



TO: All Interested Applicants

ISSUANCE DATE: Thursday, August 13, 2020

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION (RFI) #: 72061120CA000OSZ

SUBJECT: Draft Program Description for the Open Spaces Zambia Activity

DUE DATE: Thursday, September 3, 2020 at 2:00 pm Lusaka Time

Dear Interested Applicants:

The United States Government, represented by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), is seeking input from interested applicants who may provide comments, opinions, and recommendations in response to the proposed activity approach in the subject draft program description under RFI #72061120CA000OSZ. USAID/Zambia anticipates that the subsequent RFA will serve as the basis for a five-year, \$9 to \$12 million cooperative agreement, subject to the availability of funds.

The purpose of this RFI is to 1) solicit feedback on the draft *Program Description* and 2) solicit general industry comments and feedback. This RFI is not a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) or Request for Application (RFA) and in no way commits USAID to issue a NOFO or RFA or to make an award. Please note that responding to this RFI will not give any advantage to or preclude any organization or individual from any NOFO/RFA that may be subsequently issued as any/all comments received will be strictly for information gathering purposes only. USAID will not be responsible for any costs incurred.

Responses must be submitted electronically in Microsoft Word format to OAA Solicitations Lusaka AID (oaa-solicit-lusaka@usaid.gov) to the attention of Doreen Muleya and Mohib Ahmed under the title: RFI #72061120CA000OSZ Open Spaces Zambia Activity. No applications or resumes will be accepted or considered at this stage. USAID/Zambia may choose to publish through www.grants.gov, feedback or responses to questions submitted in response to this RFI in an anonymized format.

Thank you for your interest in the subject request for information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mohib Ahmed".

Mohib Ahmed,
Supervisory Agreement Officer
Director, Office of Acquisition and Assistance

RFI Response Requirements

Responses should include the following:

1. Cover page, not to exceed one (1) page, that includes:
 - a. Organization name and address
 - b. Point of contact name and contact information
 - c. Brief statement of interest that indicates the organization's interest in applying as a prime or subcontractor. If a team or consortium is envisioned, please provide the names of the potential partner organizations, if possible.
2. Comments and questions on the draft Program Description. Submissions must not exceed four (4) pages, excluding annexes/attachments that may be relevant. Please reference Page and Section Title for each question to ensure USAID is able to fully understand the question/comment.

No other documents or information are requested at this time. USAID asks respondents to not send any additional information other than what is requested above and to adhere to the page limits mentioned.

ATTACHMENT – DRAFT PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

A.1 OVERVIEW

The United States Agency for International Development’s Mission to Zambia (USAID/Zambia) intends to grant a five-year cooperative agreement in the amount of \$10 to \$12 million to implement the “Open Spaces Zambia” Activity to strengthen the democratic foundations of freedom of speech and assembly, independent and new media, and safeguarding a space for activists, human rights defenders, and oppositional voices to protect shrinking democratic space in Zambia. Freedom of expression, association, and assembly are the *sine qua non* - the essential element - of democracy.¹ Citizens, political actors, civil society, the media and the private sector need to be able to express their views and ideas without fear of reprisal by the government. In theory, there are a variety of face-to-face and virtual possibilities for Zambians to engage in debate, advocacy, development decisions, and to demand transparency and accountability. However, opportunities in Zambia have been weakened or are disappearing. This trajectory is expected to continue, especially in the run-up to the 2021 general election. The activity will mitigate increasing constraints on democratic rights and begin to widen the channels for human rights defenders, oppositional voices, and a viable independent media.

USAID is committed to helping Zambia accelerate its journey to self-reliance and the defense of democratic space. The open competition of ideas is essential to Zambia throughout her journey to a more self-reliant state. To that end, Open Spaces Zambia activity will help Zambia promote an engaged and informed citizenry and viable independent media while advancing online platforms to maintain and expand opportunities to freely express, peacefully assemble and access evidence-based socially relevant information.

