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FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

**Issue Date:** January 27, 2023  
**Deadline for Questions:** February 10, 2023, 17:00 Belgrade time  
**Closing Date:** March 17, 2023, 17:00 Belgrade time

**Subject:** Notice for Funding Opportunity (NOFO)  
Request for Applications (RFA) # 72016923RFA00002

**Activity Title:** Elections Integrity Activity in Serbia

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 98.001

Ladies/Gentlemen:

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is seeking applications for a cooperative agreement from qualified entities to implement the Elections Integrity Activity. Eligibility for this award is restricted to local Serbian non-governmental organizations.

USAID intends to make an award to the applicant, hereafter referred to as the Recipient, who best meets the objectives of this funding opportunity based on the merit review criteria described in this Request for Applications (RFA) subject to a risk assessment. Eligible parties interested in submitting an application are encouraged to read this RFA thoroughly to understand the type of program sought, application submission requirements and selection process.

To be eligible for award, the applicant must provide all information as required in this RFA and meet eligibility standards in Section C of this RFA. This funding opportunity is posted on [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov), and may be amended. It is the responsibility of the applicant to regularly check the website to ensure they have the latest information pertaining to this notice of funding opportunity and to ensure that the RFA has been received from the internet in its entirety. USAID bears no responsibility for data errors resulting from transmission or conversion process. If you have difficulty registering on [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) or accessing the RFA, please contact the Grants.gov Helpdesk at 1-800-518-4726 or via email at [support@grants.gov](mailto:support@grants.gov) for technical assistance.

USAID may not award to an applicant unless the applicant has complied with all applicable Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and System for Award Management (SAM) requirements detailed in Section D.6(g). The registration process may take several weeks to complete. Therefore, applicants are encouraged to begin registration early in the process.

Please send any questions to the point(s) of contact identified in Section D. The deadline for questions is shown above. Responses to questions received prior to the deadline will be furnished to all potential applicants through an amendment to this notice posted to [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov).

Issuance of this notice of funding opportunity does not constitute an award commitment on the part of the Government nor does it commit the Government to pay for any costs incurred in

preparation or submission of comments/suggestions or an application. Applications are submitted at the risk of the applicant. All preparation and submission costs are at the applicant's expense.

Thank you for your interest in USAID programs.

Sincerely,

Patricia Siaso  
Agreement Officer

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## SECTION A: PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

This funding opportunity is authorized under the Foreign Assistance Act (FAA) of 1961, as amended. The resulting award will be subject to 2 CFR 200 – Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards, and USAID’s supplement, 2 CFR 700, as well as the additional requirements found in Section F.

### A. Introduction

Through the Elections Integrity Activity (EIA), USAID/Serbia seeks to support a local organization or a coalition of local organizations to conduct election observation of national and local elections and promote meaningful electoral reform. The activity will explore innovative ways to achieve meaningful electoral reform.

EIA has the following objectives:

*Objective 1:* Increase election integrity through domestic monitoring of national and local elections throughout the electoral cycle.

*Objective 2:* Promote meaningful electoral reform.

### B. Background Information

Democracy in Serbia faces several critical challenges. Strong electoral legal and regulatory frameworks are not always implemented or enforced. Although elections are considered free, they are not fully fair. Within a healthy democracy, elections provide all political parties equal opportunity to compete and present voters with adequate information to make informed decisions. Elections in Serbia have traditionally met democratic criteria and reflected the will of the people, but since 2012 and more notably 2014 the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) and the European Union (EU) have voiced growing concern about the pre-election day environment.

The OSCE highlighted the lack of fair political competition during the pre-election period in its observation report of the April 2022 parliamentary elections.<sup>1</sup> It noted that the elections “presented diverse political options, but a number of shortcomings resulted in an uneven playing field, favoring the incumbents. While fundamental freedoms were largely respected during the campaign, the combined impact of unbalanced access to media, undue pressure on public sector employees to support the incumbents, significant campaign finance disparities and misuse of administrative resources led to unequal conditions for contestants.”

The government made incremental improvements to the electoral process, including the introduction of reforms in electoral administration, electoral dispute resolution, political party and

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<sup>1</sup> 2012 OSCE/ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission Final Report [https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/d/e/92509\\_0.pdf](https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/d/e/92509_0.pdf) ; 2014 OSCE/ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission Final Report <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/0/5/118968.pdf> ; 2016 OSCE/ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission Final Report [https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/c/a/256926\\_0.pdf](https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/c/a/256926_0.pdf) ; 2022 European Commission Serbia Progress Report, pg. 10. <https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-10/Serbia%20Report%202022.pdf>

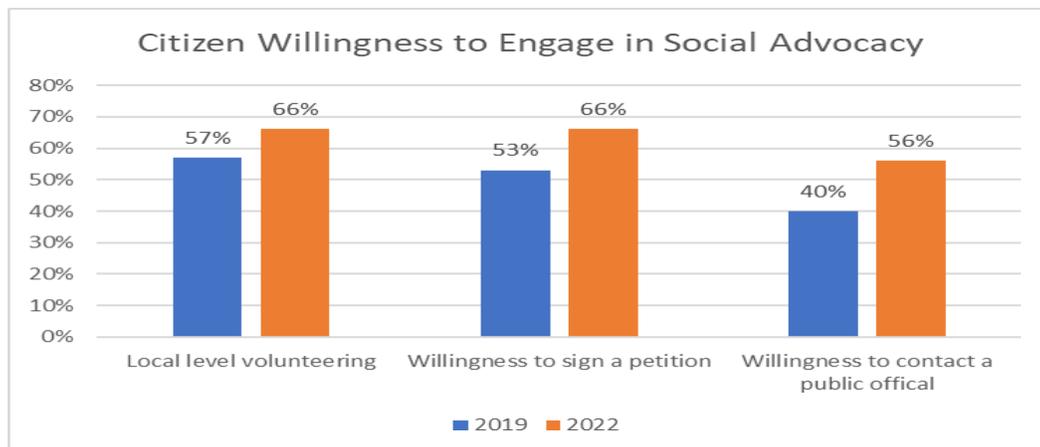
campaign financing, and campaign coverage. However, these reforms came in February 2022, two months prior to the elections and obstacles to fair competition remain. For example, the OSCE also observed that, “pressure on voters to support the incumbent and the ruling coalition and misuse of administrative resources by state and municipal actors prior to the elections blurred the line between state and the party, contrary to the OSCE commitments and international good practice.”<sup>2</sup> There is a lack of accountability for the abuse of state resources and other violations that undermines trust in the system and creates apathy among citizens, and serves as a disincentive to democratic improvements. These observations were echoed by non-partisan domestic observation groups.<sup>3</sup>

### C. Development Opportunity

Non-partisan observation is essential, but an objective assessment of a country’s electoral process is not an end in itself. It can promote electoral accountability, inclusion, and transparency, including deterring fraud and exposing problems and irregularities, which are particularly vital in less democratic contexts. It also provides targeted recommendations for improving the process in the next election, which civil society groups can use in their advocacy efforts and can form the basis for a electoral reform process. In the long-term these results build trust in the electoral system and prove the value of democratic participation.

Electoral improvements are also vital to Serbia’s European future. The European Commission, as part of its advocacy efforts, has said that it is crucial that the outstanding and new recommendations made by the OSCE and the Council of Europe are fully implemented in a transparent process, well ahead of any new elections and in consultation with expert civil society organizations<sup>4</sup>.

Citizens have not been broadly engaged in recent electoral reform efforts, which presents an opportunity. National Democratic Institute (NDI) polling between 2019 and 2022 shows a marked increase in citizens willing to engage on social issues:



<sup>2</sup> ODIHR 2022 election report, pg. 14. [https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/0/0/524385\\_0.pdf](https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/0/0/524385_0.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> CeSID at:

[http://www.cesid.rs/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Finalne-preporuke-za-unapre%C4%91enje-izbornog-procesa\\_CeSID-2022.pdf](http://www.cesid.rs/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Finalne-preporuke-za-unapre%C4%91enje-izbornog-procesa_CeSID-2022.pdf)

CRTA at: <https://crt.rs/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Preliminary-Report-on-Observing-the-Election-Day-2022.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> 2022 Serbia EU Progress Report, pg. 4, [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/serbia-report-2022\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/serbia-report-2022_en)

Polling also indicates that citizens understand that fair elections are a fundamental feature of a fully-functioning democracy. Effective observation findings that are then used in deeper engagements with citizens have the potential to build longer lasting electoral reform. In order to accomplish this, a non-partisan monitoring group must find new ways of reaching out to non-traditional audiences, understanding opposing perspectives, and expanding citizen involvement in electoral reform.

The political environment has also shifted in a way that could be conducive to meaningful electoral reform advocacy. The April 2022 national and Belgrade elections saw many more parties winning seats than in recent past elections, resulting in a more competitive composition.<sup>5</sup> As the European Commission noted in its 2022 progress report, parliament is now a more pluralistic institution.<sup>6</sup> There is now a possibility for more formal parliamentary debate and advocacy on electoral reform.

