

Internet Freedom (IF) Program Governance

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1. Introduction & Overview

This document provides a methodology for governance and oversight of the BBG Internet Freedom (“IF”) Program, including the selection and evaluation of BBG-funded Internet Freedom Projects carried out by BBG grantees, offices, or others. Under this process, recipients of Internet Freedom funds, from or through the BBG, will be held accountable to consistent and appropriate metrics and standards, described herein, which will be regularly reported to the Board.

Currently, the BBG IF Program is comprised of a BBG grantee-implemented IF effort, carried out by Radio Free Asia (“RFA”)¹, and a federally-implemented IF effort, carried out by BBG’s Office of Technology, Services, and Innovation (“TSI”).² These BBG-supported efforts (“IF Activities” or “IFAs”) propose, manage, and support USG and BBG-funded IF Projects, which are generally conducted via third party implementers (“Implementers”).³

The BBG Chief Executive Officer (CEO) will create a BBG Internet Freedom Program Office (IFPO) to direct, oversee, and facilitate compliance with the process. The process has three “phases,” covering (1) Project proposal and evaluation; (2) project approval, and formulation of a BBG-wide IF budget; and (3) status reports and closeout. Together, these phases are designed to ensure that the Agency, grantees, and other implementers, select, fund, and/or carry out IF Projects, in accordance with the BBG IF Framework Document, in a manner that ensures effective, transparent, and accountable use of taxpayer dollars to further the cause of Internet Freedom.

Nothing herein is intended to be process for process sake. The process shall be regularly reviewed by the CEO, with input from the IFAs and the International Media Coordinating Committee (“ICC”), to continually refine the process.

2. Goals of the Governance Process (the “Process”)

The Process is intended to ensure:

- effective, transparent, and accountable use of taxpayer funds to support Internet Freedom
- BBG-supported projects are designed to meet appropriate objectives;
- sufficient Agency involvement and oversight;
- compliance with federal law, rules, and policy, including the purposes for which Internet Freedom funds are authorized and appropriated by Congress
- collaborative, mutually beneficial process;
- avoidance of substantial involvement in grantee affairs;
- a standardized method for evaluating the performance and impact of IFP Projects; and
- a consistent approach for reporting progress, completion, and results of IFP Projects.

¹ RFA is a private non-profit BBG grantee. RFA currently carried out its efforts through RFA’s Open Technology Fund (“OTF”).

² Historically, entity-specific efforts have been referred to as “IF Programs”. For example, the RFA effort has been referred to as the RFA IF Program or OTF program. In this document, for purposes of clarity, each entity-specific effort is referred to as an “IF Activity” or “IFA”. Currently there are two “IFAs”: the TSI effort and the RFA effort. Nothing herein limits this to the status quo, or requires the provision of funds to a particular IFA.

³ “Implementers” could be sub-awardees, vendors, contractors and/or partners.

The expected results of the Process include:

- provide for an annual, BBG-wide IF Project Budget, that is driven by and aligned with Agency objectives, and all other elements of the IF Framework; developed via a collaborative process, prioritized and recommended by an Internet Freedom Program Office, or its equivalent; approved by the BBG CEO, and the Board;
- ensure IF Projects and implementers are appropriate to receive U.S. taxpayer money, and that awards (including sub-awards to implementers) comply with federal law, rules, and policy, including those regarding conflict of interest; and
- fully address the concerns raised by the OIG in their “Audit of Radio Free Asia Expenditure” (June 2015), and a resulting BBG Board Resolution mandating that the Agency take corrective action accordingly.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

The Process involves the following participants, with the following roles and responsibilities:

1. The Board of the BBG supervises all BBG international media activities, federal and grantee, makes grants, and sets the strategic direction for the Agency, including the BBG Internet Freedom Program. The Board develops and approves the Process, and has review and oversight responsibilities.
2. The CEO implements and interprets the Process, including through the establishment of a BBG Internet Freedom Program Office (IFPO). The CEO, through the IFPO, holds accountable all recipients of Internet Freedom Funds to consistent standards and metrics.
3. The IFPO reviews IF Projects and IF budget proposals, with direct input and involvement of the relevant BBG grantees or offices, facilitating the development of the Agency Internet Freedom Budget and Spend Plan (“IF Budget”) each fiscal year.⁴ The IPFO reviews Activity and thus BBG IF Program compliance with the Process, which is reported regularly to the CEO and the Board.
4. The IFAs propose, carry out, and report on their respective BBG-funded IF Projects in conformity with the Process.
5. An Internet Freedom working group (“IF Working Group” or “IFWG”) will be assembled at least twice a year and as convened by the IFPO or the ICC,⁵ to facilitate the development of the BBG IF Budget each fiscal year; and to review, assess and recommend changes when appropriate to BBG IF Budget. IFAs seeking BBG IF fund allocations and relevant subject matter experts may be invited by the IF Working Group to participate in these meetings as constituents when appropriate.