A.2 BACKGROUND

While Zambia has been a regional model of peaceful and multi-party political transitions, democratic backsliding and corruption threaten this relative sense of stability. Recent assessments of global fragility note Zambia as a country of concern, given worsening trends in critical areas such as inequality, civil liberties, and elite fractionalization. The country has risen on the Fragile States Index to 40th from 60th in the past 10 years and has dropped 14 places since 2009 on Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index to a low of 113 of 180 countries.² Zambia has also declined on the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Liberal Democracy Index, a Journey to Self-Reliance metric, and recorded a precipitous drop in the V-Dem indicator on the Polarization of Society.³ With the closing of democratic and civic space, the diverse voices of Zambian activists, human rights defenders, oppositional voices, and media are silenced, development gains across sectors⁴ are threatened, and efforts must be taken to protect and

¹ USAID Strategy on Democracy, Human Rights and Governance, June 2013.

² Fund for Peace, [Fragile States Index](#); Transparency International, [Corruption Perceptions Index 2019](#).

³ Sourced from on-line analysis of the [V-Dem data set](#). Accessed on April 10, 2020. The Liberal Democracy Index captures whether electoral democracy is complemented by civil liberties, the rule of law and sufficient constraints on the executive by the judiciary and legislature.

⁴ https://www.creativeassociatesinternational.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Growth_In_Governance.pdf

expand this space.

This more restrictive democratic climate is also evidenced by the misapplication of legislation such as the Public Order Act, which has been used to limit freedom of assembly and expression by prohibiting assemblies by civic groups and opposition political parties. Proposed legislation on cybersecurity is vague but overly restrictive; the Access to Information Bill has been promised since the current government came to power in 2011; and many of the proposed amendments in the Constitution (Amendment) Bill, 2019, known as Bill 10⁵ concentrate executive powers and remove many of Zambia's constitutional checks and balances.

In addition to restrictive legislation, there are extra-legal issues, influencing the continued suppression of a diverse and independent media and oppositional voices. Recent examples include the suspension of the independent Prime TV's broadcasting license;⁶ the harassment of radio stations due to their programming in Mpika and Chinsali districts; allegations of use of technology for cyber-monitoring and censorship of select individuals, journalists, and political opponents; and the harassment and police detention of journalists, political leaders, and civil society leaders.

The enabling environment for the media to play a strong accountability role is mitigated by a dominant executive, an increasingly polarized political environment, limitations to freedom of expression, intimidation, and imprisonment. Independent media, including community and privately-owned radio stations, have continued to face stepped-up harassment and threats by local government officials and ruling-party cadres. Despite these challenges, independent and new media have a critical role to play in changing the narrative by increasing access to credible information.

The issue of internet freedom⁷ in Zambia is taking root as more Zambians access the digital space.⁸ Digitization is starting to transform the ways in which people can relate to and engage with organizations, providing a new accountability paradigm for citizens, civil society, and public institutions. Just as the digital space can offer potential avenues to counteract this growing restrictive environment through the use of innovative and expressive platforms to promote transparency and accountability, this space is also being used to further close the civic and democratic space.⁹ Gender, age, and geographical disparities are also important. In Zambia, 51.2% of males are considered IT users compared to 47.9% of females; and across social media platforms, male usage overshadows female usage by 18-38% depending on the platform used.

⁵ <http://www.parliament.gov.zm/node/8067> and the Report of the Select Committee on the Constitution Amendment Bill (N.A.B. 10 of 2019), <http://www.parliament.gov.zm/node/8240>

⁶ A similar tactic was utilized against The Post newspaper in 2016.

⁷ Refer to the definition of internet freedom in the [2018 National Cyber Strategy of the United States of America](#); and additional components of Pillar IV.

⁸ Estimates show that Internet penetration across demographic groups in Zambia increased to 24% in January 2020 (<https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-zambia>). Other reports state that internet penetration is closer to 59%, accounting for over 10 million users, most of whom access the Internet using mobile devices. (Digital Rights in Africa Report 2019, Paradigm Initiative).

⁹ Per Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2019 report, Zambia is included in a grouping of countries where bloggers or ICT users have been physically attacked or killed and technical attacks against government critics or human rights organizations have been organized. Further, there is a lack of privacy and rights-respecting legal and regulatory frameworks on the digital space.

Further, increased usage does not equate with higher levels of digital literacy. Low levels of digital literacy make users more susceptible to online mis- and disinformation, cyber-bullying, and digital security issues. Equipping Zambians to navigate this new digital civic space effectively and safely is essential.

Closing democratic space, in tandem with the increasing digital presence of Zambians, a large youth population, and the use of digital space by independent media to both inform its content and expand its audience reach, has resulted in a shift to online platforms. While this digital discussion occurs mostly in the urban areas, this is the platform where oppositional voices, citizen journalists and bloggers, youth, and the defenders of human rights have found a space and efforts to protect and expand it are needed.

