Media Program in Georgia is a five-year program funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by IREX. The program envisions a vibrant, resilient, networked media sector that provides Georgia's citizens and diverse communities with the civically relevant, fact-based independent information they need to build a more just, prosperous, and inclusive society.

Program Objectives:

1. Preserve and strengthen an enabling environment that fosters press freedom and access to information.
2. Increased business innovation and viability of media outlets
2. Increase the availability of civically relevant, fact-based, independent sources of information.

USG Regulation:

2 CFR 200, 2 CFR 700

Standard Provisions for Non-U.S., Nongovernmental Recipients:

<https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/303mab.pdf>

SECTION II: AWARD INFORMATION:

Subject to the availability of funds, the USAID Media Program expects to award Fixed Amount Awards (FAA) sub-awards to eligible organizations and individuals under the **Investigative Journalism grant pool** to support creation of impartial, well-researched investigative content on high-interest public issues. Applicants are expected to submit high-quality, accessible investigative pieces or series using diverse formats—such as long reads, investigative series, video investigations, and data journalism—on a broad range of topics, from current events to critical, ongoing issues like government accountability, justice, corruption, environmental challenges, and local matters. The total amount available for this activity is \$200,000, with a ceiling of \$40,000 per grant. The expected duration of IREX’s support or the period of performance is up to 12 months, with an anticipated start day of 1 January 2025.

The USAID Media Program reserves the right to fund any or none of the applications submitted.

The USAID Media Program reserves the right to request a pre-publication legal review of stories produced under the grant. This process will be confidential between the applicant and the legal expert and aims to help protect journalists from potential lawsuits or complaints by ensuring that applicants’ work is well-researched, fact-based, and complies with Georgian law.

SECTION III: ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION:

The applicant / application must meet the following requirements:

- Organizational applicants must be officially registered as a legal entity. In lieu of official registration, a Sub-awardee may show proof of effort to secure registration, exemption from registration, or show cause why such registration is either not optional or practicable.
- Individual applicants may apply individually or submit their application in collaboration with a registered organization.
- Meet the project objectives and principles.
- Contain expected outcomes and results consistent with and linked to the project objectives.
- Have produced a high-quality body of work that consistently demonstrates adherence to strong editorial principles of neutrality, impartiality, and robust fact-checking.
- Be committed to upholding the principles of the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics (GCJE), or similarly robust journalism principles such as OCCRP.
- The applicant is not a debarred/sanctioned organization or individual according to SAM.gov and LexisNexis database checks.

- Have a Unique Entity ID (UEI). Organizations selected for funding will be expected to have, or be in the process of applying for, a UEI number. A UEI is a unique number assigned to public and private companies, individuals, or organizations that receive funding from the US federal government. UEI numbers are obtained from [HYPERLINK "http://www.sam.gov/"](http://www.sam.gov/)

Eligible Entities:

- Nongovernment Organizations whose primary purpose is journalism.
- National, regional, and local online media

Cost share is not required.

Section IV: APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION:

Any questions concerning this RFA should be submitted in writing not later than 5 days prior to the closing date shown above to contact.mp.ge@irex.org. Applicants should retain for their records one copy of all the enclosures which accompany their application.

The application must be received by the USAID Media Program no later than the closing date listed on the front page of this RFA. Pre-award costs are not allowable and will not be reimbursed. Applications should be submitted in electronic format to the following email address contact.mp.ge@irex.org with “Proposal submission under USAID Media Program RFA” in the subject line.

The complete application packet must include the required attachments:

- A. Application For Funding
- B. Budget and Budget Narrative
- C. Resumes/CV
- D. Editorial Policy / Guidelines

The templates of Attachments A and B will be provided by IREX.

Restrictions:

- Subaward funds provided under the terms of this RFA shall not be used to finance any of the following commodities as per ADS 312 Eligibility of Commodities:
- **Ineligible Commodities:** Military equipment, surveillance equipment, commodities, or equipment for the support of police or other law enforcement activities, abortion equipment and services, luxury goods, gambling equipment, weather modification equipment.
- **Restricted commodities include** Agricultural commodities, motor vehicles, pharmaceuticals, contraceptives and condoms, pesticides, used equipment, fertilizer.
- **Others:** Purchases of goods or services restricted or prohibited under the prevailing USAID source and nationality and other regulations found under ADS 310 or from

countries and suppliers as may be identified by USAID's consolidated list of debarred, suspended, or ineligible subcontractors at <http://www.epls.gov/>.

- Any purchases or activities deemed unnecessary to successfully complete the activity, including any Sub awardee headquarters expenses that are not directly linked to the implementation of the proposed project.
- Previous obligations and/or bad debts.
- Fines and /or penalties.
- Other costs unallowable under USAID and/or federal regulations such as referenced 2 CFR 200 Subpart E Cost Principles and FAR 31.2 Cost Principles for Commercial Organizations.