#### **D. Alignment with USAID’s Strategic Goal**

USAID’s strategic goal in Serbia over the next five years is to foster “*A more economically-productive and democratic Serbia pursuing European integration and self-reliance.*” USAID will help Serbia advance political and economic reforms, meet the challenge of external stresses, and sustainably advance to self-reliance.

The EIA will contribute to USAID/Serbia’s Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) Intermediate Result (IR) 1.1 “Select Government Institutions Increasingly Acting in the Public Interest.” The success of EIA will be primarily measured by how the activity contributes to achievement of Sub-IR 1.1.4 “Integrity of Election Process Increased.” The activity will expand fair competition among candidates and parties and democratic participation among citizens to achieve electoral reform.

To reach its goal, EIA will seek to strengthen the demand side of democratic reform by supporting high-quality election observation (Objective 1) and by promoting meaningful electoral reform (Objective 2). These objectives will contribute in a crosscutting fashion to Sub-IR 1.2.1 “Citizen Participation in Political Processes Expanded”, Sub-IR 1.2.2 “Citizen Oversight of Government Institutions Improved”, Sub-IR 1.2.3 “Civil Society Resiliency Enhanced”, and Sub-IR 1.2.4 “Objective Information More Readily Available.” The development hypothesis of the activity is that contributions to these Sub-IRs will lead to pertinent results in Sub-IR 1.1.4 “Integrity of Election Process Increased.”

EIA will also support the CDCS cross-cutting priorities of youth and private sector engagement as potential targeting strategies to increase citizen and private sector participation in advocacy efforts to effect electoral reform.

#### **D. Programmatic Approach**

The following principles should guide programmatic choices:

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<sup>5</sup> Opposition parties benefited from increased voter turnout and a reduced vote threshold to enter parliament; political parties required only 3% of the vote to gain a seat in parliament.

<sup>6</sup> 2022 European Commission Serbia Progress Report, pg. 11.

***Non-partisan and objective analytical work***

All work under the EIA must be nonpartisan and objective. It must not advance a partisan political agenda beyond the promotion of basic principles of human rights and democratic governance. Furthermore, all work undertaken under EIA must be evidence-based whereby decisions are made and actions and activities performed using the best evidence available and removing as far as possible any subjective opinion, unfounded belief or bias from decisions and actions/activities.

***Supporting locally-led development***

The activity should make best use of Serbia's existing local expertise and capacity and foster locally-led development and strengthening of local systems in order to ensure sustainability of efforts and continued local ownership. International expertise and knowledge should be tapped into to augment, support and perfect citizen election observation and advocacy efforts.

***Flexible and Adaptive Approaches***

The activity should remain flexible and have plans to respond to unanticipated snap elections on any level during the life of the activity. The advocacy efforts, networking, and civic education envisioned under the activity should also be adaptive to changes, opportunities and challenges that arise during the implementation of the activity.

***Fostering Inclusive Development***

Inclusive development means all people should be able to contribute to and benefit from USAID's development programming. Unfortunately, many people are denied access to services or are marginalized from participating in development. This program will provide recommendations for improving equal access to the election process to all, including marginalized groups (e.g. women, youth, persons with disabilities, LGBTIQ+).

***Collaboration and Cooperation***

It is expected that the Applicant will continue to reach out to the election management bodies on a regular basis, other organizations doing the same or similar work, and other donors, and engage them around election observation and improving the integrity of the election process in Serbia. Secondly, these efforts should also result in funding citizen election observation missions by more than one donor from more than one country, as well as donations from citizens and businesses. This would ensure an unbiased public perception and multilateral international effort towards building domestic and grassroots capacity for election monitoring and advocating for the improvements in the integrity and transparency of the election process.

**E. EIA Goal and Objectives**

EIA's goal is to increase the transparency and integrity of the electoral process. It will build on past USAID/Serbia support and other efforts to monitor elections and advocate for meaningful electoral reform as well as emerging thinking on how to improve the resiliency of civil society and the efficacy of civic advocacy.

EIA has two objectives:

**Objective 1: Election Observation.** Increase election integrity through domestic monitoring of national and local elections throughout the electoral cycle.

**Objective 2: Electoral Reform.** Promote meaningful electoral reform.

The development hypothesis of EIA is as follows:

*IF* a domestic election observation group monitors national and local elections throughout the electoral cycle; and

*IF* the process and results of the observation are used to promote more meaningful electoral reform,

THEN the transparency and integrity of the electoral process will increase, thus contributing to a more level electoral playing field;

For purposes of this activity and given that Serbia's electoral legal framework is rather solid based on observer reports, 'electoral reform' as a focus of this activity should also include *the implementation, enforcement, and adherence to existing laws and regulations*, apart from reforms that improve the integrity and transparency of the election process and/or advocate for systemic reforms in the electoral system. By "meaningful" electoral reform, USAID/Serbia refers to: electoral reform that addresses high-priority recommendations identified by international and domestic observer groups, including but not limited to reform that addresses a key recommendation to level the playing field.

**Objective 1 (30% effort):** Promote election integrity through domestic monitoring of national and local elections throughout the electoral cycle.

### ***Supporting domestic election observation***

EIA will support a local organization or a coalition of local organizations to observe all national and local municipal elections that are expected to occur during the life of the activity, in line with the international standards and principles for non-partisan election observation. USAID will provide support to the successful applicant to conduct systematic observation throughout the electoral cycle. This includes but is not limited to training, equipping, and fielding media monitors, long-term observers (LTOs) and short-term observers (STOs).

For long-term observation, EIA will support monitoring of the full electoral cycle, including voter registration; ballot qualification; mobilization of election logistics, staff, and operations; the electoral legal framework; civic and voter education; abuse of state resources and other electoral violations; the campaign environment; inclusion of women and marginalized populations; the media environment; and electoral complaint and dispute resolution. Applicants are encouraged to propose creative and viable methods of gathering evidence of electoral violations that contribute to an uneven playing field, including abuse of state resources, harassment, intimidation, and vote buying<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> ODIHR EOM, pp. 26 [https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/0/0/524385\\_0.pdf](https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/0/0/524385_0.pdf)

For election day observation of the national elections, EIA will support the applicant to field STOs in a statistically significant sample of polling stations during national elections. For election day observation of the 2024 municipal elections, EIA will support the applicant to deploy STOs to municipalities. USAID welcomes the applicant to propose a more detailed strategic approach for such a deployment.

USAID will also support the production and dissemination of election observation reports, related external communication activities, and the organization of public events to launch reports and to hold roundtable discussions of key recommendations. Applicants should propose a variety of external communication methods that go beyond engaging effectively with the usual target audiences for election observation reports. Applicants should demonstrate multiple sources of funding such that USAID is not financing 100% of its election observation costs.

*Expected Results:*

- National and local elections observed through systematic monitoring methods
- Timely election observation reports and statements produced
- Specific, targeted, and evidence-based recommendations to improve electoral integrity produced
- Observation reports and recommendations are effectively disseminated
- Observation report recommendations are shared and discussed with decision makers

**Objective 2 (70% effort):** Promote meaningful electoral reform.

***Strengthening and coordinating advocacy efforts with other organizations***

USAID welcomes applications that contain a plan for the election observation group to build, improve and sustain coalitions and other collaborative efforts with civil society organizations and media for a more coordinated and persistent joint advocacy efforts that amplify the visibility of electoral integrity issues. For example, there may be ways to seek accountability from those institutions that investigate and adjudicate violations. Additionally, there may be ways to enable greater and more effective collaboration with independent media to expose potential violations and the lack of accountability for them. By fostering a more systematic and strategic coordination approach of various interested stakeholders, it may be possible to increase demand for enforcement of and adherence to existing laws. USAID welcomes other creative ideas.

***Strengthening the direct relationship between the observation group and citizens***

As noted in the background section, one reason that more substantive election recommendations are not implemented by the government is because there does not appear to be enough citizen interest in these reforms. Applicants are expected to demonstrate creative models they will develop or to deepen connections between the domestic observation groups and citizens. Strengthening the direct relationship between the two has the potential to nurture a constituency interested in election-related issues. The successful applicant will illustrate how they will make more citizens *aware* of the election observation group and efforts, *understand* the role it plays in a functioning democracy, and encourage them to *act* toward directly supporting election integrity, with special efforts geared towards outreach and engagement of non-traditional audiences and

understanding opposing perspectives which is also crucial for trying to engage the broader electorate on these issues.

As one means to strengthen the relationship and offer a pathway to civic engagement, applicants should plan to scope, pilot, and scale an option for citizens to contribute crowdsourced funding to the observation group. Crowdsourced funding contributions can, among other benefits, provide an avenue for citizens to have ‘more skin in the game’ and enable the observation group to communicate directly and more effectively to nurture a constituency. To the same end, the activity should look to support ways to deepen LTO and STO civic engagement outside of their observation duties, for example, but not limited to, by training and empowering them to engage with their local networks.

