Media Viability Accelerator (MVA) Forward

Annual Program Statement (APS)

June 4, 2024

MVA-APS-001

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

- Due date for applications: June 4, 2025
- Questions and submissions should be made to the following email: APS@mva.net

The content of this Annual Program Statement (APS) is the responsibility of Internews and does not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the Government of the United States.

Contents

Introduction and Invitation to Apply 4
Section 1 – Project Background 6
Need 6
Response 6
Goals and Objectives 6
Section 2 – Categories of Support and Engagement 7
Category A: Independent Media in Target Countries 7
Category B: Media Support Organizations 9
Category C: Solution Providers 10
Section 3 – Process for Engagement Without Funding 11
Concept Note 12
Review 12
Section 4 - Subgrant Information 12
Estimated Funding Level 12
Anticipated Subaward Duration 13
Award Type 13
Section 5- Process for Subgrant Application 14
Concept Note 14
Review 14
Full Application Package 14
Section 6 - Eligibility Requirements 14
Section 7 – Evaluation Criteria 15
Section 8- Contacts 16
Section 9 – Additional Considerations 16
UEI Number 16
Cost Principles 16
Indirect Costs 17
Subaward Administration 17
Reporting 18
Internews and USAID Prior Approval 18
Disclaimer 18

Annexes 18
Annex 1: MVA Forward Focus and Principles 19
MVA Focus 19
MVA Partner Statements 19
MVA Forward's Inclusive Approach 19
MVA Forward's Trust Framework 20
Annex 2: Concept Note Template 22
Organization* 22
Category and Budget* 22
If Applying for Category A 23
If Applying for Category B 24
If Applying for Category C 25

Introduction and Invitation to Apply

Issuance Date: June 4, 2024

Closing Date: June 3, 2025

Subject: Annual Program Statement MVA-APS-001

Project Title: Media Viability Accelerator Forward

To Interested Applicants:

The purpose of this Annual Program Statement (APS) is to solicit concept notes for partnership and support under the Media Viability Accelerator (MVA) Forward project. MVA Forward is funded by USAID and Microsoft, and implemented by Internews, currently in conjunction with Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD), Free Press Unlimited (FPU), IREX, SembraMedia, and Thomson Reuters Foundation (TRF). These groups together form the project's Implementation Coordinating Committee (ICC) to advise and help implement the project.

MVA Forward supports independent media outlets around the world to compete more effectively for audiences and revenues. The project is built around a web-based platform (www.MVA.net) that helps media track data on their business and audience performance, as well as providing opportunities to learn from their peers. There are three main components of this project supported by this APS:

- **Category A:** This is the most important category, and it will include the vast majority of subgrants issued by the project. MVA Forward will provide direct funding to as many local and **Independent Media** outlets in the global majority as possible – reaching a diverse geography, language, audience, etc. Media will use these funds to help them reach new audiences and find new revenues. We're looking for organizations that are actively using the MVA Platform to identify viability strategies, and are ready to take creative steps to improve. All other categories listed in this APS are designed to support the work and efforts of the media in this category.
- **Category B:** To help this platform reach a diverse, global audience of media outlets, this APS seeks to identify **Media Support Organizations** that wish to coordinate with the project and incorporate the platform into their own programs that assist Independent Media. For this category, applicants should maximize their support to the types of organizations that fall into Category A.
- **Category C:** The MVA platform will also support media outlets to access assistance by creating an online "marketplace" of services, tools, technologies and support. To make a wide variety of these services available, this APS seeks to identify "**Solution Providers**" that are interested in developing, adapting and offering these tools via the platform. The proposed Solutions will be evaluated primarily on how well they address the needs of Category A organizations.

Multiple Categories: It is possible to apply in more than one category. Also, organizations may move from one category to another in subsequent applications. For example, a Category A organization could take the lessons they learned from one subgrant and use those lessons to develop a Solution under Category C under the next round of funding.

No-Cost and Low-Cost Partnerships: MVA Forward encourages no-cost engagement, since there are many opportunities for partnership under the MVA that would not require funding. It also encourages low-cost engagement, since the project seeks to provide the greatest number of grants possible within the limited budget of the APS. For this reason, cost-effectiveness of applications will be a key evaluation component.

Flexibility: This APS is designed to be more open than other forms of solicitation, allowing MVA Forward to lay out its general areas of interest and spark creative proposals on the part of potential applicants. Using a streamlined Concept Note process, the APS could lead to a variety of formal and informal outcomes with partners, including an MOU, an invitation to join the ICC, an invitation to submit a more formal application, and/or a direct award.

Competition for this APS will be open for **twelve (12) months** (with the possibility of extension and/or renewal) and applications will be considered on a rolling basis. If funds are depleted within this period, the funding round will close. However, MVA Forward does anticipate renewing or re-releasing this APS to authorize additional rounds of funding when it becomes available. Each organization can apply once for each round of funding. Funded activities can run for a period of up to **12 months**. The number of awards and amount of available funding is up to the discretion of the Technical Evaluation Committee (TEC) and Steering Committee (SC, currently made of Internews, USAID and Microsoft).

To obtain a copy of the Annual Program Statement (APS) and the Annexes, please visit www.MVA.net/aps. Changes and updates to this APS will also be posted at that location.

Thank you for your interest,

Sincerely,

Dan Spealman

Chief of Party, MVA Forward

The issuance of this APS does not constitute an award or commitment on the part of MVA Forward, nor does it commit MVA Forward to pay for costs incurred in the preparation and submission of an application.

