



*Justice for All Project – Albania*

## REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS (RFA-JAG-2017-004)

### Support to Investigative Journalism

#### I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

USAID Justice for All Project (hereinafter referred to as ‘the Project’) is a five-year (2016-2021) project designed to improve court performance through the implementation of comprehensive judicial performance standards in efficiency, transparency, accessibility and accountability. The Project also provides assistance to investigative journalism and media outlets, as well as to civil society organizations (CSOs) to strengthen their roles as important actors in the justice reform process and as watchdogs for implementation of reforms. The ultimate goal of the Project is to increase public confidence in Albania’s judicial system.

#### II. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

Corruption remains a major challenge to Albania’s political, economic, and social development. The 2016 *Corruption Monitoring System Results for Albania*, conducted by the Albanian Center for Economic Research (ACER) indicates that one in two of the respondents admitted to being demanded directly or indirectly to bribe public officials (49.6 %) <sup>1</sup>. The survey also shows that citizens perceive judges, customs officials, public officials, political parties and political leaders to be the most corrupted segments of the society, ranked in this order.

Corruption in the Albanian judicial system is widespread and present a very high risk for citizens and businesses. A survey carried out by the Albanian Institute for Development and Research Alternatives (IDRA), confirms that citizens see prosecutors and judges as the most corrupted among public officials <sup>2</sup>. The 2016 GAN Integrity Report for Albania states that bribes are often exchanged for favorable judicial decisions, and judges and prosecutors lack accountability <sup>3</sup>.

In principle, economic and organized crimes is often interlinked with parts of judiciary. Reports of international organizations and bodies, including the European Union (EU), state that Albania “has reached some level of preparation as regards the fight against organized crime.” In its most recent 2016 Progress Report for Albania, the EU states that a number of law enforcement operations has led to the vast destruction of cannabis. “However, the number of final convictions effectively leading to dismantling criminal organizations remains negligible compared to the estimated value of the regional and domestic criminal market. Financial investigations, anti-money laundering measures and asset confiscation remain underused. Albania needs to establish a track record of proactive investigations, prosecutions and final convictions in organized crime cases, including money laundering, and effectively dismantle criminal networks.”

<sup>1</sup> Corruption Assessment Report Albania, 2016 [http://seldi.net/fileadmin/public/PDF/Publications/CAR\\_Albania\\_2016/Raporti\\_i\\_Vleresimit\\_te\\_Korrupsionit\\_2016.pdf](http://seldi.net/fileadmin/public/PDF/Publications/CAR_Albania_2016/Raporti_i_Vleresimit_te_Korrupsionit_2016.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> “Korrupsioni në Shqipëri: perceptime dhe përvoja 2015-2016”

[http://www.idrainstitute.org/files/reports/Corruption%202016/Gjetjet%20Krvesore%20Studimi%20i%20Korrupsionit%20IDRA%20\\_Grafike.pdf](http://www.idrainstitute.org/files/reports/Corruption%202016/Gjetjet%20Krvesore%20Studimi%20i%20Korrupsionit%20IDRA%20_Grafike.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.business-anti-corruption.com/country-profiles/albania>

The media plays a major role in exposing corruption, misuse of power, organized and economic crime. Inspiring examples of journalists that have exposed corruption and crimes in many countries of the world testify to the exceptional power of media to fight corruption and crime, but also to enliven public debate and heighten the sense of accountability among politicians, public bodies and institutions.

The Project seeks to award grants to support investigative journalism in areas that include, but are not limited to: (i) corruption and abuse of power in the public and private sectors; (ii) organized crime; (iii) economic crimes; (iv) handling of corruption, economic, and organized crimes cases by the justice system - police, prosecutors, judges-; (v) corruption related to political activity, including party financing. These grants will be available to individual journalists or teams of journalists.

The stories (text and audiovisual) that will be supported by the Project through this RFA will be published on the web site of the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) at [www.reporter.al](http://www.reporter.al). Secondary publication on other media is optional.

The Project seeks creative, innovative applications in support of activities that will contribute to achieve the following objectives:

- Expose corruption and misconduct through thorough in-depth, fact-based, high quality reporting on corruption, particularly in the judiciary and regarding highly complex national and transnational crimes;
- Expose links between the judiciary and organized/economic crime;
- Expose organized and/or economic crimes including but not limited to drugs, human trafficking, money laundering that have the potential to lead to prosecutions and final convictions and assist in effectively dismantle criminal networks;
- Expose corruption in the political sphere, including in political party financing;
- Expose wrongdoing - corruption or misuse of power – in the public and private sectors.

Applications must specifically address one or more of the above objectives. In addition, in order to be considered, all applications must include the required elements on Annex A: *Grant Application Form* and must propose strategies for the successful implementation of the required grant activities.