4. Phases of the Process

The Process has three phases, as follows:

4.1. Phase 1: Proposing Projects: Self-Evaluation and Selection

⁴ A recurring provision in the BBG annual appropriation act has required an Internet Freedom Spend Plan to be submitted to the Committees on Appropriations within 90 days of the enactment of a federal budget.

⁵ The IF Working Group is envisioned under the auspices of the ICC.

This phase has four aspects, defined below. In requesting an annual budget for IF Projects from the BBG, each IFA will submit its final list of proposed IF Projects. To be considered for BBG funding, proposed IF Projects must comply with each of the aspects of this phase.

1. Identify and Screen

Each IFA is responsible for identifying IF Projects it intends to support with BBG IF funds in a timely manner, consistent with a valid internal proposal process. An IFA will prepare a detailed IF Project Description Document for each proposed IF Project. *See Appendix A – Elements of IF Project Description.* That document shall include a description of the proposed project, and how it will address each of the elements of the IF Framework, and other criteria useful in evaluating a proposed project. The full set of these elements is listed in Appendix A.

2. Prioritize and Rank

Each IFA should score each of its (own) proposed IF Projects using the criteria listed in Appendix B – Ranking Criteria. These criteria include the degree of alignment with agency goals and mission.⁶ If/when IFAs submit their proposed annual IFA Budget Request (see #4, below), it shall include a list identifying the rank/priority that each IFA attaches to each IF Project.

3. Certify

The IFA must certify that proposed IF Projects and implementer(s) were selected in a manner consistent with the IF Framework. The certification will include information as to how the IFA met each element of the BBG IF Framework. If specific implementer(s) are not yet known or fully through the IFA's vetting process at the time of certification, then the IFA will provide updated certifications as projects are selected for support. A model certification is included in Appendix C. IF Funds will not be released to an IFA for a specific IF Project until the BBG verifies that it has received a valid certification, and/or any other information required under this Governance Process which will provide proof of compliance. However, uncertified IF Projects will not delay the release of funds for certified IF Projects.

4. Submit to BBG:

Each year, an IFA will create a list of proposed IF Projects, referred to as an IFA's proposed annual IF budget request ("IFA Budget Request"). That IFA Budget Request will contain all of the information identified in each element of Phase 1, including IF Project Descriptions; Ranking; and Certification, and any relevant documents that accompany each, to the extent feasible, based upon the respective IFA's policies and processes.

4.2. Phase 2: IF Budget Preparation

Through the process set forth below, the IFPO will develop an annual Agency IF Budget, to be approved by the CEO and Board.

⁶ Even if projects are proposed outside of an aggregated (budget request), these ranking criteria still have utility, and should be utilized.

The development of the Agency's IF Budget will start with IFA Budget Requests received by the IFPO. (See Phase 1.4). The IFPO will review the submissions. Then, at least once a year, the IFPO will convene an IF Working Group meeting under the ICC, for the purpose of obtaining information with which it can develop a proposed BBG IF Budget.⁷

During such IF Working Group meetings, each IFA will present information and answer questions about its proposed IF Projects for the next year, provide the IFA's demonstrable qualifications and expertise to manage BBG-funded IF Projects, and discuss both how the IFA and its proposed IF Project portfolio of activities align with the Agency's IF objectives, goals and priorities in accordance with the Framework.⁸

The BBG IF Budget is simply the combination of IF Projects that the Agency wishes to fund (from each IFA Budget Request). The Agency will only provide funding to IFAs and for IF Projects that comply with the IF Framework; and, of those, the Agency's IF Project portfolio should consist of a mix of IF Projects which best meets Agency objectives.

The IFPO will develop its proposed Agency IF Budget with additional input from the IF Working Group if appropriate, and be responsible for determining that the proposed IF Projects have been de-conflicted amongst USG funders, is non-duplicative, and complies with the BBG IF Framework.