MVA Forward reserves the right to fund any or none of the applications submitted. Furthermore, MVA Forward reserves the right to make no awards as a result of this APS.

Section 1 – Project Background

Need

Around the world, independent media is confronting an extinction event, with many forces working against the ability of media to remain viable. Media business models have changed profoundly in recent decades as digital technology platforms capture most of the world's advertising and subscription revenues. Market fragmentation and rapidly changing means of sharing information further complicate the situation. Simply put, fact-based, independent media that holds power to account is being outcompeted.

Amid these obstacles, independent media is also challenged by rising authoritarianism around the world. Approximately 85% of the world population experienced a decline in press freedom over the past five years. According to Freedom House's 2023 Freedom in the World report, the number of countries and territories that received a zero rating for media freedom more than doubled between 2005 and 2022. Independent media outlets are vulnerable to being outspent, captured, discredited, harmed, threatened, sued, blocked, and taken down.

Given these challenges, MVA Forward has been designed to reinvigorate the independent media sector by providing new tools for financial viability of media outlets using analysis, innovation, and cross-sector collaboration.

Response

Through MVA Forward, USAID collaborated with Internews and Microsoft's Democracy Forward Initiative[1] to establish the MVA, a new web-based platform that will help media outlets access data to improve their performance and revenues. The MVA platform has two components:

- MVA Insights: a data platform for media outlets to track their own business performance, and to learn from others with similar market and organizational characteristics; and
- MVA Solutions: an online marketplace for integrations and other services aimed at improving media outlets' viability that they can access through the same platform.

Goals and Objectives

The goal of MVA Forward is to support independent media outlets to compete more effectively for audiences and revenues. Internews and its partners will achieve this project goal through the following project objectives:

1. Manage and Grow a Diverse MVA Community
2. Work with MVA Community Members to Increase their Viability
3. Create the MVA Platform & Ensure Ongoing Optimization
4. Ensure the MVA Forges a Path Towards Its Own Sustainable Operation

[1] USAID, Microsoft, and Internews signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on March 20, 2023.

Section 2 – Categories of Support and Engagement

Category A: Independent Media in Target Countries

Focus: Ultimately, the MVA is focused on supporting the Independent Media organizations that are vital to ensuring citizens have access to accurate and trustworthy news from a diverse set of perspectives. This category of funding is focused on ensuring that those organizations can survive and even thrive amidst the economic and political threats they currently face.

- By "independent," we mean outlets that practice "editorial independence from political interference and/or economic capture, and the upholding of professional journalistic standards through self-regulation and independent regulatory authorities."
- By "media," we mean both legacy formats (newspaper, television, radio) as well as those that exist in the digital realm (websites, online video, social media, etc.)
- By "Target Country" we mean any country categorized by the World Bank as a low, lower middle, or upper middle income country according to its gross national income per capita. A current list of these countries is available here. Target countries also include countries receiving USAID assistance, through a bilateral, nonpresence or regional program.[2] Greater weight will be given towards media in countries with greater challenges maintaining an independent media sector.

Often the media organizations we hope to support will be local – dedicated to serving a national or sub-national audience, but sometimes they will be regional in nature, and occasionally global. In many cases, the organizations we hope to support will represent and/or speak to citizens that have been marginalized by race, religion, gender, LGBTQ+ status, language, and repression. Both not-for-profit and for-profit[3] media are welcome to apply. Expected characteristics of applicants include:

- Current use of the MVA Platform[4], with greater weight given to organizations that have been using the platform the longest
- Desire to take new and innovative steps to improve viability based on data and other insights gained through the platform
- Commitment to independent news provision and editorial standards that prevent the publishing of the 12 content types excluded from the GARM brand safety and suitability framework.

Purpose: MVA Forward recognizes that while some viability improvements based on platform insights may be possible within a media organization's existing plans and resources, others may require additional resources. And while some technical support may be offered cost free by Media Support Organizations (Category B), other support desired by media outlets may only be available at some cost, including many

[2] If you do not see your country on the World Bank site in the low, lower middle or upper middle income categories, and you do not know if your country receives USAID assistance, you can reach out to APS@MVA.net to confirm if your country is eligible. This APS may be amended to include any confirmed eligible countries.

[3] USAID rules and regulations allow the project to provide grants to for-profit businesses, but they do not allow for any sort of profit to be built into the subgrants that go to these, or any other, entities.

[4] Defined as a user that who has signed up to the platform, registered at least one property, and made use of the platform at least once in the current quarter (as well as the previous quarter if they had signed up prior to the current quarter.)

types of support offered via the Solutions marketplace (Category C). MVA Forward wishes to support data- and demand-driven viability improvements, even in those cases where independent media organizations do not have the needed resources to purchase and/or implement them.

Therefore, MVA Forward will make up to $25,000[5] available to selected independent media organizations seeking to drive viability improvements in their business models and activities. These funds can be used to purchase support via the MVA Solutions marketplace, and/or on the open market, and/or to fund operational improvements directly that the media organization is able to implement on its own. We anticipate making up to 50 grants in this first round of funding, with more opportunities for a greater number of independent media in the 2nd and 3rd rounds of funding. Organizations can apply once per round, regardless of whether or not they received funding in the previous round. Almost $2.5 million will be made available in this category over the life of the project, and funds will be shifted into this category to further enhance this amount should the opportunity arise.

