



*Justice for All Project*

## **REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS (RFA-JAG-2017-005)**

### **Establish Fact Checking Services in Albania**

#### **I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

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

#### **II. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION**

In the recent decades, professional fact-checking services have emerged as a very important tool for assessing the accuracy of statements made by public officials, political parties, candidates, journalists, news organizations, associations and other groups. By calling out what is true and what is not, fact-checking services: (i) make public officials, candidates, parties, their staff, and supporters more cautious about what they say; (ii) provide independent, explanatory information that politicians and journalists can use as a frame or point of reference to discuss complex issues; and (iii) act as an advocate on behalf of the citizen rather than of a partisan source of information.

The Project seeks to award a grant to an Albanian civil society organizations (CSOs) that has the interest and capacity to establish a Fact Checking Service. Applicants must have the capacity to cross-check, in a timely manner, statements of politicians and others through research in archives, databases, and other available sources of information, such as TV footage, etc.

The Project requires that the selected grantee engages with relevant watchdog CSOs to check facts related to good governance, anti-corruption, and transparency issues, as well as engage journalists, students, and experts who will conduct peer reviews and evaluations regarding the accuracy and truthfulness of the published and aired information based on available sources.

The Project seeks creative and innovative proposals to establish a credible and high quality Fact Checking Service in Albania, in line with best international practices and standards in this field.

The proposals for establishing Fact Checking Service in Albania should plan concrete steps to achieve the following objectives:

1. Monitor and report on the factual accuracy of statements by major political players, opinion-makers, and journalists in the form of press statements and press conferences, TV ads, debates, speeches, interviews, etc.
2. Assist journalists to report accurately by timely applying best practices of fact-based journalism;
3. Ensure easy access for journalists and citizens to results of fact checking through traditional media and social media, as well as a database as repository;
4. Contribute to increase the credibility of media reports by identifying fake news;
5. Increase public knowledge, understanding, and demand for fact-based information;
6. Contribute to increase the ability of citizens to apply critical thinking vis-à-vis the information that they get through the media.

The Project will assist the grantee to fine-tune the methodology for developing the Fact Checking Service and to put in place efficient monitoring tools to ensure high quality of the service. Although it might take longer to make the Fact Checking Service fully operational, applicants should plan to conduct some fact checking during the electoral campaign leading to the June 18, 2017 general elections and to roll out increased services throughout the life of the project.

The Project will assist the grantee to publicize and make the results of the Fact Checking Service available to and through TV and radio stations, websites, and relevant social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter.

Proposals must specifically address all the above listed objectives. In addition, in order to be considered, all proposals must include the required elements on Annex A: Grant Application Form and must propose strategies for the successful implementation of the required grant activities, including introducing innovations that are appropriate to their respective organization's strengths.

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

- Support for or lobbying on behalf of a particular political party;
- Religious activities;
- Humanitarian activities;
- Theoretical research;

### **III. GRANT AWARDS**

The Project plans to award one grant ranging from \$65,000 to \$85,000 for activities that cover a period of 12 (twelve) to 18 (eighteen) months. Grant funds may be used only for activities directly related to the establishment of a Fact Checking Service in Albania.

The Project reserves the right to make an award or no awards in response to any 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 10, 2017
<b>Deadline for submitting questions:</b>	March 20, 2017
<b>Responses to be provided by:</b>	March 22, 2017
<b>Submission deadline:</b>	April 10, 2017, by 17:00
<b>Proposal review:</b>	April 11 – April 24, 2017
<b>Final award decision announced:</b>	April 28, 2017

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

#### **V. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA**

The Project seeks applications from CSOs capable of establishing a Fact Checking Service, preferably with a proven track record in watchdog activities focusing on good governance and anti-corruption.

In addition, the applicants should meet the following criteria:

- Applicants must have the institutional capacity and expertise to cross-check, in a timely manner, statements of politicians, public officials, journalists, and opinion-makers through research in archives, databases, and other available sources of information, such as TV footage, newspapers or radio.
- Have at least one year of operational experience. As a rule, the Project will not provide “start-up” funding, although the Project may make a rare exception if sufficient evidence is presented to show that the organization’s leadership has adequate prior experience.
- Have a transparent system of bookkeeping that complies with Albanian legislation and International Accounting Standards (IAS). If such a system is not in place, the grantee must work closely with the Project office to ensure that accurate financial management and transparent bookkeeping systems are developed.
- Must not be a 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 grant funds.
- Must operate as an independent non-politically affiliated organization.
- Must not be debarred, suspended, excluded or otherwise ineligible to receive US Federal funding.
- Civil servants, political appointees, members of the current parliament, staff of public broadcasting companies, and/or leaders of political parties cannot participate in a grant project, as a director or as grant-remunerated participant.

