**ANNUAL PROGRAM STATEMENT (APS)**

USAID Strengthening Media Systems (SMS) Project

Applications may be submitted from October 19, 2020 until March 1, 2021 and will be reviewed on a rolling basis. Please read all instructions before submitting any documentation.

**Purpose and Mechanisms:**

The purpose of this Annual Program Statement (APS) developed under the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Strengthening Media Systems (SMS) project focuses on supporting initiatives that will increase long-term prospects for long-term sustainability for media outlets and Media Support Organizations (MSOs). This APS will provide specific support in:

**LOT 1/Business Development**: Developing, improving and/or implementing viable business model(s) that directly contribute to the financial sustainability of specific media outlets and MSOs. Support will be provided through grantsfor developing and launching new business models/practices, developing new revenue streams, expert consulting, IT development, audience engagement, supporting new staff for sustainability-related positions, equipment, software, license and supply acquisitions, promotional activities, training and education on sustainability-related topics, etc.

**LOT 2/Sustainability Hubs:** Creating innovative solutions for continued business development of independent media in Serbia. Support will be provided through grants to SMS “Sustainability Hubs” – organizations that will engage in further development or mentoring of media business practices (data-driven decision making, improved and intensive communication with audience, new revenue streams, enhanced technical capacities, etc.), as well as continuous development of independent media capacities for effective implementation of (innovative) business models.

**LOT 3/Advocacy for Improved Media Operating Environment**: Designing and implementing advocacy initiatives aimed at improving the business operating and structural environment for media operations. Support will be provided through grants for designing and implementing advocacy campaigns which include research, policy paper development, establishing partnerships, and community engagement through outreach activities (i.e., public events, social networks campaigns), etc.

The geographic focus of this APS is Serbia. Concept notes for countries outside the geographic focus will not be considered. Additionally, organizations submitting concept notes for consideration must be registered and operating legally in Serbia.

**Application Process:**

The application process consists of two phases: concept paper submission and submission of a full application package.

Applicants must first submit a concept paper in the [template that can be found here.](https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/docx/irex-sms-concept-paper-template-2.docx)

Concept papers should be submitted to sms.grants@irex.org.

The deadline for concept note submission is **March 1, 2021**. The maximum project duration is **6 months.**

All project activities must end by June 30, 2021. The concept notes will be reviewed on a first-come, first-served basis.

Based on concept notes it receives, SMS will contact selected applicants and provide them with further instructions and a full application package. Final funding decisions will be made upon evaluation of the full application package.

The SMS project will verify that submissions meet the eligibility criteria and all application requirements. A technical review committee will evaluate applications. The evaluation committee will be consisted of SMS technical staff. Throughout the evaluation process, SMS shall take steps to ensure that members of the committee do not have any actual or apparent conflicts of interest with any concept notes or applications that are received and reviewed. An individual shall be considered to have the appearance of a conflict of interest “if that person, or 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 the Board of Directors) in any organization that submitted an application currently under the panel’s review.” Members of the review committee shall neither solicit nor accept gratuities, favors, or anything of monetary value from parties to the awards.

Issuance of this APS does not constitute an award or commitment on the part of SMS, nor does it commit the SMS project to pay for costs incurred in the preparation and submission of either the concept note or the full application.

SMS may choose to fully or incrementally fund selected application(s). The SMS project reserves the right to make no awards as a result of this APS.

All questions may be submitted to the following email: sms.grants@irex.org

**Types of Grantees Eligible:**

* Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)
* Private Enterprises
* Foundations and Associations

**Evaluation Criteria for Concept Paper:**

Concept papers will be reviewed in terms of relevance with regard to the criteria of the APS, potential effectiveness, innovative approach, and clarity and feasibility of the ideas presented.