### ***Strengthening citizen support for fair elections, particularly a more level playing field***

While not all citizens may want to provide direct support to the mission of election observation, Serbian citizens understand that free and fair elections are one of the characteristics of a fully functioning democracy.<sup>8</sup> Such understanding and desire on the citizens’ side are an opportunity to further harness the public’s demonstrated commitment to democratic values and see it incorporated into political institutions and processes. In a fully functioning democracy, citizens should be *aware* of why free and fair elections are important in a democracy through tangible examples; they should *understand* why the general recommendations made by observation groups are essential to improving democracy and their daily lives; and most importantly they should *feel* that recommendations can be implemented.

Applications should propose an innovative and feasible civic education strategy that distills election observation recommendations and any subsequent developments in ways that resonate with the average citizen. The successful applicant is expected to expand existing civic education efforts to develop and implement a strategy that makes an issue like ‘the lack of a level playing field’ strike a chord with citizens. For example, by tying big-picture electoral integrity issues to everyday issues, identities, and values, if a person values the concept of ‘fairness’ and expects or desires to be treated fairly in their everyday interactions, why should they not expect or desire fairness in an electoral process that impacts their lives? The strategy might employ traditional tactics like local media campaigns and community dialogues, but also hyper-local approaches that nurture grassroots and even familial discussion. USAID welcomes approaches that focus on ‘offline’ social interaction given USAID research that found that 17% of people primarily get their news from personal contacts (the same percentage that get their news from television) and 67% of people trust personal contacts as a source of information (compared to just 4% of people who do not trust their personal contacts).

### ***Networking the election observation group with non-traditional potential supporters***

Applications must include detailed plans to strengthen not only the applicant's existing networks with like-minded civil society organizations and actors, but also its plans to expand its network to include non-traditional actors to increase their awareness, understanding, and possibly action to

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<sup>8</sup> NDI Public Opinion Polling, November 2019, as part of USAID’s Political Processes Strengthening Activity: Serbian citizens do show an understanding of what it means to live in a fully functioning democracy. As its top characteristics, they list equal justice for all (63%), free and fair elections (48%), the protection of human rights (45%), freedom of speech (43%), and a government accountable to citizens (42%).

support electoral reform. To that end, applicants should consider incorporating a plan to conduct a rapid analysis to deepen their understanding of the root causes that result in an uneven playing field. This might lead to the identification of actors to network with, such as those in the private sector, media, cultural sphere, trade unions, etc. that (on their own or in sum) have a level of actual or potential interest that can strengthen advocacy efforts. USAID welcomes approaches that will incorporate the organization of formal and informal events and meetings to build new relationships, even in cases where actors are currently oppositional to the work of the election observation group.

*Expected Results:*

- Coordinated advocacy efforts by the election observation group and like-minded organizations improved
- Relationship and interaction between election observation group and citizens improved
- Citizen awareness and understanding of electoral integrity issues increased
- Citizen demand for certain electoral reforms increased
- Relationships between election observation group and potential new supporters established and/or improved
- Supporter engagement on electoral integrity issues increased

**F. Activity Monitoring Evaluation and Learning Plan (AMELP) guidelines**

The application must contain an illustrative AMELP responding to objectives and expected results as set forth in this Program Description. Proposed AMELP should clearly demonstrate how it will experiment with and perfect the observation methodology as well as make advocacy efforts more consequential. The AMELP should also explain how the activity will identify best practices and lessons learned, assess impact, adapt to programmatic and contextual changes, and seek to scale up successful practices. Applicants will propose indicators which will assist in managing project performance and outcomes. The AMELP must contain project objectives and results, outcome and performance/output indicators, data sources and collection methods, baseline information or a timeline for collecting it, annual targets (disaggregated by gender and focusing on youth), and references to staff responsible for data collection and analysis. The proposed AMELP should include gender indicators where appropriate and to the extent possible. The applicant must also include information as to how it proposes to tackle learning and program adaptation. The AMELP might include standard or custom indicators requested by the Mission.

**G. Coordination with other USAID programs and other donors**

Close coordination and regular consultation with USAID is expected. This activity will also coordinate with USAID activities on civil society, rule of law, media, and government accountability, as well as economic growth in order to be used as possible ways to educate stakeholders on issues of citizen concern and areas to champion for reforms. Activities include, but are not limited to, USAID's Political Processes Strengthening Activity, Civil Society Resilience Strengthening Activity, and the upcoming Strengthening Civil Engagement Activity. The activity will also coordinate with other organizations and donors engaged in election observation, including the OSCE. It is expected that election observation efforts under the EIA will seek to aggregate support from more than one donor, resulting in funding citizen election

observation missions by more than one source from more than one country. This will ensure an unbiased public perception and multilateral international effort towards building domestic and grassroots capacity for election monitoring and advocating for the improvements in the integrity and transparency of the election process.

## **H. Gender and Youth Considerations**

Gender dynamics are important for ensuring democratic and inclusive political processes. In Serbia, women are still under-represented in leadership positions (political leadership above all) as well as among elected representatives. Women, youth, persons with disabilities and LGBTIQ+ persons also face discrimination, harassment, and violence, which prevents them from becoming active in public and political life.<sup>9</sup> The demand side of electoral reform involves empowering all citizens equally and building their knowledge on how to take an active role in society, so they are better informed and able to achieve their individual political, economic, and life goals. Through this activity, USAID will support both furthering gender considerations as an outcome and incorporating gender dynamics and considerations across all activities. Additionally, the activity will promote the participation of persons with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ communities, women, youth, and other marginalized groups in the democratic process.

**[END OF SECTION A]**

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<sup>9</sup>United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Serbia. Final Gender Analysis Report 2020. Belgrade: 2020. [https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PA00WNPZ.pdf](https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00WNPZ.pdf)

## **SECTION B: FEDERAL AWARD INFORMATION**

### **1. Estimate of Funds Available and Number of Awards Contemplated**

USAID intends to award one Cooperative Agreement pursuant to this notice of funding opportunity. Subject to funding availability and at the discretion of the Agency, USAID intends to provide approximately **\$2,000,000**.

Pending the availability of additional funding and proven success of interventions, USAID may open a “window of opportunity” to increase the total estimated amount of the resulting award by up to an additional **\$2,000,000**. If USAID opens this window of opportunity, the recipient will be expected to increase the number of interventions and increase the geographic reach of interventions. No new interventions will be added.

The estimated award period of performance is five years. The estimated start date of the activity is mid 2023.

USAID reserves the right to fund any one or none of the applications submitted, or to fund parts of applications. Issuance of this RFA does not constitute an award commitment on the part of USAID, nor does it commit USAID to pay for any costs incurred in the preparation and submission of any application.

### **2. Substantial Involvement**

Substantial involvement is anticipated in this activity and specific elements of substantial involvement will be tailored in accordance with ADS 303.3.11 and final program description upon award

Cooperative agreements are grants with substantial involvement The specific areas of USAID substantial involvement will include, but not be limited to

- USAID approval of the recipient’s annual implementation plans;
- USAID approval of specified key personnel (limited to three (3) positions);
- USAID and recipient collaboration or joint participation, which includes one or more of the following:
  - USAID concurrence on the substantive provisions of sub-awards;
  - USAID approval of the recipient’s AMELP (to the extent that such information is not included in the application);
  - USAID monitoring to authorize specified kinds of direction or redirection because of interrelationships with other projects; and
  - If the prospective recipient proposes a grant program under their application, within a reasonable time after the signing the agreement, the recipient must submit a draft Grants Management manual to the Agreement Officer for approval prior to the

implementation grants scheme as described in the Program Description. The manual will guide applicants in their application to sub-awards under this award.

### **3. Authorized Geographic Code**

The geographic code for the procurement of commodities and services under this program is 937, as described in [ADS Chapter 310](#).

In anticipation of final implementation guidance issued by USAID, the Applicant is notified of recent changes to cost allowability regulations - specifically 2 CFR 200.216, finalized in July, 2022 - concerning the procurement of prohibited technology goods and services under assistance awards.

### **4. Nature of the Relationship between USAID and the Recipient**

The principal purpose of the relationship with the Recipient and under the subject program is to transfer funds to accomplish a public purpose of supporting a local organization or a coalition of local organizations to conduct election observation of national and local elections and promote meaningful electoral reform which is authorized by Federal statute. The successful Recipient will be responsible for ensuring the achievement of the program objectives and the efficient and effective administration of the award through the application of sound management practices. The Recipient will assume responsibility for administering Federal funds in a manner consistent with underlying agreements, program objectives, and the terms and conditions of the Federal award.

