

Request for Applications

**USAID Strategic Communications Support Activity**

**Request for Applications (RFA) No. 1.3.8-GUC**

Issuance Date: 8 January 2025

To Interested Parties,

The USAID Strategic Communications Support Activity (hereinafter referred to as the Activity), implemented by Chemonics International, is seeking grant applications aimed at improving communications around state reforms, enhancing public understanding and participation in the initiatives of the Government of Armenia (GOAM).

The suggested activities should:

* Enhance awareness on diverse policy areas and key institutional reforms to ensure citizen-centered communications and public outreach efforts of GOAM aimed at fostering its transparency;
* Promote effective two-way communications channels that address feedback gaps and facilitate informed interactions in an effort to encourage citizen engagement and improved GOAM responsiveness in relation to a specific aspect of government reform and/or public engagement.

Successful applicants will support the Activity by complementing existing and planned technical assistance efforts provided to GOAM.

The grant projects will be awarded and implemented in accordance with USAID and US Government regulations governing grants under contracts and the Activity’s internal grant management policies.

The Activity will hold an online pre-application workshop, which will give eligible and interested applicants the chance to get more detailed information about the Activity, the scope of the grants’ component, as well as ask specific questions about the RFA. Interested applicants that meet the eligibility requirements defined in Section IIIA and would like to attend the workshop must confirm their attendance by sending the participant’s name(s), email (s), organization’s name to the email SIF@ArmeniaSCSA.com with a subject line “1.3.8 Participation in the Pre-application workshop” by 20 January 2025

Besides, you can submit all questions concerning this solicitation via email to SIF@ArmeniaSCSA.com by 20 January 2025. Answers to all questions will be posted on the same website as the RFA by 22 Jan 2025. All questions asked will be shown with the answers immediately following. The responses will also be emailed to the individuals who submitted the questions․

The deadline for submitting full applications is 19 February 2025.

The Activity and Chemonics employees may not ask for, and applicants are prohibited from offering, any money, fee, commission, credit, gift, gratuity, thing of value, or compensation to obtain or reward improper favorable treatment regarding this solicitation. Any improper request from a project employee should be reported to the chief of party or BusinessConduct@chemonics.com .

Annexes included in this Request for Applications:

* **Annex A** - Grant Application Form (to be completed by applicants)
* **Annex B** – Grant Application Budget Form (to be completed by applicants)
* **Annex C** – Implementation Timeline (to be completed by applicants)
* **Annex D –** Grantee Monitoring and Evaluation Indicators and Results Form (to be completed by applicants)
* **Annex E** – Applicant Self-Assessment Form (to be completed by applicants)

**Mandatory and Required** as Applicable Standard Provisions (for information only):

* Standard Provisions for U.S. and Non-U.S. Nongovernmental organizations receiving a fixed amount award can be accessed through the following URL:

<https://www.usaid.gov/about-us/agency-policy/series-300/references-chapter/303mat>

* Standard Provisions for Non-U.S., Nongovernmental recipients receiving all other types of grants can be accessed through the following URL:

<https://www.usaid.gov/about-us/agency-policy/series-300/references-chapter/303mab>

**SECTION I. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

**IA.**  **OBJECTIVE**

The USAID Strategic Communications Support Activity, implemented by Chemonics International, is seeking grant applications aimed at improving communications around state reforms, enhancing public understanding and participation in GOAM initiatives.

The Activity is planning to award grants to local CSOs, media outlets, academic institutions, private sector entities directly contributing to the RFA objectives and with a demonstrable social impact with the aim:

* To enhance awareness on diverse policy areas and key institutional reforms to ensure citizen-centered communications and public outreach efforts of GOAM aimed at fostering its transparency;
* To promote effective two-way communications channels that address feedback gaps and facilitate informed interactions in an effort to encourage citizen engagement and improved GOAM responsiveness in relation to a specific aspect of government reform and/or public engagement.

The grant projects must align with the objectives of the Activity outlined below and support the focus area of Component 3, which is promoting citizen-centered strategic communications and public outreach.