Illustrative activities under Category A: MVA Forward seeks to catalyze the creativity and innovation of potential partners, so it will not impose many limitations on what an organization can do with funding. At minimum the funding must go to a viability improvement, and an organization should be able to articulate how information from the MVA has informed their proposed activities. However, there are a wide number of potential viability enhancements that an organization could carry-out on its own, with expert advice, and/or with Solution Providers available on the platform. Therefore, the following are meant to be illustrative activities, and applicants should feel free to expand on these examples in creative ways:

- Institution of a new membership or crowd-funding approach, enabled by services and/or software designed to manage those approaches.
- Hiring of consultants and/or short-term contract staff to advise the organization on strategies such as business operations and audience outreach.
- Hiring of consultants and/or short-term contract staff to assist in the realization of a new strategy.
- The application of technology-based tools integrated into the MVA such as audience survey software, or the purchase of services offered through the MVA marketplace such as digital security audits.
- Revamping of an organization's delivery platform (such as its website) to make it more appealing to a target audience.
- The development of information-related products and services that might create additional avenues of revenue beyond the traditional advertising model (for example, properly labeled sponsored content).
- Adjustment of operations and approaches necessitated by a sudden shift in a market. This might include, for example, the need to move operations outside of a country, or to adjust operations to take advantage of an opening created by new administrative policies supportive of a free press.

[5] This ceiling may be revisited in future rounds of funding based on the feedback of subgrant recipients, but it was chosen to allow MVA Forward to reach the maximum number of organizations in as streamlined a way as possible. If an Independent Media outlet has needs beyond this ceiling, it may be possible to receive support under a different MVA Forward mechanism known as Flexible Response, which addresses urgent needs in particularly difficult contexts. Organizations can reach out to APS@MVA.net to seek additional information on this alternate funding tool.

Category B: Media Support Organizations

Focus: MVA Forward is engaged currently with a group of international Media Support Organizations which, along with Internews, includes Free Press Unlimited, Global Forum for Media Development, IREX, SembraMedia, and Thomson Reuters Foundation (which together make up the Implementation Coordinating Committee or ICC). In addition to these partnerships, MVA Forward seeks to expand its engagement with similar organizations that are willing to assist their beneficiaries to access the MVA, and use it to provide support to their partners. MVA Forward invites the participation of Media Support Organizations that currently provide financial and/or technical support, advice and services to multiple independent media outlets in target countries (those in Category A) as part of their mission. These organizations include international, national, and regional organizations and networks. While for-profit[6] entities are encouraged to participate in MVA Forward, it is expected that the majority of subgrant recipients will be not-for-profit, since for-profit entities will be less likely to need financial support. Expected characteristics of this group include:

- Commitment to engage with MVA Forward in an ethical and consistent manner.
- The technical capacity necessary to support Independent Media organizations.
- An existing network of Independent Media organizations that can benefit from the MVA and that would be able to successfully pass through its Trust Framework.

Purpose: MVA Forward seeks to expand the reach of the MVA platform and accompanying assistance to as many Independent Media outlets as possible. To achieve this, MVA Forward will partner with organizations who can promote the platform and provide support to help organizations to access it and use it effectively. This promotion could take the form of simply acting as an approver on www.MVA.net to authorize Independent Media to sign up, or it could take the form of deeper integration into programming such as mentoring, and conducting research to help further improve assistance to media. Engagement can be formal or informal, and if approved by a vote of the current membership, Media Support Organizations may also be invited to join the ICC. This body coordinates the efforts of Media Support Organizations working with MVA Forward, advises on the project, and is able to engage in Flexible Response activities to help media dealing with drastic market shifts. Not all organizations will need funding to undertake these efforts, but for those that do, MVA Forward can make up to $100,000[7] per funding round per organization available. MVA Forward will provide approximately 8 such subgrants in this first round.

Illustrative activities under Category B: MVA Forward seeks to catalyze the creativity and innovation of potential partners, so it will not impose many limitations on what type of support activities Category B applicants will engage in. At minimum an applicant should be willing to promote the MVA to its Independent Media partners and integrate it into its ongoing support activities (where opportunity and funding to do so allows). However, promotion, for example, may look very different depending on the strengths of the Media Support Organization, the types of independent media it engages with, and the ongoing relationship between the two. It could include one-to-one mentorship, online or in-person training, information sharing and communications, facilitation of peer-to-peer learning, etc. Therefore, the following

[6] USAID rules and regulations allow the project to provide grants to for-profit businesses, but they do not allow for any sort of profit to be built into the subgrants that go to these, or any other, entities.
[7] ICC Members may be eligible for more funding in cases where Flexible Response activities are later approved.

are meant to be illustrative potential activities, and applicants should feel free to expand on these examples in creative ways:

- Inclusion of the MVA into the curricula of a standard series of trainings provided multiple times a year globally, nationally or regionally for Independent Media.
- Intense mentoring of local media organizations in a country or countries on the MVA itself, as well as a broader focus on the use of data, audience engagement and creative viability models.
- A series of messages and updates shared with a broad membership that keeps organizations informed on the benefits and potential uses of the MVA as it grows in functionality.
- Hosting and facilitating peer-to-peer learning events that focus on the importance of media viability (including the use of the MVA).
- Research efforts that help inform the implementation of the MVA and/or that make use of aggregate data for analysis that will have wide applicability to the sector as a whole.
- For organizations approved to join the ICC, implementation of Flexible Response Fund activities, which includes emergency technical support and subgrants to assist local organizations in adjusting to sudden shifts in their market (such as new restrictive laws, conflict, media capture, etc.)