### **5. Title to Property**

Property title under the resultant agreement shall be vested in accordance with the requirements of Mandatory Standard Provision for Non-US Organizations, [Title To And Use Of Property \(December 2014\)](#),

### **8. Special Award Requirement Relating to the Prohibition on Certain Telecommunication and Video Surveillance Services or Equipment (July 2022)**

USAID has been granted a temporary waiver under Section 889(d)(2) that will allow the recipient to use award funds through September 30, 2028, to procure certain telecommunications and video surveillance services or equipment as specified in the standard provision "Prohibition on Certain Telecommunication and Video Surveillance Services or Equipment (JULY 2022)." Based on this waiver, all costs incurred for covered telecommunications and video surveillance services or equipment will be allowable through September 30, 2028 only if the recipient has determined that there is no available alternate eligible source for the covered telecommunications and video surveillance services or equipment, without regard to the cost principle at 2 CFR 200.471. Procurements made on or after October 1, 2028, will be unallowable in accordance with 2 CFR 200.471

**[END OF SECTION B]**

## SECTION C: ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

### 1. Eligible Entities

In accordance with ADS 303.3.6.5.c. Restricted Eligibility Based on Pre-Approved Conditions, the Eligibility will be limited to local Serbian entities.

### 2. Cost Sharing or Matching

Cost Share is desirable and encouraged, but it is not a mandatory eligibility criterion under this RFA.

### 3. Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and System Award Management (SAM)

SAM.gov Requirements can be found under [this link](#). As of April 4, 2022, the federal government has moved away from the DUNS Number as its official entity identifier and replacing it with the new Unique Entity Identifier (UEI), which can be generated in [SAM.gov](#). USAID will not award the applicant until the applicant has complied with all applicable SAM requirements and has obtained a unique entity identifier.

Each applicant is required to:

- (i) Be registered in SAM before submitting its full application.
- (ii) Provide a valid unique entity identifier in its full application; and
- (iii) Continue to maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times during which it has an active Federal award or an application or plan under consideration by a Federal awarding agency.

**[END OF SECTION C]**

## SECTION D: APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

### 1. Agency Point of Contact

Name: Branislav Bulatovic  
Title: A&A Specialist  
Email: [bbulatovic@usaid.gov](mailto:bbulatovic@usaid.gov)

Name: Armend Aliu  
Title: A&A Specialist  
Email: [aaliu@usaid.gov](mailto:aaliu@usaid.gov)

### 2. Questions and Answers

Questions regarding this RFA should be submitted by e-mail no later than the date and time indicated on the cover letter. Any information given to a prospective applicant concerning this RFA will be furnished promptly to all other prospective applicants as an amendment to this RFA, if that information is necessary in submitting applications or if the lack of it would be prejudicial to any other prospective applicant.

### 3. General Content and Form of Application

#### Preparation of Applications:

Each applicant must furnish the information required by this RFA. Applications must be submitted in two separate parts, Technical Application and the Business (Cost) Application. This subsection addresses general content requirements applying to the entire application. Please see subsections 5 and 6, below, for information on the content specific to the Technical and Cost applications. The Technical application must address technical aspects only while the Cost Application must present the costs, and address risk and other related issues.

Both the Technical and Cost Applications must include a cover page containing the following information:

- Name of the organization(s) submitting the application.
- Identification and signature of the primary contact person (by name, title, organization, mailing address, telephone number and email address) and the identification of the alternate contact person (by name, title, organization, mailing address, telephone number and email address). Applications signed by an agent on behalf of the applicant must be accompanied by evidence of that agent's authority unless that evidence has been previously furnished to the issuing office.
- Program name
- Notice of Funding Opportunity number
- Name of any proposed sub-recipients or partnerships (identify if any of the organizations are local organizations, per USAID's definition of 'local entity' under ADS 303).

Applications must comply with the following:

- USAID will not review any pages in excess of the page limits noted in the subsequent sections. Please ensure that applications comply with the page limitations.
- Written in English
- Use standard 8 ½" x 11", single sided, single-spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font, 1" margins, left justification and headers and/or footers on each page including consecutive page numbers, date of submission, and applicant's name.
- 10 point font can be used for graphs and charts. Tables, however, must comply with the 12 point Times New Roman requirement. It is expected that tables will not take a substantial part of the application.
- Submitted via Microsoft Word or PDF formats, except budget files which must be submitted in Microsoft Excel.
- The estimated start date identified in Section B of this RFA must be used in the cost application.
- The technical application must be a searchable and editable Word or PDF format as appropriate.
- The Cost Schedule must include an Excel spreadsheet with all cells unlocked and no hidden formulas or sheets. A PDF version of the Excel spreadsheet may be submitted in addition to the Excel version at the applicant's discretion, however, the official cost application submission is the unlocked Excel version.

Applicants must review, understand, and comply with all aspects of this RFA. Failure to do so may be considered as being non-responsive and may be evaluated accordingly. Applicants should retain a copy of the application and all enclosures for their records.

#### **4. Application Submission Procedures**

Applications in response to this RFA must be submitted no later than the closing date and time indicated on the cover letter, as amended. Late applications will not be reviewed nor considered at the discretion of the Agreement Officer. Applicants must retain proof of timely delivery in the form of system generated documentation of delivery receipt date and time/confirmation from the receiving office/certified mail receipt.

#### **Sample Language for email submission:**

Applications must be submitted by email to both individuals indicated in section D.1. Email submissions must include the RFA number and applicant's name in the subject line heading. In addition, for an application sent by multiple emails, the subject line must also indicate whether the email relates to the technical or cost application, and the desired sequence of the emails and their attachments (e.g. "No. 1 of 4", etc.). For example, if your cost application is being sent in two emails, the first email should have a subject line that states: "[RFA number], [organization name], Cost Application, Part 1 of 2".

USAID's preference is that the technical application and the cost application each be submitted as consolidated email attachments, e.g. that you consolidate the various parts of a technical

application into a single document before sending it. If this is not possible, please provide instructions on how to collate the attachments. USAID will not be responsible for errors in compiling electronic applications if no instructions are provided or are unclear.

After submitting an application electronically, applicants should immediately check their own email to confirm that the attachments were indeed sent. If an applicant discovers an error in transmission, please send the material again and note in the subject line of the email or indicate in the file name if submitted via grants.gov that it is a "corrected" submission. Do not send the same email more than once unless there has been a change, and if so, please note that it is a "corrected" email.

Applicants are reminded that email is NOT instantaneous, and in some cases delays of several hours occur from transmission to receipt. Therefore, applicants are requested to send the application in sufficient time ahead of the deadline. For this RFA, the initial point of entry to the government infrastructure is the USAID mail server.

There may be a problem with the receipt of \*.zip files due to anti-virus software. Therefore, applicants are discouraged from sending files in this format as USAID cannot guarantee their acceptance by the internet server. File size must not exceed 25 MB. The size of each attachment is not limited as long as the total size of each individual email does not exceed 25 MB.

## **5. Technical Application Format**

The technical application is limited to **25 pages, excluding annexes if any**. The technical application should be specific, complete, and presented concisely. The application must demonstrate the applicant's capabilities and expertise with respect to achieving the goals of this program. The application should take into account the requirements of the program and merit review criteria found in this RFA, and should include the following:

**(a) Cover Page (not included in the page limit)**, see Section D.3 above for requirements

**(b) Table of Contents (not included in the page limit)**

Include major sections and page numbering to easily cross-reference and identify merit review criteria.

**(c) Executive Summary (not more than two pages), included in the page limit.**

The Executive Summary must provide a high-level overview of key elements of the Technical Application.

**(d) List of acronyms (not included in the page limit)**

**(e) Technical Approach (included in the page limit)**

The Technical Approach must demonstrate an understanding of the Program Description. It must be technically sound, feasible, informed by the implementation principles, and informed by, and adaptive to the local context. The Applicant must propose a detailed technical approach to achieve the results listed in Section A. The Applicant must include the following information:

1. How Applicants will decide on municipalities where they will observe local elections, including the process and criteria for selection;
2. Identification of priority issues related to advancing meaningful electoral reform in Serbia;
3. Identification of key challenges to election management and oversight bodies and illustrative interventions to address these challenges in partnership with these bodies;
4. Identification of key challenges to meaningful electoral reform and illustrative interventions to address these challenges;
5. A detailed justification of priorities and challenges identified above, including why they have selected specific issues and interventions, and how these interventions will demonstrate visible progress in citizen election observation and advancing meaningful electoral reform. Demonstration of creative and innovative ways to achieve meaningful electoral reform by addressing long standing issues. Applicants may place greater relative importance on the particular activity areas, but should explain/justify this choice;
6. An illustration of how the Applicant will make more citizens aware of the election observation group and efforts, understand the role it plays in a functioning democracy, and encourage them to act toward directly supporting election integrity, with special efforts geared towards outreach and engagement of non-traditional audiences and understanding opposing perspectives which is also crucial for trying to engage the broader electorate on these issues;
7. Illustrative indicators for how Applicant will measure incremental progress towards results under the two objectives as outlined in Section A of this RFA.