Applicants selected for award will be subject to a pre-award risk assessment conducted by the Project, to ascertain whether the applicant has the minimum 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:

- A copy of the organization’s most recent registration document;
- Auditor’s report;
- Financial statements (Balance Sheet, Profit and Loss, Cash Flow); and
- Organization policies.

The Project will not award a grant to an organization that does not have a DUNS number for awards of \$25,000 and above. Therefore, the successful applicant will be requested to obtain a DUNS number. The Project will provide to the winning applicant instructions on how to obtain a DUNS number.

*Note:* Partnerships of 2 (two) or more eligible CSOs are encouraged to apply. Each individual member of such a partnership must meet the minimum eligibility requirements, as shown above. However, the additional documentation for the pre-award risk assessment is only required for the authorized/lead organization representing the partnership of CSOs. In addition, the individual CSOs making up the partnership must also submit a signed letter of cooperation or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) as part of their application in response to this RFA.

## 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>
Feasibility of Design & Technical Approach <i>(includes 10 points to be separately evaluated for Collaborative Posture, which will be considered only when the application is from a partnership of eligible CSOs)</i>	50
Organizational Technical and Management Capacity	30
Past Performance	15
Cost Effectiveness	5
<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 application is responsive to the RFA and adequately addresses the Project’s goals and objectives for establishing the Fact Checking Service;
- Demonstration of the understanding of the problem that the RFA aims to address;
- The potential of the proposed project to successfully and efficiently achieve the objectives outlined in Section II above;
- The extent to which the proposed project introduces innovative and potentially replicable approaches.

#### b. Collaborative Posture *(only if the applicant is a partnership of eligible CSOs)*

- Level of collaboration among Albanian CSOs in sharing expertise and resources to fulfill the proposed project's goals is clearly defined and explained with each CSO's role, participation, and contributions noted.

## **2. Organizational, Technical and Management Capability and Past Performance**

### *a. Technical and Management Capacity*

- The technical and managerial capacity of the applicant(s) to successfully carry out the proposed project. This includes an evaluation of:
  - The level of resources (human and capital) 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 organizations and partners;
  - The experience and expertise of the management team and proposed project personnel;
  - The provision for appropriate project monitoring, evaluation, and reporting mechanisms and staff.

### *b. Past Performance*

- Past performance in achieving positive results when implementing activities similar to those proposed;
- Experience working with USAID/other donor funds and ability to meet reporting and accountability requirements;
- Demonstrated ability to gather and analyze data on project outcomes.

### *c. Organizational Capability*

- The general financial strength of the applicant;
- The organizational structure and good governance practices of the applicant.

## **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.

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

Awards made to non-U.S. organizations will adhere to guidance provided under ADS Chapter 303, "Grants and Cooperative Agreements to Non-Governmental Organizations" and will be within the terms of the USAID Standard Provisions for Non-U.S. Non-Governmental Recipients, as well as the procedures under the Project's Grants Under Contract Manual. In addition, ADS 303 references additional regulatory documents issued by the U.S. Government's Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the U.S. Agency for International Development:

- 2 CFR 200 Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards, Subpart E; and
- 2 CFR 700 - USAID's implementation of 2CFR200.

The Project is required to ensure that all organizations 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 English. Templates to be utilized when developing the application are provided in Annex A-E. Applicants shall present their technical application and budget in the formats provided and shall follow the instructions and guidelines listed in these annexes.

**Application Package:** To download the application package, please see the RFA announcement at [www.ewmi.org](http://www.ewmi.org). Alternatively, please contact the Project at [grants\\_icpp@ewmi.org](mailto:grants_icpp@ewmi.org) for an application package. Please reference “RFA-JAG-2017-005” in your request.

**Clarifications:** Applicants should submit clarification requests by the deadline listed in Section IV above via email to the Project at [grants\\_icpp@ewmi.org](mailto:grants_icpp@ewmi.org). The Project will issue clarifications to all interested organizations via e-mail.

**Proposals:** Applicants are required to submit their proposal and required documents via e-mail to the USAID Justice for All Project at [grants\\_icpp@ewmi.org](mailto:grants_icpp@ewmi.org). E-mails **must** reference “RFA-JAG-2017-005” in the subject line. Alternatively, applications may submit a hard copy of the application during regular business hours and in a sealed envelope to:

### **USAID Justice for All**

**Rr. “Skenderbej”, pallati nr. 8, shkalla 2, apt. 823  
Tiranë**

Faxed applications will not be accepted.

Applications will be accepted no later than 17:00 Tirana time on **April 10, 2017**. Late or unresponsive applications will not be considered.

Submitted proposals must be the original and sole work of the applicant organization(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 CSOs 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 Activities

**Annex C** – Project Implementation Timeline

**Annex D** – Project Budget Guidelines

**Annex E** – Project Budget Template

*This grant program 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.*