Category C: Solution Providers

Focus: MVA Forward encourages organizations that offer tools, technologies, services, capacity building, accreditations, and data to promote their services for independent media in the MVA Solutions marketplace. These providers may be not-for-profit or for-profit businesses.[8] MVA Forward encourages both multinational and local providers to apply for Category C grants. In some cases, these local providers may be Independent Media organizations that made adaptations to their own business models (along the lines of what is supported under Category A) and now wish to share those lessons with other media outlets. Expected characteristics of this group include:

- The technical capacity necessary to develop and deliver effective Solutions for Independent Media viability.

Purpose: In September 2024, the MVA intends to launch its Solutions marketplace, which will facilitate the supply of support to independent media to meet the demand expressed by those outlets. At minimum, the marketplace will allow organizations to list and describe the services they offer to support independent media. At its most sophisticated, the marketplace will offer technologies and applications that fully integrate with the platform to benefit media viability. Some organizations may choose to offer their Solutions on the platform at no cost to a user, but most will likely charge a reasonable fee. Most organizations will not need funding from MVA Forward to list their service on the Solutions marketplace; in many cases it will be a simple description of a service already provided, or an off-the-shelf technology already developed.

However, in some cases, organizations may need funding to significantly modify their services to make them more directly applicable to media viability and/or to fully integrate them with the platform. In some cases, organizations may need funding to develop a new tool or technology. In cases where MVA Forward

[8] USAID regulations allow the project to provide grants to for-profit businesses, but they do not allow for any sort of profit to be built into the subgrants that go to these, or any other, entities.

evaluates that a tool will be particularly helpful, and an applicant is particularly well suited to develop that tool, MVA Forward may make up to $50,000 per round of funding per organization available so that applicants can develop that tool and offer it on the Solutions marketplace. Organizations may charge for services and technologies offered on the platform, but subgrants are more likely to be awarded in cases where they are offered at low or no cost to users. MVA Forward will provide approximately 5 such subgrants in this first round.

Please note: applicants are able to apply with the release of this APS, but are advised to consider waiting until the full parameters of the marketplace are better known around its date of release.

Illustrative Solutions under Category C: MVA Forward seeks to catalyze the creativity and innovation of potential partners, so it will not impose many limitations on what type of Solution an organization can develop with funding. At minimum, the services, tools and technologies offered via the MVA Forward platform should aim to demonstrably help independent media survive and thrive, even in increasingly difficult contexts. However, these Solutions could focus on a wide variety of strategies and capacities, including: audience engagement, innovative revenue models, business operations, development of new products, donor engagement, and more. As with the MVA platform itself, offerings in multiple languages are welcome and even preferred. The following are meant to be illustrative potential Solutions, and applicants should feel free to expand on these examples in creative ways:

- An integration with the MVA platform that pulls relevant data from other sources (for example, audience survey data, audience engagement tracking at an article level, financial performance from accounting software) and adds it in a supplementary fashion to the data already available on the MVA platform.
- Online assessments and accreditations that can result in a "badge" on the profile page of Independent Media outlets indicating their successful completion of those processes.
- A tool that measures the impact of journalistic efforts and links that impact to outlet viability.
- An audience, membership, and/or donor management system.
- An AI solution that streamlines existing tasks and enhances content without compromising quality.[9]
- Online or offline training and mentorship service offerings in a variety of viability-related topics (for example, digital security, audience engagement, business operations, etc.)

Section 3 – Process for Engagement Without Funding

MVA Forward encourages Media Support Organizations (Category B) and Solution Providers (Category C) to engage MVA Forward without a formal subgrant from Internews. For example, a Media Support Organization may see no-cost opportunities to benefit its partners by acting as trust authority in approving their access to the MVA, and/or integrating the MVA into already existing work. As another example, a Solution Provider might already have an off-the-shelf service or product it wishes to make available in the marketplace, and/or an integration it wishes to create at its own cost due to the opportunities for

[9] At this point, MVA Forward does not anticipate supporting generative AI technology intended to write news without the assistance of reporters and editors, but may consider tools that enhance human-produced content. For example, optimizing original content for search engines or adapting that content for delivery on various platforms.

marketing that integration to MVA users. These cases are welcome, and they allow the project to focus limited funds on areas of greatest need. The project anticipates many more engagements than subgrants in Categories B & C.

Concept Note

For organizations wishing to engage with MVA Forward without funding, the process is simple. It may start with the reading of this APS, or it may commence with a conversation about potential partnership that leads to further interest. Organizations are then asked to fill out the very brief Concept Note form (Annex 2), which is made up of just a few check boxes and brief text fields. All organizations must fill out the "Organization" and "Category and Budget" sections of this form, but **applicants need only fill out the portions of the rest of the form that apply to them**. If an organization is only interested in being an approving authority[10] to allow others on the platform without receiving a subgrant, for example, it need only fill out the introductory section, and check the box that indicates that. If an organization wishes to offer a service or tool on the Solutions marketplace without receiving a subgrant, it need only fill out the introductory section, along with a brief description of what it would like to offer on the platform. Concepts should then be submitted to APS@MVA.net.