The proposed grant projects should include interventions that:

1. Will enhance awareness of specific aspects of key institutional reforms by GOAM, diverse policies, programs, and activity areas;
2. Will support GOAM’s communications efforts and build upon existing platforms, channels, frameworks, and mechanisms for interactive discussions and approaches to generate stronger citizen participation,
3. Will engage multiple stakeholders and be designed to enhance effective collaboration and coordination among those engaged, including GOAM, at all levels, citizenry, CSOs, media outlets, the private sector, academia, and others,
4. Will promote a two-way communications culture and framework to strategically communicate with various target audiences through audience-tailored messages, tools and channels based on the specifics of communicated policies, programs, and actions,
5. Will identify and address gaps, hurdles, and challenges to effective two-way communications and government-citizen interaction.

**IB**. **BACKGROUND**

The USAID Strategic Communications Support Activity is a five-year project financed by USAID and implemented by Chemonics International. The Activity supports GOAM to build effective, streamlined, data-driven, and citizen-centered strategic communications systems, capacity, and practices. Specifically, the Activity supports GOAM in the following three main focus areas:

1. enable the institutional set-up and talent management of the public sector's streamlined strategic communications;
2. ensure the public sector has institutionalized systems and capacity for data-driven information management to inform strategic communications;
3. foster citizen-centered strategic communications and public outreach.

The three interconnected components of the Activity will aim to achieve the following expected outcomes:

* Sustainable institutional structure and protocols are in place for effective internal, interagency, and external strategic communications;
* Improved government systems and technical and human capacities for effective, data-driven, message-tested, and targeted strategic communications are established, utilizing polling, focus groups, and social sentiment analysis;
* Effective strategies are developed for two-way communications, including feedback loops based on interactive discussions to generate stronger citizen engagement.

The suggested grant projects must apply the following lenses when relevant:

* Sustainability: The grant projects should incorporate feasibility assessments throughout the performance of the work to ensure, on a best effort basis, that there is demonstrated commitment and potential capacity among local actors to adapt and claim ownership of introduced systems, processes, and capacities.
* Gender equality, women empowerment, and social inclusion (GESI): The grant projects should establish inclusive mechanisms that fully integrate vulnerable and marginalized groups in feedback loops and communication frameworks and be oriented towards positive attitude/behavior change that challenge stereotypes, counter gender-based violence, promote equality and empower women and youth.
* Social and Behavior Change (SBC): The grant projects should utilize systematic insights into human behavior (why people behave the way they do) and behavior change (how behaviors change depending on different factors) to foster positive outcomes among specific groups. Whether through direct interactions, targeted interventions and advocacy efforts, or broad mobilization campaigns, communications methods should be informed by interactive, theory-based, and research-informed behavioral insights to promote sustainable behavior change at individual, community, and societal levels.
* Leveraging technology: The suggested grant projects must be responsive to the USAID Digital Strategy and the USAID-endorsed Principles for Digital Development. Where appropriate, they must introduce context-appropriate digital information, technology-based solutions and systems to enable and streamline effective, data-driven, and citizen-centered strategic communications.
* CLA: Given the changing nature of the communications landscape, the suggested grant projects must incorporate approaches for adapting to the evolving environment, including if there is evidence of changes in stakeholder commitment. They must remain responsive to new information and contextual changes and recommend appropriate adjustments.

**IC.** **DETAILED PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

The Activity is planning to award grants to CSOs, media outlets, academic entities, and/or private sector entities directly contributing to the RFA objectives and with a demonstrable social impact registered in Armenia.

The grant projects aim at improving communications around state reforms, enhancing public understanding and participation in GOAM initiatives.

 Grant projects should focus on promoting effective strategies for two-way communication, incorporating feedback loops through interactive discussions to foster stronger citizen engagement.