#### **(f) Key Personnel, Management Approach and Staffing Plan**

##### a) Key Personnel:

The Applicants must propose the following Key Personnel: Program Manager, and up to two Objective leads. The Applicants have the flexibility to combine objective lead and other key personnel positions in line with their technical and staffing approaches. All Key Personnel are expected to devote 100% LOE to this activity.

The Applicants should submit CVs/resumes for Key Personnel candidates **as an Annex (not included in the overall page limitation)**, and document the candidates' most recent, relevant experience, including three references for each Key Personnel candidate. The CVs with references are limited to **3 pages** for each key personnel candidate.

**b) Management Approach and Staffing Plan:**

The Applicant must describe plans to set up its organizational structure, and office(s) with clear lines of authority and responsibilities to implement the proposed technical approach. This includes the description of how implementation through context-appropriate local government and community partners will be operationalized (e.g. short-term technical assistance (STTA), sub-awards, and other methods as applicable.). If the Applicant anticipates using sub-awards, the Applicant is expected to include the roles and responsibilities of each sub-awardee, and the lines of authority and communication. The proposed management structure should be clear, feasible, efficient, and should promote implementation by and not merely in consultation with the other local and/or international stakeholders while demonstrating a commitment to building local capacity. Furthermore, the Applicant must present a vision and strategy for program management that allows adaptation of program approaches in line with the CLA section of the Program Description. The proposed staffing plan together with the Key Personnel section must clearly show how the proposed staffing mix is appropriate to successfully implement the proposed approach and to maximize the likelihood of achieving the expected results listed in Section A.

The skillset for the Activity implementation team must include – across the team – at a minimum the following skills:

- Demonstrated experience in managing and implementing projects focused on citizen election observation and electoral reform, government accountability, election management, election oversight, and the rule of law;
- Experience with adaptive management approaches;
- Demonstrated understanding of the current context of the EU accession process as well as institutional reforms vis a vis election environment and processes that will need to be prioritized to maintain progress toward EU accession.

The Applicant should provide an organization chart showing the overall staffing plan

**c) Organizational Capability:**

The Applicant must describe its organizational knowledge and capability to effectively implement the proposed approach; organizational experience in relevant sector(s), geographical region(s), and with similarly structured interventions; project management capabilities; evidence of effectively using adaptive management and integrating learning into program implementation; internal controls; ability to mobilize and retain staff; and capability to execute effectively in activity implementation.

**d) Past performance information:** In addition, the applicant should describe a maximum of five relevant contracts, grants, and/or cooperative agreements that the organization has implemented involving similar or related programs over the past five years. The applicant should include the following past performance information as an **Annex to the Technical Application, not to exceed 5 pages, not included in the overall page limitation.**

- Name, address, current telephone number, and email address of responsible representative(s) from the organization for which the work was performed.
- Contract/grant name, number, place of performance, annual amounts received, and beginning and end dates; and
- Brief description of the project/assistance activity.

## 6. Business (Cost) Application Format

The Cost Application must be submitted separately from the Technical Application. While no page limit exists for the full cost application, applicants are encouraged to be as concise as possible while still providing the necessary details. The cost application must illustrate the entire period of performance, using the budget format shown in the SF-424A.

Prior to award, applicants may be required to submit additional documentation deemed necessary for the Agreement Officer to assess the applicant’s risk in accordance with 2 CFR 200.206. Applicants should not submit any additional information with their initial application.

The Cost Application must contain the following sections:

- a) **Cover Page** (See Section D.3 above for requirements)
- b) **SF 424 Form(s)**

The applicant must sign and submit the cost application using the SF-424 series. Standard Forms can be accessed electronically using the following links:

<b>Instructions for SF-424</b>	<a href="https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/forms/sf-424-mandatory-family.html">https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/forms/sf-424-mandatory-family.html</a>
<b>Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424)</b>	<a href="https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/forms/sf-424-mandatory-family.html">https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/forms/sf-424-mandatory-family.html</a>
<b>Instructions for SF-424A</b>	<a href="https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/forms/sf-424-mandatory-family.html">https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/forms/sf-424-mandatory-family.html</a>
<b>Budget Information (SF-424A)</b>	<a href="https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/forms/sf-424-mandatory-family.html">https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/forms/sf-424-mandatory-family.html</a>
<b>Instructions for SF-424B</b>	<a href="https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/forms/sf-424-mandatory-family.html">https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/forms/sf-424-mandatory-family.html</a>
<b>Assurances (SF-424B)</b>	<a href="https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/forms/sf-424-mandatory-family.html">https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/forms/sf-424-mandatory-family.html</a>

Failure to accurately complete these forms could result in the rejection of the application.

- c) **Required Certifications and Assurances**

The applicant must complete the following documents and submit a signed copy:

- (1) “Certifications, Assurances, Representations, and Other Statements of the Recipient” ADS 303mav document found at <https://www.usaid.gov/ads/policy/300/303mav>
- (2) Certificate of Compliance: Please submit a copy of your Certificate of Compliance if your organization's systems have been certified by USAID/Washington's Office of Acquisition and Assistance (M/OAA).

#### **d) Budget and Budget Narrative**

The applicants must provide a complete budget by cost element, including the budgets for each sub-awardee if any, by utilizing the provided budget template in Attachment 1 to this RFA. The Budget must be submitted as one unprotected Excel file (MS Office 2000 or later versions) with visible formulas and references and must be broken out by project year. Files must not contain any hidden or otherwise inaccessible cells. Budgets with hidden cells lengthen the cost analysis time required to make an award and may result in a rejection of the cost application. The Budget Narrative must contain sufficient detail to allow USAID to understand the proposed costs. The applicant must ensure the budgeted costs address any additional requirements identified in Section F, such as Branding and Marking. The Budget Narrative must be thorough, including sources for costs to support USAID’s determination that the proposed costs are fair and reasonable.

The Budget must include the following worksheets or tabs, and contents, at a minimum:

- Summary Budget, inclusive of all program costs (federal and non-federal), broken out by major budget category and by year for activities implemented by the applicant and any potential sub-applicants for the entire period of the program. See budget template in Attachment 1 to this RFA.
- Detailed Budget, including a breakdown by year, sufficient to allow the Agency to determine that the costs represent a realistic and efficient use of funding to implement the applicant’s program and are allowable in accordance with the cost principles found in 2 CFR 200 Subpart E.
- Detailed Budgets for each sub-recipient, for all federal funding and cost share, broken out by budget category and by year, for the entire implementation period of the project.

The Detailed Budget must contain the following budget categories and information, at a minimum:

- 1) Salaries and Allowances – Must be proposed consistent with 2 CFR 200.430 Compensation - Personal Services. The applicant’s budget must include position title, salary rate, level of effort, and salary escalation factors for each position. Allowances, when proposed, must be broken down by specific type and by position. Applicants must explain all assumptions in the Budget Narrative. The Budget Narrative must demonstrate that the proposed compensation is

reasonable for the services rendered and consistent with what is paid for similar work in other activities of the applicant. Applicants must provide their established written policies on personnel compensation. If the applicant's written policies do not address a specific element of compensation that is being proposed, the Budget Narrative must describe the rationale for all costs and the supporting market research.

- 2) Fringe Benefits – (if applicable) If the applicant has a fringe benefit rate approved by an agency of the U.S. Government, the applicant must use such rate and provide evidence of its approval. If an applicant does not have a fringe benefit rate approved, the applicant must propose a rate and explain how the applicant determined the rate. In this case, the Budget Narrative must include a detailed breakdown of all items of fringe benefits (e.g., superannuation, gratuity, etc.) and the costs of each, expressed in U.S. dollars and as a percentage of salaries.
- 3) Travel and Transportation – Provide details to explain the purpose of the trips, the number of trips, the origin and destination, the number of individuals traveling, and the duration of the trips. Per Diem and associated travel costs must be based on the applicant's normal travel policies. When appropriate, please provide supporting documentation as an attachment, such as company travel policy, and explain assumptions in the Budget Narrative.
- 4) Procurement or Rental of Goods (Equipment & Supplies), Services, and Real Property – Must include information on estimated types of equipment, models, supplies and the cost per unit and quantity. The Budget Narrative must include the purpose of the equipment and supplies and the basis for the estimates. The Budget Narrative must support the necessity of any rental costs and reasonableness in light of such factors as: rental costs of comparable property, if any; market conditions in the area; alternatives available; and the type, life expectancy, condition, and value of the property leased.
- 5) Contractual (Subawards, Contracts and Consultants) – If applicable, specify the budget for the portion of the program to be passed through to any subrecipients. See 2 CFR 200 for assistance in determining whether the sub-tier entity is a subrecipient or contractor. The subrecipient budgets must align with the same requirements as the applicant's budget, including those related to fringe and indirect costs.
- 6) Other Direct Costs – This may include other costs not elsewhere specified, such as report preparation costs, passports and visas fees, medical exams and inoculations, as well as any other miscellaneous costs which directly benefit the program proposed by the applicant. The applicant should indicate the subject, venue and duration of any proposed conferences and seminars, and their relationship to the objectives of the program, along with estimates of costs. Otherwise, the narrative should be minimal.