Review

Applicants will be reviewed on a rolling basis. The MVA Forward team may request refinement of the note in writing, seek additional information via a call, and/or gather its own information. The application will then be reviewed by the MVA Technical Evaluation Committee (TEC) to determine if it should be shared with the ICC and the SC.

With the MVA's bias for inclusion, that determination will generally be positive for a no-cost engagement, unless an organization does not meet the minimum Eligibility Requirements (Section 6) or the Category Requirements (Section 2). Existing partnership with, or a recommendation from an existing ICC member, will further bolster an application.

The TEC committee will share the application, along with additional information from MVA Forward staff to provide context and details (for example, an evaluation of a proposed Solution, the results of a Trust Framework analysis, etc.) and the ICC will be given 5 business days to review.

Successful applicants will be sent a brief Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for review and signature that fleshes out the expectations and commitments of each party for as long as they maintain their partnership under MVA Forward. Organizations who propose activities on par with existing members may also be invited to join the ICC if the existing members vote in favor of extending the invitation.

Section 4 - Subgrant Information

The following information is for those seeking funding from MVA Forward. For organizations not seeking funding to engage with the MVA, please see Section 3 above.

Estimated Funding Level

MVA Forward expects to award multiple grants across the three categories described above as follows:

[10] Approving authorities have the ability to authorize access to the platform for organizations that are known to them.

- **Category A:** For eligible Independent Media, MVA Forward anticipates awarding up to 50 subgrants this round of up to $25,000 each.
- **Category B:** For Media Support Organizations (who are assisting Independent Media), MVA Forward anticipates awarding up to 8 subgrants this round of up to $100,000 each.
- **Category C:** For Solution Providers (who are developing tools useful to Independent Media), MVA Forward anticipates awarding up to 5 subgrants this round of up to $50,000 apiece.

MVA Forward may choose to fund applications fully, partially, or incrementally. Awards typically **may not exceed $25,000 for Category A, $100,000 for Category B or $50,000 for Category C**. However, the final amount will depend on grant activities and final negotiation, and may higher than the typical range, subject to Steering Committee approval. Also with SC approval, MVA Forward may award more or fewer subgrants in each category than the illustrative numbers listed above.

MVA Forward will likely offer three rounds of funding by renewing or reissuing this APS. Organizations are eligible to apply once each round, whether or not they received funding for their previous application. In other words, it is possible to receive multiple grants from MVA Forward, even though there is a limit of one grant for each round of funding.

Applicants may see potential for their organizations in multiple categories. For example, some Media Support Organizations may integrate the MVA into their programming (Category B) and also offer a solution in the marketplace (Category C). The concept note template allows for the possibility of work that crosses categories. Also, organizations may move from one category to another in subsequent applications. For example, a Category A organization could take the lessons they learned from their first subgrant under the project and use those to develop a Solution under Category C for the next round of funding.

However, please note that **the categories are not additive**. The maximum amount an organization can receive per funding round is equal to the highest category ceiling it is applying for, not a combination of those ceilings. Therefore, an organization can receive up to $100,000 if its application includes mostly Category B work; or it can receive up to $50,000 if its application includes mostly Category C work; but it cannot receive up to $150,000 in a round for both Category B and C work.[11] Also, if an applicant does choose to apply in multiple categories, it still cannot budget more to a category of work than the ceiling of that category. For example, if an applicant is seeking funding under Category A and Category B, it can only budget up to $25,000 to internal operations improvements, and the rest must go to external work that would fall under Category B.

If the budgeted amount of funding in a particular category has been committed for that funding round, MVA Forward may stop accepting applications in that category until this APS is replaced or renewed.

Anticipated Subaward Duration

The period of performance will be **up to 12 months**.

Award Type

Grants will usually be provided in the standard cost-reimbursable format that allows for advances and then the reconciliation of those advances in quarterly financial reports. In certain cases, the MVA may provide materials or equipment directly, which would be an in-kind grant. The grant mechanism will be

[11] Although, ICC members may later be eligible for subgrant increases to accommodate flexible response activities.

determined by MVA Forward through a pre-award determination process based on the nature of the grant activity and the financial and management capacity of the grantee organization. The award size, number of awards, and amount of available funding is subject to change.

Section 5- Process for Subgrant Application

Concept Note

Organizations are asked to fill out the very brief Concept Note form (Annex 2), which is made up of just a few check boxes and brief text fields. **All organizations must fill out the "Organization" and "Category and Budget" sections of this form, and then fill out only the category sections relevant to them.** On the form, those applying for any category must describe in brief the activities they propose for the funding requested. Category A is also required to describe how those activities connect to insights learned through use of the MVA. Categories B and C are also required to write a brief capacity statement. Concepts should then be submitted to APS@mva.net.

Review

The following are the steps in the application review process:

1. Applicants will be reviewed on a rolling basis against the minimum Category Requirements (Section 2) and the Eligibility Requirements (Section 6).
2. MVA Forward may request refinement of the note in writing and/or seek additional information via a call.
3. The application will then be reviewed by the MVA Technical Evaluation Committee (TEC) and scored against the Evaluation Criteria (Section 7).
    - For applicants seeking funding under Category A, the TEC will make the final determination.
    - For applicants seeking funding under Category B and/or C, the TEC will determine if it should be shared with the Implementation Coordinating Committee (ICC) and the Steering Committee (SC) based the applicants score and further research. Scores and recommendations will be shared with the committees, along with additional information from MVA Forward staff to provide context and details (for example, evaluation of a proposed Solution, the recommendation of an existing ICC member, etc.) These groups will have 5 business days either to express support or to object. The SC, after considering the input of the ICC, will then make the final determination.