Award criteria will include, among others: (i) the relevance of the proposed subject matter of the investigation; (ii) past performance of the submitter; (iii) the efficiency of the proposed investigative project; (iv) likelihood of completion of the investigation; and (v) the likelihood of the proposed story being published and broadly disseminated.

The Project will not review applications that include the following activities:

1. Support for or lobbying on behalf of a particular political party;
2. Religious activities.
3. Humanitarian activities;
4. Theoretical research;
5. Any construction activities.

### **III. GRANT AWARDS**

The Project plans to award multiple grants for projects spanning 2 (two) to 12 (twelve) months. Grant funds may be used only for activities directly related to the implementation of the project. Awards will be made in the following categories:

**Small grants for investigations and story production pieces:** Up to \$2000.00

**Medium Grants for investigations and story production pieces of a complex nature:**

Up to \$5000.00

Awards can be made to individual journalists or a team of journalists.

The Project reserves the right to make multiple awards or no awards in response to the applications received. Applicants must bear all the costs and risks related to the preparation of any proposals submitted in response to this RFA. Further, the Project reserves the right to accept or reject any or all applications received, and reserves the right to ask further clarifications from the applicants.

**IV. TIMELINE**

All proposals should include a timeline of activities guided by the following deadlines:

<b>Request for applications issued:</b>	March 24, 2017
<b>Deadline for submitting questions:</b>	Ongoing – all answers will be published at <a href="http://www.ewmi.org/JFA">http://www.ewmi.org/JFA</a>
<b>Responses to be provided by</b>	Ongoing – Questions will be answered and responses posted within 3 business days of receipt
<b>Submission deadline</b>	Ongoing – Last date for submission in this round is August 15, 2017.
<b>Proposal review:</b>	Ongoing – All Proposals will be reviewed by the designated Grants Review Committee within 10 business days of receipt.
<b>Final award decision announced:</b>	Ongoing – applicants will be notified of a final decision regarding their application within 20 business days of receipt.

Applications will be accepted until August 15, 2017 and awards for this round may be made until September 30, 2017 or until such time as all funding has been awarded.

**Please note that evaluation and award dates are subject to change.**

**V. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA**

The Project seeks applications from journalists or teams of journalists working in print, broadcast, online media, and freelance journalists in Albania. Applications may be submitted by individual journalists or a team of journalists. Teams shall name one of its member as the primary person responsible in relation to the Project.

The applications should also meet the following criteria:

- The investigation should uncover new and important information of obvious public interest;
- The journalist(s) already has key information (relevant sources, specific cases, documents and data) related to the proposed subject of investigation and access to additional information is realistic;

- The investigation must not present an unreasonable risk to the participating journalists;
- A realistic timeline for carrying out the proposed investigative reporting must be provided;
- The journalist(s) must attend the opening and closing seminars and training sessions that the Project will organize with the grantees under this RFA; they should also cooperate with the Project’s editors and trainers throughout the implementation of grant-supported activities;
- The journalist(s) must be responsive to requests by the Project’s staff during the investigative work;
- The journalist(s) are expected to meet professional journalistic and ethical standards the implementation of grant-supported activities;
- The journalist(s) must not be debtor, and must have cancelled any debt to the state or arranged for full debt payment prior to receiving the first disbursement of the Project’s grant funds (*this excludes payments for private loans to commercial banks or other credit institutions*);
- The journalist(s) must not be, suspended, excluded or otherwise ineligible to receive US Federal funding;
- Staff of public broadcasting companies cannot participate in a grant project, as a director, project manager or as grant-remunerated participant.

Applicants selected for awards will be subject to a pre-award risk assessment conducted by the Project, to ascertain whether the applicant has the minimum professional and management capabilities required to handle US government funds. Therefore, before making the final decision, the Project may request additional documentation, such as, but not limited to additional samples of investigative stories.

## VI. EVALUATION PROCESS AND CRITERIA

The selection process will be administered by a Grants Review Committee (GRC) established by the Project. If an application is short-listed for potential funding, the respective applicant may be requested to provide additional information. The Project will assess proposals based on the following merit review criteria:

<b>Evaluation Category</b>	<b>Rating – Points</b>
Technical approach	40
Professional and management capacity	30
Past performance	20
Cost Effectiveness	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

These merit review criteria elements are described fully below.

### 1. Technical Approach

#### a. Feasibility of Design & Technical Approach

- The degree to which the proposed investigative reporting is responsive to the RFA and adequately addresses Project’s goals and objectives for this RFA;
- Demonstration of the understanding of the problems/issues which the RFA aims to address;

- The potential of the proposed investigative reporting to successfully and efficiently achieve the objectives outlined in Section II above;
  - A clearly designed, well-thought, ambitious, and realistic plan to carry out the proposed investigative reporting;
- b. *Collaborative Posture (only if the applicant is a partnership of two or more journalists or of journalists and CSOs)*
- Level of collaboration among journalists or between journalist(s) and Albanian CSOs in sharing expertise and resources to meet the proposed investigative reporting goals is clearly defined and explained with each partners' role, participation, and contributions noted.