- 7) Indirect Costs – Applicants must indicate whether they are proposing indirect costs or will charge all costs directly. In order to better understand indirect costs please see Subpart E of 2 CFR 200. The application must identify which approach they are requesting and provide the applicable supporting information. Below are the most commonly used Indirect Cost Rate methods:

Method 1 - Direct Charge Only

Eligibility: Any applicant

Initial Application Requirements: See above on direct costs

Method 2 - Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA)

Eligibility: Any applicant with a NICRA issued by a USG Agency must use that NICRA

Initial Application Requirements: If the applicant has a current NICRA, submit your approved NICRA and the associated disclosed practices. If your NICRA was issued by an Agency other than USAID, provide the contact information for the approving Agency. Additionally, at the Agency's discretion, a provisional rate may be set forth in the award subject to audit and finalization. See [USAID's Indirect Cost Rate Guide for Non Profit Organizations](#) for further guidance.

Method 3 - De minimis rate of 10% of modified total direct costs (MTDC)

Eligibility: Any applicant that does not have a current NICRA

Initial Application Requirements: Costs must be consistently charged as either indirect or direct costs but may not be double charged or inconsistently charged as both. If chosen, this methodology once elected must be used consistently for all Federal awards until such time as a non-Federal entity chooses to negotiate an indirect rate, which the non-Federal entity may apply to do at any time. The applicant must describe which cost elements it charges indirectly vs. directly. See 2 CFR 200 for further information.

Method 4 - Indirect Costs Charged as A Fixed Amount

Eligibility: Non-U.S. non-profit organizations without a NICRA may request, but approval is at the discretion of the AO.

Initial Application Requirements: Provide the proposed fixed amount and a worksheet that includes the following:

- Total costs incurred by the organization for the previous fiscal year and estimates for the current year.
- Indirect costs (common costs that benefit the day-to-day operations of the organization, including categories such as salaries and expenses of executive officers, personnel

administration, and accounting, or that benefit and are identifiable to more than one program or activity, such as depreciation, rental costs, operations and maintenance of facilities, and telephone expenses) for the previous fiscal year and estimates for the current year

- Proposed method for prorating the indirect costs equitably and consistently across all programs and activities using a base that measures the benefits of that particular cost to each program or activity to which the cost applies.

If the applicant does not have an approved NICRA and does not elect to utilize the 10% de minimis rate, the Agreement Officer will provide further instructions and may request additional supporting information, including financial statements and audits, should the application still be under consideration after the merit review. USAID is under no obligation to approve the applicant's requested method.

**e) Prior Approvals in accordance with 2 CFR 200.407**

Inclusion of an item of cost in the detailed application budget does not satisfy any requirements for prior approval by the Agency. If the applicant would like the award to reflect approval of any cost elements for which prior written approval is specifically required for allowability, the applicant must specify and justify that cost. See 2 CFR 200.407 for information regarding which cost elements require prior written approval.

**f) Approval of Subawards (if applicable)**

The applicant must submit information for all subawards that it wishes to have approved at the time of award. For each proposed subaward the applicant must provide the following:

- Name of organization
- Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number generated from [SAM.gov](https://sam.gov)
- Confirmation that the subrecipient does not appear on the [Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control \(OFAC\) list](#)
- Confirmation that the subrecipient does not have active exclusions in the System for Award Management (SAM)
- Confirmation that the subrecipient is not listed in the [United Nations Security designation list](#)
- Confirmation that the subrecipient is not suspended or debarred
- Confirmation that the applicant has completed a risk assessment of the subrecipient, in accordance with 2 CFR 200.332(b)
- Any negative findings as a result of the risk assessment and the applicant's plan for mitigation.

**g) SAM Requirements**

USAID may not award to an applicant unless the applicant has complied with all applicable SAM requirements and has obtained the Unique Entity Identifier (UEI). Each applicant (unless the applicant is an individual or Federal awarding agency that is exempted from requirements under 2 CFR 25.110(b) or (c), or has an exception approved by the Federal awarding agency under 2 CFR 25.110(d)) is required to:

1. Provide a valid UEI number for the applicant and all proposed sub-recipients.
2. Be registered in SAM **before** submitting its application. SAM is streamlining processes, eliminating the need to enter the same data multiple times, and consolidating hosting to make the process of doing business with the government more efficient ([www.sam.gov](http://www.sam.gov)).
3. Continue to maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times during which it has an active Federal award or an application or plan under consideration by a Federal awarding agency.

The registration process may take many weeks to complete. Therefore, applicants are encouraged to begin the process early. If an applicant has not fully complied with the requirements above by the time USAID is ready to make an award, USAID may determine that the applicant is not qualified to receive an award and use that determination as a basis for making an award to another applicant.

SAM registration: <http://www.sam.gov>

Non-U.S. applicants can find additional resources for registering in SAM, including a Quick Start Guide and a video on how to obtain an NCAGE code, on [www.sam.gov](http://www.sam.gov), navigate to Help, then to International Registrants.

#### **h) Branding Strategy & Marking Plan**

The apparently successful applicant will be asked to provide a Branding Strategy and Marking Plan to be evaluated and approved by the Agreement Officer and incorporated into any resulting award.

#### **i) Conflict of Interest Pre-Award Term**

##### **Personal Conflict of Interest**

1. An actual or appearance of a conflict of interest exists when an applicant organization or an employee of the organization has a relationship with an Agency official involved in the competitive award decision-making process that could affect that Agency official's impartiality. The term "conflict of interest" includes situations in which financial or other personal considerations may compromise, or have the appearance of compromising, the obligations and duties of a USAID employee or recipient employee.
2. The applicant must provide conflict of interest disclosures when it submits an SF-424. Should the applicant discover a previously undisclosed conflict of interest after submitting the

application, the applicant must disclose the conflict of interest to the AO no later than ten (10) calendar days following discovery.

### **Organizational Conflict of Interest**

The applicant must notify USAID of any actual or potential conflict of interest that they are aware of that may provide the applicant with an unfair competitive advantage in competing for this financial assistance award. Examples of an unfair competitive advantage include but are not limited to situations in which an applicant or the applicant's employee gained access to non-public information regarding a federal assistance funding opportunity, or an applicant or applicant's employee was substantially involved in the preparation of a federal assistance funding opportunity. USAID will promptly take appropriate action upon receiving any such notification from the applicant.

### **j) Potential Request for Additional Documentation**

Upon consideration of award or during the negotiations leading to an award, applicants may be required to submit additional documentation deemed necessary for the AO to make an affirmative determination of responsibility (such as, bylaws, constitution, articles of incorporation, travel, procurement, financial management, accounting manual, and personnel policies and procedures, especially regarding salary, promotion, leave, differentials, etc.) Applicants should not submit this information with their applications. The information in this paragraph is provided so that applicants may become familiar with additional documentation that may be requested by the AO.

### **k) Funding Restrictions**

Profit is not allowable for recipients or subrecipients under this award. See 2 CFR 200.331 for assistance in determining whether a sub-tier entity is a subrecipient or contractor.

Construction will not be authorized under this award.

USAID will not allow the reimbursement of pre-award costs under this award without the explicit written approval of the Agreement Officer.

Except as may be specifically approved in advance by the AO, all commodities and services that will be reimbursed by USAID under this award must be from the authorized geographic code specified in Section B.3 of this RFA and must meet the source and nationality requirements set forth in 22 CFR 228.

**[END OF SECTION D]**

## **SECTION E: APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION**

### **Merit Review Criteria**

The merit review criteria prescribed here are tailored to the requirements of this particular RFA. Applicants should note that these criteria serve to: (a) identify the significant matters which the applicants should address in their applications, and (b) set the standard against which all applications will be evaluated.

Technical and other factors will be evaluated relative to each other, as described here and prescribed by the Technical Application Format. The Technical Application will be rated by a Selection Committee (SC) using the criteria described in this section.

### **Review and Selection Process**

The Agreement Officer (AO) makes the final selection of the Selection Committee (SC) members. SC members will be USAID personnel, also, representatives from the American Embassy, host government, or private sector individuals may be included as well, at the AO's discretion.

#### **a) Technical Merit Review**

USAID will conduct a merit review of all applications received that comply with the instructions in this RFA. Applications will be reviewed and evaluated in accordance with the following criteria shown in descending order of importance.

Please note that the technical approach should be developed in conjunction with a budget estimate of no more than \$2 million. Should a "window of opportunity" open and additional funding become available, further information will be requested from the awarded recipient.