Full Application Package

Selected organizations will then be invited to submit a Full Application Package that consists of a brief Workplan, Detailed Budget, Registration Certificate and Subrecipient Questionnaire. MVA Forward will provide templates and guidance to applicants whose concept notes are approved. However, please note that approval of a concept note does not represent a commitment to fund the proposed activities. Final approval is subject to successful submission, negotiation, and approval of the full application package by Internews and USAID.

Section 6 - Eligibility Requirements

This APS is issued as a public notice to ensure that all interested and qualified organizations have a fair opportunity to submit applications. Applicants for any category must meet the following minimum

eligibility criteria to be considered eligible for partnership and/or a subaward resulting from this APS. Each applicant must:

- Complete a brief concept note.
- Be a legally registered organization.[12]
- Have a focus and principles (reflected in, for example, the organization's mission, vision, activities, values, etc.) that align with the focus and principles of MVA Forward, along with those of Internews and its existing partners, and the project's Trust Framework. (References to these can be found in Annex 1.)
- Not be listed with active exclusions on the UN Security Designation List, Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons List, System for Award Management (SAM), or Internews List of Debarred Grant recipients.

All applications will go through an initial screening against these minimum eligibility criteria and any applicant that does not meet the criteria will be eliminated. Additional expectations and requirements are described under each category described above.

Section 7 – Evaluation Criteria

Applications will be evaluated in accordance with the evaluation criteria set forth below. Awards will be granted to applications that offer the best technical and financial value to MVA Forward.

#	Criteria	Description	Points
1	Approach	• Do the proposed activities suggest that the applicant can contribute to the objectives this APS aims to advance? ○ For Independent Media, will the proposed activities support greater viability for that outlet, based on findings from the MVA? ○ For Media Support Organizations, will the proposed activities benefit a reasonable number of key Independent Media Outlets in a cost-effective manner? ○ For Solution Providers, will the proposed solutions be of use to the viability of Independent Media?	30
2	Alignment & Commitment	• Does the organization have a focus and principles (reflected in, for example, the organization's mission, vision, activities, values, etc.) that align with the focus and principles of MVA Forward? • Has the applicant demonstrated commitment to the objectives of the MVA (for example, by supporting	20

[12] It is acknowledged that some organizations may not be able to register in the countries that they serve and will have to operate in exile. Nonetheless, they must have some sort of legal registration (even if it is not in their primary country of focus) to partner formally and receive funding under the project. Organizations that are in the process of registration or have other registration challenges can reach out to APS@MVA.net to discuss their situation.

		independent media viability around the world for a significant period of time)?	
3	Capacity	• Does the applicant have sufficient capacity to carry out the activities proposed?[13]	20
4	Cost Effectiveness	• Is the proposed activity cost effective and does it represent value for money? Is the total amount of funding reasonable for the activities proposed and on par with other applications of similar scope? For Solutions, are the proposed fees required from users minimal?	20
5	Equity	• Given MVA Forward's expressed goal of having an inclusive programmatic reach (see Appendix 1), does the applicant contribute significantly to an equitable and diverse distribution of MVA partners?	10

Section 8- Contacts

The point of contact for this APS and any questions during the APS process is: APS@MVA.net

Prospective applicants that are interested in inquiring about this APS must submit their questions in writing so that answers can be posted and accessible for all applicants. Prospective applicants will also be welcome to join an online Questions and Answer session or sessions which will be announced at www.MVA.net/APS. Any information given to a prospective applicant concerning this APS will be furnished promptly to all other prospective applicants at www.MVA.net/APS, if that information is necessary in submitting applications or if the lack of it would be prejudicial to any other prospective applicants.

Section 9 – Additional Considerations

UEI Number

The United States Federal Government has transitioned from the use of the DUNS Number to the Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) as the primary means of entity identification for Federal awards government-wide. UEI numbers are required in accordance with 2 CFR Part 25, and the transition from DUNS to UEI has resulted in the UEI being issued by the Federal Government in SAM.gov. Before receiving any grant of USD $25,000 or more, applicants must obtain a UEI number. ***As obtaining a UEI number may require significant time, MVA Forward recommends submitting a request as soon as possible to avoid potential delays.***

Cost Principles

Application budgets will be reviewed in accordance with, and selected subrecipients' costs will be subject to, the applicable cost principles:

- Not for Profit organizations:
  - 2CFR200 Subpart E, Cost Principles
- For Profit organizations:

[13] As evaluated through what is written in the concept note, the organization's reputation based on past engagement with ICC and SC members, as well research and evaluation conducted by the TEC.

- 48CFR31.2 Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR) and 48CFR731.2
- USAID Acquisition Regulations (AIDAR) - Cost Principles for Commercial Organizations

All costs must be reasonable, allocable, and allowable. Reasonable costs are those costs that are generally recognized as ordinary and necessary and would be incurred by a prudent person in the conduct of normal business. Allocable costs are those costs specifically linked to the execution of the activity such as staff salaries, consultations, supplies, and other direct costs. Allowable costs are those costs that conform to any limitations in the grant award.