Citizen participation is dampened by the elite nature of decision making at all levels of governance and the concentration of power in Lusaka and other urban centers. Afrobarometer survey data from 34 African countries suggests that a lack of opportunity is influencing citizen engagement on key metrics as compared to other countries. While citizen engagement structures exist, in practical terms, they are still emerging and have limited capacity beyond localized impact. Actual (reported) practice is roughly similar to the African average, although Zambians are more likely to raise issues or complaints with religious and traditional authorities than government officials or members of parliament. In addition to authorities taking away spaces for expression and gathering, there is a trend of people voluntarily abandoning those spaces, out of fear or disillusionment.

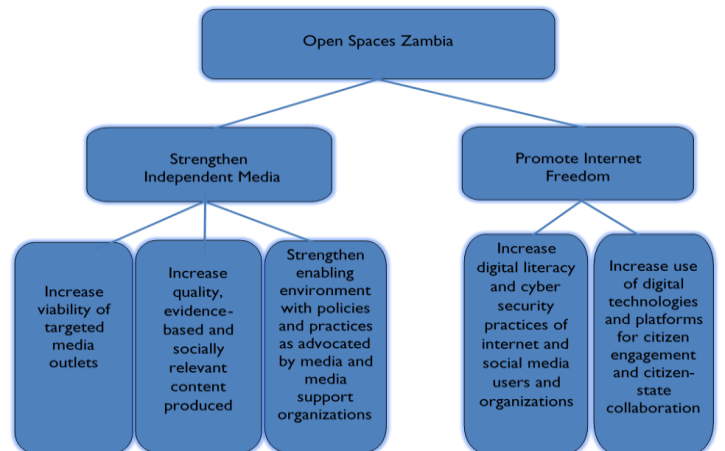
A.3 ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

Theory of Change

Open Spaces Zambia is based on the development hypothesis that if the enabling environment for an independent media in Zambia is strengthened; the viability of targeted media outlets is enhanced; more quality, evidence-based and socially relevant content is produced; opportunities for constructive dialogue, discourse, and debate in online spaces between activists, oppositional voices, human rights defenders and the state are enhanced; then the civic and democratic space in Zambia will be protected, enhancing Zambia's potential for greater open and accountable governance.

The result is a widening, open and democratic society, and an empowering public space, where peaceful, constructive dissent is viewed as an opportunity for dialogue rather than a threat, where access to balanced information reinforces the ability of citizens to productively engage with each other and their government, and where freedoms of expression and assembly are respected across social and political engagement platforms.

Results Framework



Objectives and Anticipated Results

The two objectives of Open Spaces Zambia are:

- 1) Strengthen and Promote an Independent Media
- 2) Promotion of Internet Freedom and Safe, Online Spaces

Objective 1: Strengthen and Promote an Independent Media

Objective 1 supports opportunities in Zambia to protect and promote media independence, encouraging an enabling environment for independent and new media outlets while enhancing the production of high-quality, balanced, and independent reporting on socially relevant issues and increasing the demand for quality, fact-based information through the engagement of media-literate consumers. USAID anticipates that this will focus on broadcast entities which have a public interest mission, but it may include other select media outlets, as required.

Anticipated results include:

- Increased viability of targeted media outlets;
- Increased quality, evidence-based and socially-relevant content produced, increasing Zambians' access to unbiased information; and
- A strengthened enabling environment with policies and practices as advocated by media and media support organizations (such as licensing practices, handling of media complaints, criminal versus civil libel and defamation laws, and government advertising practices).

Objective 2: Promotion of Internet Freedom and Safe, Online Spaces

Social media networks have created new opportunities for public engagement and have helped fill a communications gap for dissenting or independent voices who wish to access alternative information. Based on the growth of urban Zambians accessing the digital space, Objective 2 focuses on enhancing existing and developing new digital tools and platforms for expression and engagement. Inherent in this focus is also increasing digital literacy and improved cybersecurity practices of those in the online space. Open Spaces will also complement existing advocacy

efforts impacting freedom of expression and internet freedom, such as the proposed Cyber Security and Cyber Crimes Draft Bill.

Anticipated results include:

- Increased number of internet and social media users and organizations with increased digital literacy and adopting cyber-safety measures; and
- Increased use of digital technologies and platforms for citizen engagement and citizen-state collaboration.

