**REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS (RFA)**

**for Strengthening Media Systems (SMS)**

**Issuance Date:** 08/28/2018

**Closing Date:** 09/16/2018

**Closing Time**: Midnight

**Subject:** Request for Applications (RFA) Number RFA-SMS-2018-01 Strengthening Media Systems (SMS)

**Reference:** Issued by the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) under USAID CPFF Number AID-169-C-17-00006

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.

The grants will be awarded and implemented in accordance with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Advanced Directive System (ADS) 302.3.5.6 and 302.3.4.13, “Grants under Contracts (GUCs).” All reasonable, allocable, and allowable expenses, both direct and indirect, which are related to the grant 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 grant. Construction is not eligible for reimbursement under this award.

For non-US organizations, the [Standard Provisions for Non-US Nongovernmental Recipients](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1868/303mab.pdf) will apply. For Fixed Amount Awards, the [Standard Provisions for Fixed Amount Awards to Nongovernmental Organizations](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1868/303mat.pdf) will apply.

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 Strengthening Media Systems Project/IREX nor does it commit Strengthening Media Systems/IREX 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.

Thank you for your interest in Strengthening Media Systems Project/IREX activities.

Sincerely,

Evan Tracz

Chief of Party

Strengthening Media Systems Project

**SCHEDULE A**

**SECTION I: FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION:**

1. **Background**

The Strengthening Media Systems (SMS) is a four-year program funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX). SMS aims to improve the legislative, regulatory, and economic environment for Serbia’s media in order to provide Serbian citizens with the information they need to engage in informed citizenship and hold their government accountable. The project supports the development of a broader, more cohesive, and more effective network for media support and reform to ensure that Serbian media continue to adapt to changes in the evolving political, technological, and economic environment.

In order to achieve its purpose, SMS has two objectives:

* Improve the legal, regulatory, and economic environment for media in Serbia.
* Support the development of financial sustainability, innovation, and partnerships in the Serbian media sector.

1. **Grant Program description**

The Strengthening Media Systems grant program is intended to support the development of financial sustainability, innovation, and partnerships in the Serbian media sector. The grant program is designed to support online media, traditional media, civil society groups, and others producing professional news content for the Serbian population in the development and scaling of innovative media business models.

1. **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this RFA is to offer organizations that participated in the SMS Media Accelerator program the opportunity to further develop and support their ideas and innovations by providing them targeted technical assistance and financial support. In addition, this RFA is open to other potential applicants seeking to develop viable and sustainable digital products and services, or innovative ideas that have the potential to launch or further develop sustainable business models that focus on the digital media market.

Grant activities are aimed at providing support for evidence-based ideas and innovations. Funds can serve as seed funding, provide needed equipment and supplies, facilitate the implementation of initial activities, or offer other support such as additional tailored technical assistance and mentoring.

USG Regulations:

For non-US organizations, the Standard Provisions for Non-US Nongovernmental Recipients and Standard Provisions for Fixed Amount Awards to Nongovernmental Organizations apply.

**SECTION II: AWARD INFORMATION:**

Subject to the availability of funds, IREX expects to award multiple Fixed Amount Grants Under Contract up to $25,000. The expected duration of IREX’s support or the period of performance is 11/01/2018-

05/01/2018. Strengthening Media Systems/IREX reserves the right to fund any or none of the application submitted.

**SECTION III: ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION:**

The applicant / application must meet the following requirements:

* Be officially registered and working in compliance with all applicable civil and fiscal regulations, including, but not limited to pertinent local laws and status. In lieu of official registration, a grantee may show proof of effort to secure registration, exemption from registration, or show cause why such registration is either not optional or practicable
* Meet the projects objectives and principles
* Contain expected outcomes and results consistent with and linked to the project objectives
* Applicant is not a debarred organization

Types of Grantees Eligible:

* Serbian Nongovernmental Organizations (Non-US NGOs)
  + Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)
  + Private Enterprises
  + Foundations and Associations

Cost share is not required but will be considered in evaluation of cost reasonableness and cost efficiency. In-kind contributions such as office space, equipment, and staff-time will be considered cost-share only if provided by a third party. IREX will ensure that the value computed by the grantee is reasonable and fair. Grantee contributions, both cash and in-kind, must meet the following criteria:

* Are verifiable from the grantee’s records
* Are not included as cost-share contributions for any other USG-assisted program and were not paid for by the USG
* Are necessary and reasonable for proper and efficient accomplishment of this award’s objectives
* Are allowable under the Standard Provisions “Allowable Costs”
* Are included in the approved grant budget

**Section IV: APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION:**

Any questions concerning this RFA should be submitted in writing no later than September 7, 2018 to Grants and Subcontracts Coordinator, at [SMSgrants@irex.org](mailto:SMSgrants@irex.org). Applicants should retain for their records one copy of all enclosures which accompany their application.

The application must be received 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. An application and modifications thereof shall be submitted in electronic format (Word and Excel) to the following e-mail address: SMS[grants@irex.org](mailto:grants@irex.org)

The complete application packet must be submitted in the required format with the required attachments.

* Application Form:
  + Applicant Information, including DUNS number
  + Technical Proposal

1. Executive Summary
2. Background and Justification
3. Objectives, Results, and Indicators
4. Target Groups
5. Activities
6. Workplan
7. Communications Plan
8. Monitoring
9. Management Plan
10. Sustainability
    * Institutional Capacity

* Budget and Budget Narrative
* Statement of Liability and Required Certifications and Assurances
* Due Diligence Questionnaire

*Restrictions:*

* Grant 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 grantee 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.

Late Application

Late applications are marked as “late”. IREX 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 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.

**SEXTION V: APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION:**

The Grants and Subcontracts Coordinator will verify that submissions meet the eligibility criteria and all application requirements. A technical review committee will evaluate applications. Throughout the evaluation process, SMS/IREX shall take steps to ensure that members of the committee do not have any conflicts of interest or the appearance of such with regard to 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.

The application will be evaluated according to the evaluation criteria set below. To the extent necessary (if an award is not made based on initial applications), negotiations may be conducted with each applicant whose application, after discussion and negotiation, has a reasonable chance of being selected for award.

*Evaluation Criteria:*

**a. Technical Merit 60 points**

* Anticipated impact of funding on digital idea/innovation advancement
* Anticipated impact of funding on financial sustainability and further development of the applicant’s capacities
* Problem statement, approach and methodology
* Innovative design
* Relevance to program goals

1. **Organizational Capacity 20 points**

* Relevant staff skills to the proposed project or adequate capacity building incorporated into proposal to meet required skills
* Capacity to adhere to USAID financial guidelines

1. **Feasibility and Cost Effectiveness 20 points**

* Are costs reasonable, allowable, and allocable?
* Is the proposal cost effective?
* Consistency of costs with the technical proposal
* *Note:* Cost share is not required but will be factored into analysis of cost reasonableness and effectiveness.

**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 have the ability to 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 grant agreement.

Reporting Procedures:

A description of reporting requirements will be included in the Grant Agreement. The types of reporting required, along with the schedule of reporting, will depend on the grant type and project duration. Under Fixed Amount Awards, deliverables and milestone completion certifications are required.

**SECTION VII - OTHER INFORMATION**

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

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