This APS will **NOT** fund the following costs:

- Application development costs
- Purchases of restricted goods, such as: restricted agricultural commodities, motor vehicles including motorcycles, pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, used equipment; without the previous approval of MVA Forward, or prohibited goods under USAID regulations.
- Alcoholic beverages.
- Construction.
- Purchases of goods or services restricted or prohibited under the prevailing USAID source/nationality.
- Any purchase or activity, which has already been covered by other donors or projects.
- Prior obligations of and/or, debts, fines, and penalties imposed on the Grantee.

Indirect Costs

Recipients may choose to budget all costs directly, or selected subrecipients will be eligible for reimbursement of indirect costs if they:

- Have a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) from their cognizant agency, or
- Accept a de minimis indirect cost rate of 10 or 15 percent[14] applied to Modified Total Direct Costs (MTDC).[15]

Subaward Administration

Internews is required to respect the provisions of the United States Foreign Assistance Act and other United States laws and regulations. The Grant Program will be administered according to Internews' policies and procedures as well as USAID's regulations.

The following regulations and provisions, at minimum, will apply to grant agreements issued from this APS:

- For US-based organizations:

[14] The determination between 10% or 15% is subject to applicable policies in effect at the time of the award.

[15] MTDC is defined as all direct salaries and wages, applicable fringe benefits, materials and supplies, services, employee and consultant travel, and up to the first $25,000 of each subaward (regardless of the period of performance of the subawards or subcontracts under the award). MTDC excludes equipment, capital expenditures, charges for patient care, rental costs, tuition remission, scholarships and fellowships, participant support costs and the portion of each subaward more than $25,000.

    - 2CFR200 and 2CFR700 Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards
    - ADS303maa Standard Provisions for US Non-governmental Organizations
- For Non-US organizations:
    - ADS303mab Standard Provisions for Non-U.S. Non-governmental Organizations

Reporting

Grants will include technical and financial reporting requirements. Technical and financial reports will be streamlined, simplified, and generally will be required on a quarterly basis.

Internews and USAID Prior Approval

The selected applicants will be subject to Internews and USAID approval before a grant is awarded. Organizations are reminded that there may be delays in the completion of this process. Should such approval not be given, the grant cannot be awarded. MVA Forward may request pre-selection meetings and require additional documentation as needed such as a pre-award questionnaire.

Disclaimer

The issuance of this APS does not commit Internews to make an award to any prospective grantee responding to this solicitation. Prospective sub grantees will not be reimbursed for costs incurred in the preparation and submission of an application. Internews reserves the right to reject any and/or all applications or make an award without further discussion or negotiations.

Annexes

- Annex 1: Missions and Values Information
- Annex 2: Concept Note Template

[End of APS]

Annex 1: MVA Forward Focus and Principles

MVA Focus

As stated above, the MVA is focused on supporting the Independent Media organizations that are vital to ensuring citizens have access to accurate and trustworthy news from a diverse set of perspectives. The project seeks to ensure that those organizations can survive and even thrive amid the economic and political threats they currently face.

- By "independent," we mean outlets that practice "editorial independence from political interference and/or economic capture, and the upholding of professional journalistic standards through self-regulation and independent regulatory authorities."
- By "media," we mean both legacy formats (newspaper, television, radio) as well as those that exist in the digital realm (websites, online video, social media, etc.)
- By "Target Country" we mean any country categorized by the World Bank as a low, lower middle, or upper middle income country according to its gross national income per capita. A current list of these countries is available here. Target countries also include countries receiving USAID assistance, through a bilateral, nonpresence or regional program.

MVA Partner Statements

The current ICC and SC members have statements that describe their vision, mission, values, etc. at the following links:

- Free Press Unlimited: https://www.freepressunlimited.org/en/who-we-are
- Global Forum for Media Development: https://gfmd.info/about/
- Internews: https://internews.org/about/
- IREX: https://www.irex.org/about-us
- Microsoft: https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/about/values
- SembraMedia: https://sembramedia.org/who-we-are/
- Thomson Reuters Foundation: https://www.trust.org/about-us/
- USAID: https://www.usaid.gov/about-us/mission-vision-values

MVA Forward's Inclusive Approach

MVA Forward is oriented towards ***inclusion*** and serves as many independent media outlets as possible—both through services provided by the MVA platform itself, as well as through planned subgrants and technical support. At the same time, MVA Forward has robust standards and guidelines to ensure proper use of the platform.

MVA Forward proactively promotes diversity among its partners and the communities it serves and tracks its reach to a diversity of groups. Where marginalized groups are underserved by the media, MVA Forward conducts extra outreach. MVA Forward also follows Community Diversity Guidelines to promote and support a broad and inclusive set of media outlet partners by location, size, type (e.g., digital-only, exile), language, organization composition (e.g., gender), and audience demographics (e.g., women audiences).

Further, MVA Forward promotes a nondiscriminatory, inclusive, and integrated development approach that ensures that all people, including those who face discrimination (and thus may have limited access to a country's benefits, legal protections, and/or social participation) are fully included and can actively

participate in and benefit from development processes and activities. To counteract the unique challenges faced by women journalists and women owned media outlets, for example, MVA Forward embeds interventions to support media by and for women and other communities who are subject to disproportionate levels of risk and underrepresentation. Such interventions may include, for example, targeting subgrants and technical assistance to particularly marginalized groups and/or media outlets who serve marginalized groups.

MVA Forward has inclusive and consultative governance and advisory structures and processes to manage the MVA platform and to ensure that MVA Forward remains responsive to the current and emerging needs of a growing community of users. These structures and processes operate on principles of transparency, respect for human rights, and mitigating risks and/or harm.