Based on information received during this process, the IFPO will combine the IFAs' proposed IF Budgets to arrive at an initial BBG IF Budget to recommend to the CEO for his/her approval, and if approved, the proposed BBG IF Budget will be forwarded to the Board for approval. If the CEO does not approve the recommendations, he/she will return the proposed BBG IF Budget to the IFPO with comments for additional information or clarification until such a time that the CEO has approved a final BBG IF to recommend to the Board for its approval.

Once the Agency IF Budget receives all necessary review and approval, the CEO will approve release of funding for approved IF Projects once the IFPO acknowledges receipt of required IFA-provided documentation in Phase 1.

4.3. Phase 3: IF Project Review

The Agency, through the IFPO, will regularly evaluate IF Projects to determine how they meet the goals of the IF Framework and relevant IF Project metrics.

⁷ A schedule for developing the IF Budget will be developed and regularized by the IFPO, in consultation with the relevant stakeholders, including the BBG Office of Chief Financial Officer (OCFO), to ensure any necessary synchronization with federal budget process.

⁸ A requested IF work order should be developed with the day-to-day involvement of the Entity for which the IF Project is focused.

The IFPO will conduct a formal IF Project Review process at least twice a year, and report the results to the CEO and the Board.⁹ The purpose is to hold IFAs and IF Projects regularly accountable to standards and metrics set forth under this Governance process.

The IFAs will provide timely updates on each IF Project managed, as stated above, and will provide a final IF Project close-out report when a Project is completed.

IFAs will prepare and present a package of reports (Project Review Package) to the IFPO discussing each of its active IF Projects, and those that were completed since the last IF Project Review process. Each IFA must also specifically identify to the IFPO any concerns about or challenges to an IF Project or implementer.¹⁰ These will be completed twice yearly and will include metrics on each project and the projects overall.

Each Project Review Package is to be comprehensive and provide detailed information about the IF Projects presented for review. The report will necessarily include the standardized, objective metrics set forth herein to demonstrate how the projects are meeting the goals of the Framework. *See Appendix D.* The report will include any agreed upon project-specific metrics; these are the type of metrics which in addition to standard metrics, may differ per the unique nature, methodology, goals and maturity of the specific IF Project.¹¹

The IFPO will assemble the IFAs' project reports into a single report on, if and how the BBG-funded IF Projects are meeting the goals of the IF Framework and developed IF Project metrics. To facilitate a BBG IF Projects review, an IF Working Group meeting may be convened. At the conclusion of this IF Projects Review, the IFPO will present that report to the CEO and the Board. The Agency will take into account information from BBG IF Project reviews when deciding upon investments, projects, and budgets in current and future years.

⁹ A schedule for the Project Review will be developed and regularized by the IFPO, in consultation with the relevant stakeholders, including the BBG Office of Chief Financial Officer (OCFO), to ensure any necessary synchronization with federal budget process.

¹⁰ These include IF Projects that are diverging from their expected plan, due to factors including unknown technical impediments, not achieving the expected outcome, or by not adhering to budget or timeline. They can also be IF Projects that present non-anticipated issues, or have generated controversy. In such cases, the IFA may modify or amend a contract/subaward and will notify IFPO of the change and the reasons for it. The IFPO may also work with the IFAs to identify any issues with the current mix of IF Projects in meeting BBG objectives.

¹¹ However, such specific metrics should not undermine a fundamental purpose of the Governance and Framework Documents: to set out goals and other objective measures against which all IF Projects can be measured.

APPENDIX A – Elements of Project Descriptions

Each Project Proposal should contain the following elements:

1. Whether the request is for a new or existing Project
2. Discussion and description of how the Project meets each of the elements of the IFP Framework.¹²
3. Indicate the IF Project's targeted IF threat or specific geographic region.
4. Description with particularity (in a way understandable by a lay person without a technical background) the intended outcome of the IF Project
5. Description of any technical aspects of the IF Project important for someone with technical background to understand to evaluate the IF Project on its technical merits.
6. The amount of funding sought for the project
7. The length of time of the project and how long the funding you seek would be expected to last in carrying out a multi-year IF Project. If an existing IF Project is seeking additional funding, specify the length of additional time it is expected to take.
8. If known, the relative priority of the IF Project as opposed to others in the IFA's proposed IF Budget.
9. If the IF Project is already underway, provide data concerning the performance of the Project using the relevant metrics set forth in [Appendix D](#).
10. Has this project been funded (by other USG Agencies or the private sector) in the past? If so, what was the result? Why is it no longer being funded?
11. Identification of potential metrics for projects that could be used to measure the performance of the IF Project and evaluate if it has been successful.
12. Identification of risks to the successful completion of the IF Project (other than insufficient funding) and how those risks will be managed.
13. Assessments, reviews or evaluations that were used or relied upon to recommend the IF Project.
14. A determination that the IF Project's desired outcome is not duplicative¹³ of the outcome of any past or current Project, and, as relevant, complements the outcome of any past or current IF Project.¹⁴
15. Is this better funded by another Agency? Does this project better align with the purposes of an Internet Freedom program of another Agency or USG-funded NGO, e.g., State or USAID? If so, why are they not funding? Have they funded the same or similar effort in the past? If so, what happened?
16. Who the implementer(s) (e.g., sub-awardee(s)) are?*
17. Any information about the implementer that would call into question their suitability as a candidate to receive U.S. taxpayer money.*
18. With respect to validating an IFA's compliance with federal rules when awarding work, explain (1) how an award complied with the relevant grant and/or procurement rules; (2) how the implementer was chosen; and (3) how any conflict of interest (or the appearance thereof) was avoided.*
19. List any other risks in funding this project.

* [If known. If not yet known, then provide information at/before Certification, per appendix C.]

¹² The framework elements include a set of IF goals, purposes, and project types; a requirement for alignment with Agency Strategic Goals; safeguards; and a requirement to be able to implement consistent with US law and policy.

¹³ This is not to preclude funding alternate approaches to solving the same IF challenge as the censorship tactics change constantly.

¹⁴ This should include IF Projects of any BBG entity; it should also consider activities of other USG Agencies of which the IF Program or IFA is aware.

APPENDIX B – Ranking Criteria

The threshold question is whether the IF Project meets all elements of the IFP Framework (see Appendix B). If so, then it should be ranked. The following are the type of criteria that should be considered in ranking IF Projects.

1. Mission alignment – how closely the IF Project aligns with the IF Framework.
2. Strategic alignment – how closely the IF Project aligns with Agency and Interagency strategic priorities. [The setting of Strategic Priorities is discussed in section 4 of the IF Framework document].
3. Purpose alignment – how directly the IF Project meets its stated purpose. [Purposes are listed in section 2 of the IF Framework]
4. Transformative value - the likelihood that the IF Project will take the exchange of information on the internet or social media in a new direction;
5. Effectiveness & efficiency – how effectively and efficiently the IF Project can attain its desired outcome;
6. Risk – known risks that might cause the IF Project to fail (other than lack of funding) and the ability to mitigate those risks;
7. Impact – the operational impact of the IF Project across all BBG activities;
8. Urgency – the urgency of the need the IF Project is to address;
9. Safeguards – the ability of the IF Project outcome to be protected from illicit purposes, and
10. Degree of overlap – the likelihood that the IF Project outcome duplicates the outcome of one or more current or former Projects of the BBG, another agency, or the private sector.¹⁵
11. Alignment with Other Agency Efforts – how it complements efforts of other agencies, and whether it better aligns with efforts of another agency rather than BBG.

¹⁵ This should include Projects of any BBG entity; it should also consider activities of other USG Agencies.

APPENDIX C - Certification

1. Each IFA will submit a final list of IFPO-approved projects for the CEO, his designee, or the IPFO, in consultation with the BBG Grants manager, to review, certifying that all IF Projects and implementers have been selected in accordance with this process.

2. Relevant Implementers: The List will contain certification and/or explanation as to the following, if not yet provided under Appendix A:

- 2.1. Who the implementer(s) (e.g., sub-awardee(s)) are?
- 2.2. Any information about the implementer that would call into question their suitability as a candidate to receive U.S. taxpayer money.
- 2.3. With respect to validating an IFA’s compliance with federal rules when awarding work, the certification should explain (1) how an award complied with the relevant grant and/or procurement rules; (2) how the implementer was chosen; and (3) how any conflict of interest (or the appearance thereof) was avoided.

3. Certification Language

A designated official of each IFA will submit the following Certification or its equivalent for each IF Project it proposed to fund, and each Implementer (e.g., sub-awardee) it proposes to use to carry out the IF Project.

CERTIFICATION

On behalf of _____ [name of IFA] _____, this is to certify that _____ [name of IFA] _____ has evaluated the _____ [name of IF Project] _____ and _____ [name of Implementer & sub-implementers] _____, and has determined that _____ [name of IF Project] _____ and [name of Implementer & sub-implementers] _____ have been selected in accordance with the BBG IF Governance Process and IF Framework.