The suggested projects may include activities such as:

* Disseminating accurate, clear, and accessible information about government policies, programs, key institutional reforms, and actions. This may include conducting research, producing reports, organizing community events, creating multimedia content;
* Designing and implementing or supporting data-driven communications campaigns on critical societal issues;
* Engage citizens through various online and offline channels to communicate public policies effectively and directly through surveys, consultations, town halls, or other participatory methods;
* Developing and implementing innovative and interactive channels that facilitate government-citizen communications, dialogue, and exchanges, including through leveraging technology;
* Identifying and leveraging existing networks, platforms, mechanisms, and dialogues to foster knowledge sharing and bolster government outreach effectiveness, capabilities, and responsiveness. Proposals should outline strategies for improving and building on these platforms, ensuring they remain active instead of creating new ones;
* Exploring and suggesting approaches allowing to leverage the expertise and outreach capabilities of CSOs, media, and private sector that can lead to broader and more effective communications efforts than the government could achieve independently.

There will be no restrictions on formats or approaches, allowing applicants to present their own vision for addressing the identified issues.

The Activity cannot support any initiatives related to law enforcement entities. Should this restriction change or be adjusted, the Activity will issue an update to this RFA.

**ID.** **AUTHORITY/GOVERNING REGULATIONS**

The Activity grant awards are made under the authority of the U.S. Foreign Affairs Act and USAID’s Automated Directive System (ADS) 302.3.5.6, “Grants Under Contracts.” Awards will adhere to guidance provided under [ADS Chapter 303](https://www.usaid.gov/ads/policy/300/303), “Grants and Cooperative Agreements to Non-Governmental Organizations” and will be within the terms of the USAID Standard Provisions as linked in the annexes, as well as the Activity grants procedures.

* 2 CFR 200 [Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards, Subpart E](http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=2e11c56f4c402a68fd92aee657de8475&mc=true&node=sp2.1.200.e&rgn=div6) (U.S. applicants are subject to 2 CFR 200 in its entirety)

Full text of 2 CFR 200 can be found at <http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title02/2cfr200_main_02.tpl>. The Activity is required to ensure that all organizations receiving USAID grant funds comply with the guidance found in the regulations referenced above, as applicable to the respective terms and conditions of their grant awards.

Under the Activity grant program, USAID retains the right at all times to terminate, in whole or in part, the Activity grant-making authorities.

**SECTION II. AWARD INFORMATION**

The Activity anticipates awarding up to $150,000 through several grants with each individual grant award in the estimated range of $25,000 - $60,000 (to be denominated and disbursed in the equivalent amount of Armenian Dram), but the final amount will be dependent upon grant activities and final negotiation and may be lower or higher than the indicated range. The duration of any grant award under this solicitation is expected to be up to 12 months.

**SECTION III. ELIGIBILITY**

**IIIA. ELIGIBLE RECIPIENTS**

* Applicants must be registered in the Republic of Armenia as:
* non-governmental organizations,
* media outlets,
* academic entities,
* private sector entities directly contributing to the RFA objectives and with a demonstrable social impact.
* The applicants must be recognized by and in good standing with Government of the Republic of Armenia by adhering to all applicable civil and fiscal regulations.
* Consortia (joint partnerships of more than one organization) may apply (per Section 1C); however, one organization must be identified as the “lead applicant”. The lead applicant will be primarily responsible for all grant activities – including administration, programmatic and financial reporting, ensuring adherence to implementation timeline and achievement of key performance indicators, etc. The Activity will assess the lead applicant’s capabilities as part of the pre-award risk assessment and reserves the right to request backup documentation related to the solicitation and selection of consortium partners.
* The applicants that apply with consortia may only submit one application per lead applicant under this RFA. Importantly, there cannot be any subaward anticipated in the grant (that is outlined in the proposal or grant budget).
* Applicants may submit multiple grant proposals and while unlikely, may receive multiple awards.
* Applicants must be able to demonstrate successful past experience in the implementation of integrated development programs related to the Activity’s priority areas.
* Applicants must have established outreach capabilities with linkages to the beneficiary group(s) identified in the program description. This should be reflected by the incorporation of the beneficiary perspective in the application.
* Applicants must display sound management in the form of financial, administrative, and technical policies and procedures and present a system of internal controls that safeguard assets; protect against fraud, waste, and abuse; and support the achievement of program goals and objectives. The Activity will assess this capability prior to awarding a grant.
* Applicants must sign certain required certifications prior to receiving a grant.
* Applications from or with engagement of the partners from different marzes (regions) of Armenia are strongly encouraged.
* **Grantees will be required to provide a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) at the time of award. If the applicant already has a UEI number it should be included in their application. Otherwise, applicants will be expected to get a UEI number before an award is made. The Activity will assist successful applicants with this process. More information on UEIs can be found** [**here**](https://sam.gov/entity-registration)**։ <https://sam.gov/entity-registration> ․**
* The Activity will work with the successful grantee to draft a marking and branding plan which will be annexed to the grant agreement.
* Faith-based and community groups will receive equal opportunity for funding in accordance with the mandated guidelines laid out in ADS 303.3.28 except for faith-based organizations whose objectives are for discriminatory and religious purposes, and whose main objective of the grant is of a religious nature.