Key freedom of expression and media advocacy issues to be addressed as a cross cutting issue under this activity and these two objectives.

Programmatic Approach

Open Spaces Zambia shall approach these objectives by supporting targeted independent and new media outlets, other media practitioners, human rights defenders, social media users, technologists, bloggers, and activist voices. It will address challenges and opportunities at the national level, support independent media at the local/regional level in areas with existing USAID activities building on lessons learned from international experience in supporting media development and freedom of expression, as well as experience in other USAID sectors at influencing social and behavioral change through radio and social media. The additional geographical areas will be identified based on the viability of partners, complementary with other donor initiatives to support independent media, the degree of political contestation and other political economy factors in the catchment area, audience size (population density and reach), and the opportunities to leverage other USAID activities. Opportunities for strengthening ‘influencer’ stations, or those which tend to lead content generation, and expanding their network of stations, will also be a consideration.

This activity will engage the private sector as stakeholders and key contributors to the creation and enhancement of digital tools and platforms for expression and engagement - harnessing their expertise and innovation.

A.4 STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Alignment to USAID/Zambia 2019-2024 CDCS and Development Objectives

The Open Spaces Zambia activity supports Development Objective I of USAID/Zambia’s Country Development Cooperation Strategy (2019-2024): *Citizen and National Self-Reliance Advanced by More Effective, Accountable Governance*.¹⁰ It is one of the primary activities designed to achieve IR I, Citizen Engagement in National Development Choices Strengthened, and prevent further democratic backsliding and polarization of the political and social landscape, while enhancing the ability of citizens to engage more effectively with governing authorities, and advocating for reform actions in selected issue areas.

¹⁰ See the strategy at: <https://www.usaid.gov/zambia/cdcs>.

Relationship to Partner Country Programming

This activity supports Zambia's Seventh National Development Plan and Pillar 5, "Creating a conducive governance environment for a diversified economy." Open Spaces Zambia supports various strategies under this Pillar, including strengthening transparency and accountability mechanisms, the promotion of platforms for citizen engagement and participation, and the promotion of human rights.

Relationship to Cooperating Partner Programming

The German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) Civil Society Participation Programme (CSPP) (April 2015 - July 2021) aims to encourage and support state and civil society dialogue and initiatives and enhance active citizenry and access to justice in Zambia. The overall objective of CSPP is for Zambia's civil society actors to have more options for demanding legal empowerment and political participation, as well as transparency and accountability in public institutions. Of particular interest to Open Spaces Zambia is CSPP's support to CSO advocacy for human rights-based internet legislation and to ensure girls and women are in a position to use digital tools to raise their concerns and to demand transparency and accountability from public institutions.

Strategy for Sweden's Development Cooperation with Zambia (2018-2022)
Objective I - Human rights, democracy, the rule of law and gender equality aims at supporting increased transparency and reduced corruption in public administration through the primary focus on the strengthening of domestic accountability through civil society and supporting the development of a free and independent media primarily through grants to local partners.

USAID's Zambia Political Participation and Leadership (ZPPL) (2018-2022) - Supports an inclusive, competitive, and representative political system through the strengthened effectiveness of civil society advocacy for electoral and political reforms and the promotion of credible and non-partisan domestic oversight of electoral processes.

A.5 OTHER TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Lessons Learned

Open Spaces Zambia is also informed by Zambian and international experience in donor-supported activities on independent media, civil society development, digital space and transparency, and accountability initiatives. Bulleted below are key takeaways from similar programming:

- Spreading resources too thin increases the risk of creating a scattered portfolio of small CSO and media activities that are difficult to scale up or link together in a strategic way;
- Digital tools can help to facilitate a dynamic relationship between institutions and stakeholders, promoting regular interaction, adaptive performance, and actionable decisions based on visible data.

A.6 GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

There has been much analysis on gender and other demographic divides and differences in civic participation, community engagement, and the information, communications and technology, and digital space. Open Spaces Zambia will learn from these analyses and current and existing activities to implement good practices across all actions to ensure gender equality and social inclusion in activity implementation, paying close attention to the existing digital divide of access to and use of digital devices, opportunities, and platforms. As part of the design and implementation of any proposed intervention, the applicant should assess and identify gender issues that affect the participation of men, women, boys, and girls equally in the program. Gender also cross cuts other social cleavages, and interacts with broader dynamics related to political and social exclusion. ‘Youth’ in Zambia is often used as a socio-economic classification, rather than simply a demographic category. It is used to describe people who are excluded from access to political, economic, or societal power. Younger people are also a majority – an estimated 53 percent of Zambia’s population is under 35.¹¹ Demographics and its associated social hierarchies are a key dynamic of change.