Environmental Considerations: Activities supported by the USAID Media Program will not support or engage in construction, reconstruction, rehabilitation, or renovation work. The USAID Media Program will also not engage in actions that normally have a significant impact on the environment as defined by 22 CFR 216 (2) (d):

1. Programs of river basin development;
2. Irrigation and water management;
3. Agricultural land leveling;
4. Drainage projects;
5. Large scale agricultural mechanization;
6. Resettlement projects;
7. New land development;
8. Penetration road building and road improvement;
9. Power plants;
10. Industrial plants; and
11. Potable water and sewerage projects

In addition, the USAID Media Program will not support activities that:

- Support project preparation, project feasibility studies, engineering design for activities listed in §216.2(d)(1);
- Affect endangered species;
- Provide support to extractive industries (e.g. mining and quarrying);
- Promote timber harvesting;
- Lead to construction, reconstruction, rehabilitation, or renovation work;
- Support agro-processing or industrial enterprises;
- Provide support for regulatory permitting;
- Lead to privatization of industrial facilities or infrastructure with heavily polluted property;
- Assist the procurement (including payment in kind, donations) or use (including handling, transport, fuel for transport, storage, mixing, loading, application, clean-up of spray equipment, and disposal) of pesticides or activities involving procurement, transport, use, storage, or disposal of toxic materials--pesticides cover all insecticides, fungicides, rodenticides, etc. covered under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act; and/or
- Procure or use genetically modified organisms.

Pursuant to 2 CFR 200.216 procurement of certain telecommunications and video surveillance services or equipment is prohibited.

Late Applications

Late applications are marked as “late” and are ineligible for review or award; however, the USAID Media Program reserves the right to accept and include late applications in the review and award process when it is considered within the best interest of the USAID Media Program to do so and if applications that were received on time have not been opened and reviewed. Applications that are submitted late or incomplete run the risk of **not** being considered for review.

SECTION V: APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION:

Within 10 working days of the deadline for submitting applications, a technical review committee will convene (Note: Under unusual circumstances the technical review committee may be delayed). Throughout the evaluation process, the USAID Media Program shall take steps to ensure that members of the committee do not have any conflicts of interest or the appearance of such regarding the organizations whose applicants are under review. An individual shall be considered to have the appearance of a conflict of interest “if that person, or that person’s spouse, partner, child, close friend or relative works for or is negotiating to work for or has a financial interest (including being an unpaid member of a Board of Directors) in any organization that submitted an application currently under the panel’s review.” Members of the committee shall neither solicit nor accept gratuities, favors, or anything of monetary value from parties to the awards.

Verification of the application submission requirements will be conducted by the USAID Media Program’s grants manager. Awards will be made within one month after the technical evaluation committee completes its review.

The application will be evaluated according to the evaluation criteria set out below. Negotiations may be conducted with shortlisted applicants.

Evaluation Criteria:

Technical Merit: 30 points

- Relevance to program goals
- Importance and relevance of the proposed topics to the Georgian people.
- Approach of proposed coverage
- Potential impact provides fact-based information and data to enhance public awareness and understanding of events, public policies, among audiences and the public at large

Audience and Distribution: 20 points

- Google analytics data for online and/or regional media

- Content distribution plan. Applicants are required to show how they will reach audiences with the content produced and seek to expand their existing audiences by trying new methods of distribution and innovative content distribution methods .

Feasibility and Cost Effectiveness: 20 points

- Are costs reasonable, allowable, and allocable, according to the budget guidelines?
- Is the proposal cost effective and a reasonable use of funds?
- Is the proposed content feasible / possible to produce within the time and budget limitations?

Professional capacity: 30 points

- History of delivering a similar type/size of grant-funded project.
- Technical capacity of the organization/Individual (including human and technical resources)
- Adherence to professional and ethical standards. The grant review committee reserves the right to request further assessment of shortlisted applicants by the Georgian Charter for Journalistic Ethics.

Applicants with an average score of less than 70% of the maximum points will be automatically rejected.

Section VI: AWARD AND ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

The recommendation or selection of an application in accordance with established procedures does not guarantee an award. All applicants must demonstrate that they possess, or can obtain, the necessary management competence to practice mutually agreed upon methods of accountability for funds and other assets provided.

A successful applicant can expect to receive an Award Letter, signed by the program. The award letter will be addressed to the organization's point of contact as stated in the application. Applicants that were not successful can expect a letter explaining the reason for their unsuccessful application.

Following the Award Letter, final negotiations will take place before the signing of a Subaward agreement.

Reporting Procedures:

A description of reporting requirements will be included in the Subaward Agreement. The types of reporting required, along with the schedule of reporting, will depend on the Subaward type

and project duration. Reporting forms will be provided to Subaward recipients. Types of reporting will include the following:

- A brief program report to be submitted during project implementation according to a schedule described in the Subaward agreement. This report will include a description of progress made during the period, problems in project implementation; actions taken to overcome them; and activities planned for the next period.
- A brief final program report will describe how the project objectives and goals were reached, results of the project, and problems and solutions during implementation.
- Links to all content produced under the grant and associated social media posts. These links will be shared immediately after they have been broadcast and as a list included in the final program report.

Issuance of the final installment of Subaward funds is contingent upon the USAID Media Program receipt and acceptance of Final Deliverables and Final Program Reports.

SECTION VII - OTHER INFORMATION

Issuance of this RFA does not constitute an award or commitment on the part of the USAID Media Program, nor does it commit the USAID Media Program to pay for costs incurred in the preparation and submission of an application.

The USAID Media Program / IREX reserves the right to fund any or none of the applications submitted. Further, the USAID Media Program reserves the right to make no awards as a result of this RFA.