**SECTION IV – APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION**

**IVA. INSTRUCTIONS TO APPLICANTS**

Applicants must propose strategies for the implementation of the program, introducing innovations that are appropriate to their organizational strengths.

**IVA1. PRE-AWARD RISK ASSESSMENT**

All organizations selected for award are subject to a pre-award risk assessment conducted by the Activity, to ascertain whether the organization has the minimum management capabilities required to handle US government funds. The applicant self-assessment is the first step in the pre-award risk assessment process. The Applicant Self-Assessment Form is contained in Annex E.

**IVA2. GRANT APPLICATION**

Templates to be utilized when developing the application are provided in Annex A-E. Applicants shall present their technical application and budget in the formats provided and shall follow the instructions and guidelines listed in these annexes.

All grant activity costs must be within the normal operating practices of the Applicant and in accordance with its written policies and procedures. For applicants without an audited indirect cost rate, the budget may include direct costs that will be incurred by the Applicant to provide identifiable administrative and management costs that can be directly attributable to supporting the grant objective.

The applicationmust be signed by an authorized agent of the Applicant.

**IVA3.** **INELIGIBLE EXPENSES**

The Activity grant funds may not be utilized for the following:

* Construction or infrastructure activities of any kind. Per ADS 303.3.30 and the ADS 303 Mandatory Reference entitled, “USAID Implementation of Construction Activities”, construction is not eligible for reimbursement under grants resulting from this solicitation. Construction also includes improvements, renovation, alteration, and refurbishment.
* Ceremonies, parties, celebrations, or “representation” expenses.
* Purchases of restricted goods, such as: restricted agricultural commodities, motor vehicles including motorcycles, pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, contraceptive products, used equipment; without the previous approval of the Activity, or prohibited goods, prohibited goods under USAID regulations, including but not limited to the following: abortion equipment and services, luxury goods, etc.
* Covered telecommunication and video surveillance equipment or services – per the standard provision entitled “Prohibition on Certain Telecommunication and Video Surveillance Services or Equipment”, grant funds including direct and indirect costs, cost share and program income may not be used to (1) procure or obtain; (2) extend or renew a contract to procure or obtain; or (3) enter into a contract (or extend or renew a contract) to procure or obtain equipment, services, or systems that use covered telecommunications equipment or services (“CTES”) as a substantial or essential component of any system, or as critical technology as part of any system. This prohibition covers certain telecommunications equipment and services, including, but not limited to, phones, internet, video surveillance, and cloud servers, produced or provided by Huawei Technologies Company, ZTE Corporation, Hytera Communications Corporation, Hangzhou Hikvision Digital Technology Company, or Dahua Technology Company (or any subsidiary or affiliate of such entities) unless the Activity has determined that there is no available alternate eligible source for the CTES. For fixed amount awards, this restriction is only applicable if any of the milestones are for telecommunication or video surveillance services or equipment.
* Alcoholic beverages.
* Purchases of goods or services restricted or prohibited under the prevailing USAID source/ nationality (Cuba, Iran, North Korea, and Syria).
* Any purchase or activity which has already been made.
* Purchases or activities unnecessary to accomplish grant purposes as determined by the Activity.
* Prior obligations of and/or, debts, fines, and penalties imposed on the Grantee.
* Creation of endowments.