Certified,

[Name]

[Title]

[Name of IFA]

APPENDIX D – Reporting

Each IFA is responsible for preparing, as least twice a year, a report discussing IF Projects currently underway and those that were completed since the last IF Working Group Project Review. This report is to be comprehensive and provide detailed information.

1. **Status Report for Ongoing Projects:** IFAs are to prepare a status report for each IF Project underway.¹⁶ In the report, the IFA should discuss whether (1) an IF Project is meeting its objectives or if the circumstances have changed which affect the anticipated outcome of the project; (2) corrective actions are needed and, if implemented, whether the corrective actions are succeeding, and (3) a recommendation should be made to terminate the Project is required and the use of the remaining funds for a different Project. See Appendix D.1 – Elements of IFA Status Reports, for a complete list of the elements to include in a status report.
2. **Evaluation for Completed Projects:** If a Project has been completed since the last IF Working Group Project Review, the IFA is responsible for preparing an IF Project evaluation report that sets forth the information listed in Appendix D.2 – Elements of Evaluation Reports.

Appendix D.1 – Elements of IFA Status Reports

An IFA's semi-annual report to the BBG CEO should discuss the following with regard to each IF Project underway.

1. Deliverables/Achievements –measured using the metrics set forth in Appendix E – IF Performance Metrics.
2. Methodology – in the case of problems that have arisen concerning systems development or research design (including contractor management issues);
3. Technical – technical issues or problems involving hardware or software development;
4. Schedule – estimated time frames versus actual, including schedule slippages, amendments and/or compressions;
5. Costs – estimated costs versus actual costs spent or obligated to date, any changes in funding, and the impact of these changes;
6. Business/program alignment – evaluation of the IF Project's relationship to agency objectives; and
7. Risk – risks that were previously identified are being appropriately mitigated and/or new risks have been evaluated and steps taken to address them.

¹⁶ These reports are meant to be cumulative in nature; therefore, an IFA should start with the most recent prior report and update, adjust or amend information as appropriate.

Appendix D.2 – Elements of IF Evaluation Reports.

Upon completion of an IF Project, an IFA completes an Evaluation Report. An IF Project Evaluation Report should include the following elements:

1. A description of the overall IF Project outcome.
2. An evaluation of the performance of the Project measured using the metrics set forth in Appendix E – Performance Metrics.
3. A full accounting of the IF funds expended and spent on the IF Project.
4. A discussion of the risks or issues encountered, and how they were mitigated.
5. An assessment of the success or failure of the IF Project
6. A discussion of the performance of the Implementer, any issues that were encountered with the Implementer, and how they were resolved.
7. A discussion of the lessons learned that could be informative to others working on internet freedom technology or on other IF Projects.

APPENDIX E – IF Performance Metrics and Impact Indicators

The following are the type of metrics which the CEO through the IFPO will establish by which BBG will measure IF Project performance and the degree of IF Project success.

1. With respect to enhancing the free flow of information, performance could be measured by:
 - 1.1 The number of overseas persons in BBG-priority audiences gaining access to blocked or censored content;
 - 1.2 The length of time the IF Project outcome shows increasing use;
 - 1.3 Any additional factors adopted, as appropriate
2. If the purpose is to increase threat awareness, performance could be measured by:
 - 2.1 The number of new, unique threats identified by the research.
 - 2.2 How widely information about new, unique threats is disseminated
 - 2.3 Any additional factors adopted, as appropriate
3. If the purpose is to enhance individual safety, then performance could be measured by:
 - 3.1 The number of unique persons using the IF Project outcome in countries known to target individuals for their use of the internet or social media, unless the nature of the project is to obfuscate usage
 - 3.2 Any additional factors adopted, as appropriate
4. For “research and/or development,” performance could be measured by:
 - 4.1 How the R&D effort proves or disproves the products’ ability to meet the specified purpose (as set forth in one of the three previous bullets);
 - 4.2 Any additional factors adopted, as appropriate
5. For all IF Projects, performance will be measured by:
 - 5.1 How close to the desired outcome the IF Project came;
 - 5.2 How close to the original timeline the Project was completed
 - 5.3 How close to budget the Project came – with additional “success points” for achieving the desired outcome under budget;
 - 5.4 Any additional factors adopted, as appropriate