

Supplier Event

Support for Independent Media in Eastern Partnership Countries

Support for Independent Media in the Baltic States

Foreign & Commonwealth Office, London, June 26th 2018

The starting point of this programme is the identifying patterns of behaviour from the Russian Federation, which looks to sow disunity and course disruption to democratic processes and institutions in the West – implementing programmes and interventions that counter these malign influences.

Media balance and plurality is a big issue. Lack of plurality makes allows disinformation to work. There are a huge raft of malign behaviours that the Russian State undertakes. The Programme is to weaken the Russian State's influence on its near neighbours and the programme does this by implementing projects along the following work strands:

Programme Strands

- ENGAGE – working through the British Council to implement people-to-people activities between ethnic Russians and local communities to develop links along the lines of 21st century skills – includes English language skills and media literacy, social enterprises and cultural activities;
- ENHANCE – supporting independent media in Russia's near abroad to bring balance and plurality to Russian language media, in the Baltic States and Eastern Partnership countries;
- EXPOSE – by debunking and exposing Russian disinformation in real time, which can be reported in mainstream media with the goal to expose malign state disinformation in countries that are targeted by it. If you expose disinformation, it is less likely to be impactful; therefore, the Russian State becomes less credible.
- ENABLE – working with allied governments through the Government Communication Service to improve their strategic communications to their populations.

We are looking for activity that will widen media plurality.

Countries

- Eastern Partnership – Ukraine is the primary focus of activity; other EaPs (Belarus, Georgia, Moldova) are more difficult.
- Georgia – not doing a lot of work. Media landscape is politicised. Few opportunities to fund. Not considered a priority at present.
- Ukraine – Does not currently have a plural media environment. Media ownership dominated by oligarchs. Programme funding is helping the main public broadcaster to grow its audiences. Content – format acquisitions. Regional broadcasting and regional media is more trusted than national media.
- Moldova – Media is in two main languages Romanian and Russian, dominated by oligarchs. Ok to work with TVA, capacity building. It is the smaller organisations who made need support. No activity undertaken with Oligarch or State Media.
- Belarus – almost all media is state owned. A degree of self-censorship. Slim pickings in Belarus.
- Estonia – potential local media opportunities. ETV+ (Russian language broadcaster) is main beneficiary. ETV+ currently has some content and credibility issues with local population.
- Latvia – elections in November this year. Government policy is detrimental to social cohesion. 30% Russian speaking population not catered for by Latvian Government so Russian population gets their news/entertainment from Kremlin backed stations.
- Lithuania – Small Russian speaking community in Lithuania compared to Latvia and Estonia. Small, locally organised Russian speaking broadcasters (e.g. radio stations) will need support. Currently no Russian language public broadcaster.

We work with European Endowment for Democracy (EDD) – Grants to fund innovative media projects across the Eastern Partnership countries.

Creative Content Support Fund. Works with 32 Russian language platforms.

Other donors, such as the USA are active in this area, particularly by providing more money to Independent Media but are held back by lack of leadership. EU is funding media controlled by oligarchies as they are seen as the only alternative. The Nordic Countries, Finland, Sweden and Denmark are particularly active and have a deep understanding of these issues. Meetings with international donors are regularly, with the next one to be held in London later in 2018.

Things we want to avoid

We do not need wide-ranging audience analysis and how the UK government should be working in the country. Do not see the need for months and months of scoping.

What we want: Sustainable audiences; Self-sufficient, independent media organisations; reach most of the state media.

Security

No unauthorised disclosures of activity on this work. Contract will need to take a look at who we are working with. Basic IT security reasonable steps should cover our requirements but the FCO may request an explanation of what steps have been taken to ensure security and Duty of Care.

It should be noted that for security reasons, some grantees will not wish to be linked to the FCO. It should be noted that the Programme Team would prefer the programme documents do not end up in the Russian media. We know that they are following us, and we are expecting an expose soon.

Q&A

Question: Why was Armenia left out?

Answer: Armenia is in a state of flux, therefore we need to let dust settle.

Question: You mention Belarus but it is not in the Terms of Reference.

Answer: Because opportunities to work there are very small.

Question: Is the Donor Meeting a consistent meeting that happens quarterly?

Answer: It is twice year, coordinated with the Latvian Government.

Question: Is the P2P work delivered by the British Council?

Answer: The P2P work in the Baltics it is delivered by the British Council. IREX, in partnership with the US, delivers some P2P work in Ukrainian schools.

Question: Are you expecting to fund content for this project?

Answer: Yes

Question: This will include the acquisition of content?

Answer: Potentially if it is effective.

Question: Budget – surely the Ukrainian public broadcaster will swallow up a huge chunk of it?

Answer: Yes.

Question: How much?

Answer: Probably 2/3rds of it.

Question: 2/3rds for co-production including upskilling?

Answer: That's what we have in our heads.

Question: 2/3rds of the budget for Eastern Partnership being spent on Ukraine and then in Ukraine?

Answer: Focus on the public broadcaster.

Timescale this FY is really tight.

Question: Are you bound by ODA rules to spend it all by December?

Answer: No, most of this is not ODA money.

Question: In terms of the budget, will it (ODA) be parts of it?

Presumably – review for extension. A detailed commercial proposal for the first year?

Answer: That's pretty much what we want. If the Partner is performing well, the reality is there is quite a lot of easy wins. Light touch governance. Less goes on consultancy and more goes on outcomes.

Question: Should bidders provide a full framework with the bid?

Answer: Up to bidders whether they should put in a full framework or not. You will not be marked down for it either way.

Technical criteria: Scored from 0-4 on marking scheme. Assessors don't look at finance. Do not cross reference questions in your answer because the assessor may only be looking at one question.

Question: The Terms of Reference mention Gender equality / sensitivity – what are your expectations?

Answer: We think there is scope for gender sensitivity in programming. Girls on HBO is the type of thing but in Ukraine. No right answer to this, but needs to be embedded throughout the programme, and needs to be more than just counting the number of female viewers.

Question: Are there any issues in targeting people under 18?

Answer: Audience Agnostic. Should be how the different media organisations see themselves. Real potential audience. Have no real view on the types of programming.

Question: Are you looking at content Acquisition for the Baltics as Well?

Answer: Potentially, it depends on the individual media organisations.

Due diligence – can someone pick up the media to the newsroom and tell them what to put out? If so, we do not want to work with them. Reputational risk to the FCO if so.

Question: What are you seeking from suppliers? Looking at a call for grants?

Answer: Prefer to avoid call for grants. Ongoing scoping between implementer and Embassy. Relatively small sector.

Question: Are you sticking to those two deadlines?

Answer: Yes

Question: Do you want the same supplier for both projects, or two different suppliers?

Answer: Different media environments. No preference either way. As long as a supplier has the capacity to manage both projects, they can bid for both projects.

Question: British Council deliverables – Terms of Reference plurality of the media – is that to be aligned with British Council?

Answer: Where possible, some areas of convergence (e.g. media literacy)