## **2. Professional and Management Capability and Past Performance**

- a. *Professional and Management Capacity*
- The journalistic, subject-related, and managerial capacity of the applicant(s) to successfully carry out the investigative reporting project. This includes an evaluation of:
  - The professional level of the respective journalist(s) and CSOs are sufficient to accomplish the overall project objectives;
  - The track record and demonstrated commitment of the applicant to implement proposed activities and demonstrated ability to work well with other partners;
  - The experience and expertise of the investigative journalist(s) and other proposed project personnel;
  - The provision for appropriate project reporting mechanisms.
- b. *Past Performance*
- Past performance in achieving positive results when undertaking investigative reporting similar to the one proposed;
  - Impeccable professional and personal integrity;
  - Ability to meet reporting and accountability requirements if awarded a grant by the Project;

## **3. Cost Effectiveness**

- The budget must be (i) complete and fully documented, (ii) reasonable, and (iii) allocated to appropriate budget categories;
- The budget must demonstrate a clear and direct relationship between proposed activities and the proposed use of funds;
- Proposed expenditures must be allowable and allocable to the Project.
- The Project must not be held liable for journalist(s) health, safety, or security during the implementation of the grant-supported activities.

## **VII. AUTHORITY/GOVERNING REGULATIONS**

The Support to Investigative Journalism awards are being made to eligible individuals as part of the Justice for All Program in Albania. The Program, funded by USAID under the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended, is administered by EWMI under Prime Contract no. AID-182-TO-16-00001

Basic guidelines and detailed procedures for the awards are contained in the USAID Justice for All Project Grants under Contract Manual.

The USAID Justice for All Project is required to ensure that all applicants receiving USAID grant funds comply with the guidance found in the regulations referenced above, as applicable to the respective terms and conditions of their grant awards.

## **VIII. APPLICATION SUBMISSION PROCEDURES**

The Project will accept proposals in Albanian and Albanian. For those applicants that do not have the capacity to prepare the application in English please note that the Project will translate your submission. Templates to be utilized when developing the application are provided in Annex A and B. Applicants shall present their technical application and budget in the formats provided and shall follow the instructions and guidelines listed in these annexes.

Applications can be e-mailed, or hand-delivered to the Project office in Tirana using contact information provided below.

**Application Package:** The Application Package should include:

1. Annex A: The Application Form;
2. Annex B: The Project Implementation Timeline;
3. Annex D: The Grant Budget – please note that inclusion of Budget Notes (detailed explanations) detailing the link between activities noted in the technical application and the budget **are required**;
4. The CV(s) of the applicant(s) highlighting his/her/their experience in journalism and, in particular, in investigative journalism;
5. A letter of commitment by the applicant(s) that confirms his/her/their availability to carry out the proposed investigative report within the proposed timeframe;
6. A sample of up to three previous investigative reports prepared by the applicant(s).

To download the application package, please see the RFA announcement at [www.ewmi.org/JFA](http://www.ewmi.org/JFA) alternatively, please contact the Project at [grants\\_icpp@ewmi.org](mailto:grants_icpp@ewmi.org) for an application package. Please reference “RFA-JAG-2017-004” in your request.

**Proposals:** Applicants should submit their proposal and required documents via e-mail to the Project at [grants\\_icpp@ewmi.org](mailto:grants_icpp@ewmi.org). E-mails **must** reference “RFA-JAG-2017-004” in the subject line alternatively, applications may be submitted during regular business hours and in a sealed envelope addressed as follows:

**Attn. GAU: RFA-JAG-2017-004**  
**USAID Justice for All Project**  
**Rr. “Skenderbej”, pallati nr. 8, shkalla 2, apt. 823**  
**Tirane**

Faxed applications will not be accepted.

Applications will be accepted during the whole time, but no later than **17:00** on **August 15, 2017**. Late or unresponsive applications will not be considered.

Submitted proposals must be the original and sole work of the applicant(s). Plagiarism will result in disqualification from the grant competition.

The Project will retain all materials and documents submitted by applicants. It will not use this information for purposes other than proposal review and will not share it with other persons or institutions, except when required by Albanian law or requested by USAID.

Please note that in line with our donor coordination efforts, we will share the names of the applicants and a short description of their respective projects with other Albanian and international programs that support investigative journalism in Albania.

## **IX. LIST OF ANNEXES**

The following is a list of annexes that are an integral part of this RFA:

**Annex A** – Grant Application Form

**Annex B** – Project Implementation Timeline

**Annex C** – Budget Guidelines

**Annex D** – Project Budget Template

*This grant is made possible by the support of the American People through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID.) The contents of this RFA are the sole responsibility of East-West Management Institute, Inc. and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.*