**IVB.**  **APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION**

Applications shall be submitted in English or Armenian.

Applications (including the budget and supporting documentation) should be submitted in electronic format only to *SIF@ArmeniaSCSA.com* with a subject line *“*RFA No. 1.3.8 GUC [ORG Name]- [Proposal Title]”. Applications must be submitted no later than 19 February 2025 by 23:59.

In addition to the application forms and budget, applicants should submit the following to the Activity:

* **A copy of the Applicant’s valid legal registration**
* **A copy of their latest audited financial statements if available or latest financial statements for the past three years.**
* **CVs of key individuals engaged in the project.**

**SECTION V. APPLICATION MERIT REVIEW CRITERIA**

All applications will be reviewed by an internal review panel comprised of the Activity technical and implementation staff, and recommendations may be vetted by a larger group. Applications will be initially screened against the eligibility criteria and whether the application package is full.

Applications will be evaluated against the merit review criteria in the table below.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Merit Review Category** | **Rating (Points)** |
| Feasibility of design, technical approach | 30 |
| Impact on target group(s) and alignment with Activity’s objectives and programmatic lenses | 35 |
| Management, programmatic capacity, and past experience | 25 |
| Cost effectiveness | 10 |
|  |  |
| **Overall Rating (out of 100 points)** | **100** |

These merit review criteria elements are described more fully below.

A. *Feasibility of Design & Technical Approach:*

The quality and feasibility of the application in terms of the viability of the proposed technical approach, (i.e., the proposed technical approach can reasonably be expected to produce the intended outcomes), appropriateness of the proposed methodology, innovativeness, and the work plan for achieving project goals. Proposed mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation with objectively measurable indicators will also be appraised. **30 points**

*B. Impact on Target Group(s) and alignment with Activity’s objectives and programmatic lenses։*

The extent to which the proposed activity corresponds to the needs of target group(s), will directly benefit them and will align with the Activity’s objectives. The extent to which the funded activity is sustainable or will promote sustainability of the organization. Also, the degree to which it will directly or indirectly stimulate other organizations and resources to replicate, develop, or implement activities supporting the objectives of the Activity, directly contribute to the achievement of the Activity’s expected results and must be measurable under one or more of the Activity’s focus areas and expected outcomes․ Evaluation of approaches may include either approaches proven to be effective or new untried approaches with promise.  **35 points**

*C. Management, programmatic capacity, and past performance.*

Evidence of the capability to undertake and accomplish the proposed activities in the field of strategic communications. The application should demonstrate the organization’s effectiveness in terms of internal structure, technical capacity, and key personnel, in meeting the goals set within the suggested project. In addition, the organization must demonstrate adequate financial management capability. The evaluation will be based principally on the background, qualifications, appropriateness and skills of its key personnel; the “track record,” and achievements (including development of self-sufficient, sustainable activities) of the organization. **25 points**

D. *Cost Effectiveness.* The degree to which budgeting is clear and reasonable and reflects best use of organizational and grant resources. **10 points**

**SECTION VI. AWARD AND ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION**

All grants will be negotiated, denominated, and funded in Armenian Dram.

All costs funded by the grant must be allowable, allocable, and reasonable. Grant applications must be supported by a detailed and realistic budget as described in Section IV.

Issuance of this RFA and assistance with application development do not constitute an award or commitment on the part of the Activity, nor does it commit the Activity to pay for costs incurred in the preparation and submission of an application. Further, the Activity reserves the right to accept or reject any or all applications received and reserves the right to ask further clarifications from the offerors. Applicants will be informed in writing of the decision made regarding their application.