A.7 GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Self-Reliance and Sustainability

Sustainability is a core part of the U.S. global development policy. The activity is expected to build the institutional capacity of targeted organizations, specifically those working on media independence, freedom of speech, the free flow of information and to introduce tools, methodologies, and mechanisms in a manner that these will continue to develop beyond the timeframes and scope of this activity.

The Activity will support, and measure impact related to, the Journey to Self-Reliance strategy through increasing local capacity and commitment to this activity’s objectives, and sustainability planning will, in part, address this requirement. Furthermore, partnership with local partners to conduct proposed activities is part of a sustainability strategy to promote local participation and ownership and increase sustainability of impact. Sustainability of interventions and impacts is a critical component of the activity and should be incorporated throughout.

Science, Technology, Innovation and Partnership (STIP)

USAID seeks to engage the private sector in the identification and definition of development problems and the scoping and implementation of solutions to those problems. USAID recognizes and seeks to leverage the expertise and resources of the private sector to help increase the reach, efficiency, effectiveness, innovation and sustainable results and impact of USAID’s development investments. Building Public-Private Partnerships is an important programming approach at USAID. The applicant should explain how it will engage, leverage, or partner with

¹¹ Zambia Population and Demographic Projections, 2011-2035.

the private sector, based on USAID's Private-Sector Engagement Policy¹², in areas where sustainable mutually beneficial partnerships may exist that will advance freedom of expression and assembly and independent media in digital and online spaces.

A.8 BACKGROUND DOCUMENTATION

1. Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA) “Local Radio Stations in Africa: Sustainability or Pragmatic Viability?” June 2020.
<https://www.cima.ned.org/publication/local-radio-stations-in-africa-sustainability-or-pragmatic-viability/>
2. Democracy, Rights and Governance Sub-Committee Recommendations on Working in Closed and Closing Spaces, USAID, <https://www.usaid.gov/who-we-are/organization/advisory-committee/documents/democracy-rights-and-governance-sub-committee-recommendations-working-closed-and>
3. Digital 2020: Zambia, DataReportal, Global Digital Insights,
<https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-zambia>
4. Digital Strategy 2020-2024, USAID, <https://www.usaid.gov/usaid-digital-strategy>
5. National Cyber Strategy of the United States of America, 2018,
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/National-Cyber-Strategy.pdf>
6. Principles for Digital Development, <https://digitalprinciples.org/resources/>
7. Renewing Democracy in the Digital Age, Berggruen Institute,
[https://www.berggruen.org/themencode-pdf-viewer-sc/?tnc_pvwf=ZmlsZTl0dHRwcovL3d3dy5iZXJnZ3JlZW4ub3JnL3dwLWNvbnRlbnQvdXBsb2Fkcy8yMDIwLzAzL0JFUl8yMDIwXlJlbmV3YW5nRGVtb2NyYWN5X25ldy5wZGUYmc2V0dGluZ3M9MTExMTExMTExMTExMTExMTEmbGFuZzIibjIVUw==#page=&zoo
m=auto&pagemode=2018 National Survey on Access and Usage of Information and Communication Technologies by Household.](https://www.berggruen.org/themencode-pdf-viewer-sc/?tnc_pvwf=ZmlsZTl0dHRwcovL3d3dy5iZXJnZ3JlZW4ub3JnL3dwLWNvbnRlbnQvdXBsb2Fkcy8yMDIwLzAzL0JFUl8yMDIwXlJlbmV3YW5nRGVtb2NyYWN5X25ldy5wZGUYmc2V0dGluZ3M9MTExMTExMTExMTExMTExMTEmbGFuZzIibjIVUw==#page=&zoo m=auto&pagemode=2018%20National%20Survey%20on%20Access%20and%20Usage%20of%20Information%20and%20Communication%20Technologies%20by%20Household)

¹² USAID Private Sector Engagement Policy
https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1865/USAIDPSEPolicy_ExecutiveSummary.pdf