Finally, MVA Forward aligns with USAID's Disability Policy and integrates the specific needs of people with disabilities—such as barriers to engaging in access to information, civic education and community development activities, and access to information and communication technologies—into program design at all levels.

MVA Forward's Trust Framework

The Trust Framework is an evolving document that will be updated as the platform is opened to more partners. When changes occur, they will be appended to this APS.

The Trust Framework is designed to verify which media outlets should be able to access the MVA platform. In its first iteration, it is designed so that Media Support Organizations working with the MVA (currently Internews, IREX, FPU, GFMD, SembraMedia and TRF) can authorize their partners to sign-up for the platform. Therefore, each of these Media Support Organizations are responsible for vouching for their invitees and that those media outlets conform to the framework.

It is acknowledged that these Media Support Organizations may already have standards in place (e.g., existing partnership guidelines) that may overlap with the requirements of this framework. If that's the case, the Media Support Organizations may only need to confirm once that their standards overlap, and may not need to review the Trust Framework for each individual outlet they are authorizing. For example, if a Media Support Organization is only inviting its members, and membership requirements are confirmed to overlap sufficiently with the Trust Framework, then the Trust Framework need not be revisited for each individual outlet.

Confirmations

By authorizing access to the MVA for a Media Outlet, the Media Support Organization granting access confirms the following:

- ✓ There is an existing or previous affiliation between the applicant and the Media Support Organization that is sufficient to enable the assessing organization to confirm the Media Outlet's suitability to access the MVA.
- ✓ The individual granting access has no personal affiliation (e.g. a financial interest, family relationship, former employment status, board membership, etc.) that would limit their ability to conduct this assessment in a fully impartial manner.

- ✓ To the assessor's knowledge, there are no internal risks involving this media organization that would suggest they would not use the MVA in a trustworthy fashion. (Typically, this risk would entail known ethical breaches or controversies, non-transparent ownership, etc.)
- ✓ To the best of the assessor's knowledge, the applying organization publishes none of the 12 content types excluded from the GARM brand safety and suitability framework.

Annex 2: Concept Note Template

Organization*

1. Name of Organization: Click here to enter text.
2. Location of Organization (where it is registered): Click here to enter text.
3. Key Contact Name: Click here to enter text.
4. Key Contact Email: Click here to enter text.
5. Organization website: Click here to enter text.
6. Briefly describe who you are, what you do, where you do it and why you're well situated to engage with MVA Forward. This could be as simple as copying your "About Us" paragraph from your website or other information product. (300 words max.)

   Click here to enter text.

7. Are you being invited to engage with MVA Forward by any of the following organizations, and/or have you partnered with them in the past (please check all that apply):
   - ☐ Internews
   - ☐ Free Press Unlimited
   - ☐ Global Forum for Media Development
   - ☐ IREX
   - ☐ Microsoft
   - ☐ SembraMedia
   - ☐ Thomson Reuters Foundation
   - ☐ USAID

8. Please list the email of one contact at each of the organizations checked who can vouch for your work: Click here to enter text.

Category and Budget*

1. Under which categories would you like to partner with MVA Forward? (Please check all that apply, and *please skip filling out information below for any category you are NOT applying for.)*
   - ☐ Category A (up to $25,000),
   - ☐ Category B (from $0 to $100,000), and/or
   - ☐ Category C (from $0 to $50,000).
2. ☐ Check this box if you are you asking for any funding to partner with MVA Forward.

Please note: If you are not asking for funding, you do not need to fill in any other questions in this category.

3. If so, how much in US Dollars? Click here to enter text.
4. Up to a year, how long will you use this funding for? Click here to enter text.
5. If applying for funding, please attach your legal registration documentation to your submission.

---

* Required

If Applying for Category A

Please skip to the next category if you are not applying for this one.

1. How many months have you been using the MVA? Click here to enter text.
2. Describe any insights you may have gained by using the MVA. (300 words max.)

   Click here to enter text.

3. Describe proposed actions you wish to take based on those insights, and why you think this will improve your viability. (300 words max.)

   Click here to enter text.

If Applying for Category B

Please skip to the next category if you are not applying for this one.

1. ☐ Check this box if you would you like to serve as an approving authority to allow your partners on to the MVA.
2. ☐ Check this box if you have defined standards for partnership with Independent Media organizations (for example, membership requirements and/or pre-award assessments). To confirm these, please share them along with this application.

Please note: If you are not asking for funding, you do not need to fill in any other questions in this category.

3. If you are asking for funding, how and where would you be able to make use of the MVA in your existing media support programming? And how many organizations do you think that would reach? (300 words max.)

   Click here to enter text.

4. If you are asking for funding, please indicate what work you've done in the past that demonstrates the capability to conduct the work you are proposing. (300 words max.)

   Click here to enter text.

If Applying for Category C

1. Please describe the services or technologies you would like to make available on the MVA Solutions marketplace, and how they will benefit the viability of independent media? (300 words max.)

   Click here to enter text.

2. What do you anticipate this offering will cost? (Please enter zero if you plan to make it available to users for free.) Click here to enter text.

Please note: If you are not asking for funding, you do not need to fill in any other questions in this category.

3. If you are asking for funding, please indicate what work you've done in the past that demonstrates the capability to develop this solution. (300 words max.)

   Click here to enter text.