#### **1. Technical Approach**

The degree to which the implementation approach is technically sound, feasible, and informed by the implementation principles; the extent to which the proposed program creates opportunities for advancing both objectives as outlined under this RFA in a meaningful way; the extent to which the proposed approach is in line with the programmatic approach as outlined in the Program Description; the extent to which the proposed approach introduces non-traditional and innovative ways to achieve outlined objectives and expected results, in particular meaningful electoral reform; the extent to which the technical approach is informed by and adaptive to the local context. The extent to which the Theory of Change is technically sound and explains how the technical approach chosen will likely lead to meaningful change; The extent to which the Applicant describes specific activities that will be implemented and how these activities will create synergies to achieve the goal and two specific objectives of the activity; The extent to which the applicant presents an effective mobilization plan for a timely commencement of the activity; The extent to which the Applicant uses the collaboration, learning and adaptation (CLA) principles, specifically describing how CLA will be utilized to promote collaboration and coordination within the activity and with external partners and stakeholders; the extent to which

CLA will be leveraged to promote locally-led development and sustainability of project interventions, and how ongoing learning and knowledge will be collected, analyzed, disseminated and utilized to adapt programming and design and implement innovative approaches.

## **2. Key Personnel, Management Approach and Staffing Plan**

The extent to which the proposed management approach and staffing plan are clear, feasible, efficient, and convincingly demonstrate the Applicant's ability to successfully implement the proposed approach to achieve the goal and two objectives under this RFA; the extent to which the staffing plan and the Key Personnel meet the requirements outlined in the Program Description and in Section D, "Application and Submission Information" of this RFA; the extent to which the management approach supports effective and efficient implementation of the proposed program while maximizing cost-efficiency and streamlining technical integration; the extent to which the proposed AMELP demonstrates the Applicant's and Partners' ability to effectively measure results, monitor project impact, and adapt program approaches. The extent to which the AMELP follows the requirements outlined in this RFA;

## **3. Organizational Capacity**

The extent to which the Applicant convincingly demonstrates experience in relevant sector(s) and the extent to which the Applicant demonstrates experience in implementing similar programs of comparable scale and complexity.

### **b) Business (Cost) Review**

The Agency will evaluate the cost application of the applicant(s) under consideration for an award as a result of the merit criteria review to determine whether the costs are allowable in accordance with the cost principles found in 2 CFR 200 Subpart E.

Applicants should submit a cost application with a budget estimate of no more than \$2 million. Should a "window of opportunity" open and additional funding become available, further information will be requested from the awarded recipient.

The Agency will also consider (1) the extent of the applicant's understanding of the financial aspects of the program and the applicant's ability to perform the activities within the amount requested; (2) whether the applicant's plans will achieve the program objectives with reasonable economy and efficiency; and (3) whether any special conditions relating to costs should be included in the award.

Proposed cost share, if provided, will be reviewed for compliance with the standards set forth in 2 CFR 200.306, 2 CFR 700.10, and the Standard Provision "Cost Sharing (Matching)" for U.S. entities, or the Standard Provision "Cost Share" for non-U.S. entities.

The AO will perform a risk assessment (2 CFR 200.206). The AO may determine that a pre-award survey is required to inform the risk assessment in determining whether the prospective recipient has the necessary organizational, experience, accounting and operational controls, financial

resources, and technical skills – or ability to obtain them – in order to achieve the objectives of the program and comply with the terms and conditions of the award. Depending on the result of the risk assessment, the AO will decide to execute the award, not execute the award, or award with “specific conditions” (2 CFR 200.208).

**[END OF SECTION E]**

## SECTION F: FEDERAL AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

### 1. Federal Award Notices

Award of the agreement contemplated by this RFA cannot be made until funds have been appropriated, allocated and committed through internal USAID procedures. While USAID anticipates that these procedures will be successfully completed, potential applicants are hereby notified of these requirements and conditions for the award.

### 2. Administrative & National Policy Requirements

The resulting award from this RFA will be administered in accordance with the following policies and regulations.

[Standard Provisions for Non-U.S. Non-governmental Organizations.](#)

### 3. Reporting Requirements

The Recipient must adhere to all reporting requirements listed below. All plans and reports must be submitted in English. Documents must be submitted electronically by email. All reports must be submitted by the due date for review by the USAID Agreement Officer's Representative (AOR) designated by the Agreement Officer. The Agreement Officer and designated Acquisition & Assistance Specialist must be copied on each submission. The Applicant will consult the AOR on the format and expected content of reports prior to submission.

#### a) PLANS

- 1) **Annual Work Plan:** The Recipient shall submit an Annual Work Plan of its activities during the first year of the program within 45 days of the effective date of this Award for review, comments, or suggestions to the Agreement Officer's Representative (AOR) who will respond with comments/revisions or the approval within 10 days after the Annual Work Plan is submitted. The Recipient shall then submit the revised Work Plan to the AOR for approval not later than 15 days from receipt of USAID's comments and/or suggestions. Subsequent Annual Work Plans shall be submitted 30 days prior to commencement of the subsequent year of the Cooperative Agreement. The Work Plan shall include a timeline and benchmark indicators for achieving the objectives of each component of the program, all major activities that will be undertaken, rationale behind these activities, anticipated results of these efforts and how they will be measured. A sub-section with details of collaboration with other USAID- funded programs and other donors shall also be included. A gender action plan is also required to be integrated as a component of the annual work plan,

The Recipient shall submit significant changes or revisions to the Work Plan to the USAID

Agreement Officer's Representative (AOR) for his/her approval.

- 2) **Monitoring, Learning and Evaluation (MEL) Plan:** The Recipient shall submit a Monitoring, Learning and Evaluation (MEL) Plan within 90 days of the effective date of the award to the USAID Agreement Officer's Representative (AOR). The Recipient shall establish realistic expectations for what the project can produce in its various phases of implementation. The MEL Plan shall at a minimum include, and not be limited to the following:

- (1) the results to be achieved by the program.
- (2) qualitative or quantitative indicators to be used to measure achievement of the results.
- (3) the method of data collection to be used to obtain the indicator data.
- (4) baseline data and targets for each indicator by year.

The Recipient shall consult with USAID and the Impact Evaluation team while developing its MELP. Once developed, the MELP will be submitted to USAID for review and approved by the Agreement Officer's Representative (AOR).

- 3) **Close-out/Demobilization Plan:** Four months prior to the completion date of the Cooperative Agreement, a close-out/demobilization plan must be submitted to the USAID Agreement Officer for Approval with a copy to the AOR. The Plan must outline a clear phase-out exit strategy and timeline of execution, including a description of the methodology it will use in determining areas and levels of sustainability. The plan will also include a list of actions that are typically required for close-out activities to ensure that all activities are completed; conduct an analysis of progress to date and, if necessary, expedite timelines to ensure completion. The close-out plan must include:

- Current financial status report with a thorough pipeline analysis to ensure that there are sufficient funds available to finalize activities and complete all requirements.
- Final Financial Status Report timeline.
- A final inventory of residual non-expendable property, which was acquired or furnished under the cooperative agreement.
- A disposition report of the following types of property, along with a proposed disposition of such property: (1) All equipment that has a per unit current fair market value at the end of this award of \$5,000 or more; (2) New/unused supplies with an aggregate current fair market value at the end of this award of \$5,000 or more. The plan will include proposed beneficiaries of the property as well as schedule for the transfers.
- A request for disposition instructions for any property acquired or furnished by the

Government under the activity.

- Subcontractor/sub grantee/partnership phase out plan.
- Status of all program audit reports per the instrument's provisions.
- Final audit report timeline.
- Personnel phase-out timeline (who is expected to serve until when).
- Personnel phase-out plan (to include severance pay plan).

**(a) Financial Reporting:**

- 4) **Quarterly Financial Reports:** The Recipient shall submit the Standard Form (SF) SF-425 Federal Financial Report on a quarterly basis to the Financial Management Office and Agreement Officer's Representative, within 30 days following the end of each fiscal year quarter, regardless of the effective date of the Agreement. Each financial form shall be identified by the appropriate award number.
- 5) **Final Financial Report:** The original of the final financial report shall be submitted to the Paying Office, the Agreement Officer and the Agreement Officer's Representative not later than 90 calendar days after the estimated completion date of this award.

**(b) Program Performance Reporting**

- 1) **Quarterly Performance Reports:** The Recipient shall submit Quarterly Program Performance Reports to USAID during the duration of this Award. The quarterly performance reports are due 30 calendar days following the end of each fiscal year quarter, regardless of the effective date of the Agreement. Depending on the project start date, the first quarterly report may include somewhat more or less than one quarter's activities. The Recipient shall submit one copy of each Quarterly Program Performance Reports to the Agreement Officer's Representative (AOR) for her/his review and approval.

The quarterly reports shall describe project accomplishments and the progress made during the reporting period, include information on all activities, both ongoing and completed during the quarter, as well as any issues or problems that are affecting the delivery or timing of services provided by the Recipient. The reports shall also briefly present the following information:

- (i) Reasons why established goals were not met, if applicable.
- (ii) Other pertinent information including the status of finances and expenditures and, when appropriate, analysis and explanation of cost overruns or high unit costs.

The Recipient will report on activity performance quarterly, using a format agreed to with the AOR. The Recipient is encouraged to consult with the USAID Agreement Officer's Representative (AOR) in finalizing the reports.

- 2) **Annual Performance Report:** The annual performance report shall include the fourth quarter performance report and is due 30 calendar days following the end of each fiscal year. Annual Report will include performance reporting for the last quarter (July through September) as well as aggregated reporting for the entire fiscal year and will include the elements listed above, as well as a description of key lessons learned and how the lessons will be used to inform the coming year's Annual Work Plan. The annual report will also include the following information:
- An Executive Summary of major findings, challenges, and achievements
  - Extent to which objectives and results in the Annual Work Plan were achieved;
  - Highlights of major achievements.
  - Significant implementation problems and challenges encountered during the year (if applicable) and mitigation measures taken to address these.
  - Description of efforts to ensure coordination, collaboration, and information sharing during the reporting period and any problems encountered, agreements reached, and/or actions taken to ensure coordination with relevant stakeholders.
  - Description of efforts and progress achieved with activities to address gender issues.
  - Description of efforts and progress achieved with regards to sustainability of project activities.
  - Progress achieved regarding MEL Plan indicators and targets for the fourth quarter and the entire fiscal year.
  - Lessons learned, observations, and recommendations that might be relevant to the design and implementation of other related activities.
  - Success stories, highlighting the role of USAID and the American people in improving opportunities for Serbia. Success stories must include quality photos that will be shared for public outreach purposes.
- 3) **Ad hoc, Interim Reporting:** Events may occur between the scheduled performance reporting dates that have significant impact upon the activity. In such cases, the Recipient must notify the AOR and AO as soon as the following types of conditions become known:
- Problems, delays, or adverse conditions, which will materially impair the ability to meet the objective of the Federal award. This disclosure must include a statement of the action taken, or contemplated, and any assistance needed to resolve the situation.
  - Waste, fraud, or abuse detected in the activity, and actions being taken to investigate the situation as well as to mitigate future occurrences. This reporting does NOT

- absolve the Recipient of the duty to disclose waste, fraud, or abuse to the USAID Inspector General Hotline (ig.hotline@usaid.gov); and
- Events or conditions that could have negative political or public relations perceptions affecting the activity. These include statements in the press or on social media, relationships with local officials or actors, etc. The Recipient will work with the AOR to determine a response strategy and to assist in mitigating any negative effects.

On the other hand, the Ad hoc reporting might also be required occasionally by the AOR, such as for example during Portfolio Review, or asking for a Monthly Success Story to be submitted for the purpose of promoting our activities in Washington, or similar events.

Regular activity monitoring events and communication will be established between the Implementing partner and the AOR.

- 4) **Final Report:** The Recipient is required to submit a Final Report within 90 calendar days following the estimated completion or termination date of this award. The final performance report shall contain at a minimum the following information:
- (i) An executive summary of the accomplishments and results achieved.
  - (ii) An in-depth analysis of progress and results that synthesizes achievements that contributed towards program objectives. This section should clearly describe activities, major accomplishments and results achieved under the award.
  - (iii) Final data, compared to baseline data, for all indicators included in the monitoring, learning and evaluation plan. This section should include disaggregated data by gender, regions, disenfranchised groups and other relevant groups identified.
  - (iv) A summary of problems/obstacles encountered during the implementation, and how those obstacles were addressed and overcome if appropriate.
  - (v) Lessons learned, best practices, and other findings from the implementation of the program, along with recommendations for future programming under each of the program objectives.

**A list of all reports, publications, evaluations, and information and media products produced under this agreement, as well as confirmation that all products were submitted to the USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC). For DEC submission instructions, see Standard Provision M.8 for Non-US NGOs and M.21 for US NGOs, entitled “SUBMISSIONS TO THE DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCE CLEARINGHOUSE AND PUBLICATIONS (JUNE 2012)”.**

#### **4. Environmental Compliance**

- (a) The Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended, Section 117 requires that the impact of USAID’s activities on the environment be considered and that USAID include environmental sustainability as a central consideration in designing and carrying out its development

programs. This mandate is codified in Federal Regulations (22 CFR 216) and in USAID's Automated Directives System (ADS) Chapters 201

(<http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1870/201.pdf>) and 204

(<http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1865/204.pdf>), which, in part, require that the potential environmental impacts of USAID-financed activities are identified prior to a final decision to proceed and that appropriate environmental safeguards are adopted for all activities. The Recipient's environmental compliance obligations under these regulations and procedures are specified in the following paragraphs of this cooperative agreement.

- (b) In addition, the Recipient must comply with host country environmental regulations unless otherwise directed in writing by USAID. In case of conflict between host country and USAID regulations, the latter shall govern.
- (c) No activity funded under this cooperative agreement will be implemented unless an environmental threshold determination, as defined by 22 CFR 216, has been reached for that activity, as documented in the approved Request for Categorical Exclusion (RCE).
- (d) Request for Categorical Exclusion (RCE) **DCN: 2022-SRB-004** has been approved for this activity, see Attachment 2 to this RFA. It has been determined that the activity is fully within the class of Categorical Exclusions. As per 22 CFR 216.2(c)(2), neither an Initial Environmental Examination, nor an Environmental Assessment is required for an activity which is determined to fall within one or more of the categories listed at 22 CFR 216.2(c)(2)(i) education, technical assistance or training programs; and at 22 CFR 216.2(c)(2)(iii) analysis, studies, academic research, workshops and meetings.
- (e) As part of its Annual Work Plan, the Recipient, in collaboration with the AOR and Mission Environmental Officer (MEO), shall review all ongoing and planned activities under this cooperative agreement to determine if they are within the scope of the approved Regulation 216 environmental documentation. If the Recipient plans any new activities outside the scope of the approved Regulation 216 environmental documentation, it shall prepare an amendment to the documentation for USAID review and approval. No such new activities shall be undertaken prior to receiving written USAID approval of environmental documentation amendments. Any ongoing activities found to be outside the scope of the approved Regulation 216 environmental documentation shall be halted until an amendment to the documentation is submitted and written approval is received from USAID.
- (f) Subaward Provision: A provision for subawards is included under this award; therefore, the Recipient will be required to use an Environmental Screening Report (ESR) or Environmental Review (ER) checklist using impact assessment tools to screen grant proposals to ensure the funded proposals will result in no adverse environmental impact, to develop mitigation measures, as necessary, and to specify monitoring and reporting. Use of the ERF or ER checklist is called for when the nature of the grant proposals to be funded is not well enough known to make an informed decision about their potential environmental impacts, yet due to the type and extent of activities to be funded, any adverse impacts are expected to be easily mitigated. Implementation of the grants program cannot go forward until the ERF or ER checklist is completed and approved by USAID. Recipient is responsible for ensuring that

mitigation measures specified by the ESR or ER checklist process are implemented.

The Recipient will be responsible for periodic reporting to the USAID AOR, as specified in this award.

**[END OF SECTION F]**

## **SECTION G: FEDERAL AWARDING AGENCY CONTACT(S)**

### **1. RFA Points of Contact**

See Section D.1

### **2. Acquisition and Assistance Ombudsman**

The A&A Ombudsman helps ensure equitable treatment of all parties who participate in USAID's acquisition and assistance process. The A&A Ombudsman serves as a resource for all organizations who are doing or wish to do business with USAID. Please visit this page for additional information: <https://www.usaid.gov/work-usaid/acquisition-assistance-ombudsman>

[The A&A Ombudsman may be contacted via: Ombudsman@usaid.gov](mailto:Ombudsman@usaid.gov)

**[END OF SECTION G]**

## **SECTION H: OTHER INFORMATION**

USAID reserves the right to fund any or none of the applications submitted. The Agreement Officer is the only individual who may legally commit the Government to the expenditure of public funds. Any award and subsequent incremental funding will be subject to the availability of funds and continued relevance to Agency programming.

### Applications with Proprietary Data

Applicants who include data that they do not want disclosed to the public for any purpose or used by the U.S. Government except for evaluation purpose, should mark the cover page with the following:

“This application includes data that must not be duplicated, used, or disclosed – in whole or in part – for any purpose other than to evaluate this application. If, however, an award is made as a result of – or in connection with – the submission of this data, the U.S. Government will have the right to duplicate, use, or disclose the data to the extent provided in the resulting award. This restriction does not limit the U.S. Government’s right to use information contained in this data if it is obtained from another source without restriction. The data subject to this restriction are contained in sheets {insert sheet numbers}.”

Additionally, the applicant must mark each sheet of data it wishes to restrict with the following:

“Use or disclosure of data contained on this sheet is subject to the restriction on the title page of this application.”

**[END OF SECTION H]**

**SECTION I: STANDARD PROVISIONS**

Note: the full text of these provisions may be found at:

<https://www.usaid.gov/ads/policy/300/303mab>

**Please note that the resulting award will include all standard provisions (both mandatory and required as applicable) in full text.**

**[END OF SECTION I]**

**[END OF RFA # 72016923RFA00002]**