USAGM Internet Freedom (IF) Program Framework

1. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW: The USAGM seeks to fund a number of Internet Freedom Projects (IF Projects), directly and through its grantees, under the USAGM Internet Freedom Program (IF Program). This framework will guide these efforts in accordance with USAGM strategy, priorities, and goals. USAGM-funded or supported IF Projects must comply with this Framework.

The Framework has eight elements, as follows:

1. Program Purpose
2. Program Goals
3. Types of Projects
4. Priorities & Coordination
5. Measuring Impact & Success
6. Safeguards
7. Compliance with US laws, regulation, and policy
8. Selected pursuant to the methodology set forth in the Governance Document

2. PROGRAM PURPOSE: Internet freedom is an interagency effort that seeks to overcome attempts to interfere with, monitor, censor, or prevent overseas persons from using the Internet as an open platform on which to communicate, innovate, learn, organize, and express themselves. The USAGM mission to "inform, engage, and connect people around the world in support of freedom and democracy"[1] is, in part, accomplished by "overcoming censorship," thus the purpose and importance of the IF Program.[2]

IF Program will fund the research, development, and deployment of technologies to support the free flow of information and independent media abroad, in USAGM priority audiences, in accordance with USAGM's priorities and purposes for which Internet Freedom funds are authorized and appropriated by Congress.[3] The USAGM may support efforts that require research and development, and those that are ready for deployment. The Agency may also support efforts that facilitate usability and adoption of certain tools by intended users, and that provide IF training for intended users.

3. PROGRAM GOALS: The IF Program goals are derived from the USAGM's mission and priorities. Accordingly, the IF Program seeks to counter censorship of USAGM-funded, affiliated, or supported content, and other credible, independent news and information. More broadly, the IF Program supports the overall USAGM mission and priorities consistent with those of "Internet Freedom" articulated by the Congress:

- "to provide tools and techniques to access the Internet Web sites of USAGM broadcasters that are censored";
- "to work with such broadcasters to promote and distribute such tools and techniques, including digital security techniques";
- to support the "continued development of technologies that provide or enhance access to the Internet, including circumvention tools that bypass Internet blocking, filtering, and other censorship techniques used by authoritarian governments";
- to ensure the "maintenance of the United States Government's technological advantage over such censorship techniques"; and

- to further the "research of key threats to Internet freedom" [4]

The IF Program will fund IF Projects related to the development, deployment, or adoption of technological tools, systems, or techniques that can be freely used, by overseas target audiences, to bypass government censorship, and safely share and access digital news and information, in furtherance of the USAGM mission. The IF Program may also fund IF Projects to train users and to research better understand threats to Internet freedom.

4. TYPES OF PROJECTS: IF Projects will support the free flow of information online consistent with the risks to the user and in accordance with the USAGM's priorities. IF Projects may be "categorized" in the following ways:

4.1. Create access to on-line content. These IF Projects provide access to content through circumvention, delivery, and provisioning technologies and may, as required, provide a validation function to prevent or warn of data manipulation.
4.2. Facilitate digital information sharing. These IF Projects support the ability to engage in two-way communications. This includes the ability to share information, to engage with others online and to freely express themselves with existing or new digital platforms.
4.3. Provide user to user access to digital content and information sharing. These IF Projects would include solutions that enable and protect person-to-person communication allowing citizens in repressive environments to participate in online communities.
4.4 Threat & Response Awareness. These IF Projects may aid IF Program decision-making and IF Program-funded efforts by providing timely and relevant information about current threats and the effectiveness of IF Program efforts. These IF Projects aid the development of effective Internet Freedom projects by enhancing understanding of dynamic, aggressive and increasingly sophisticated current threats to Internet Freedom.

5. PRIORITIES AND COORDINATION:
5.1 USAGM Priorities: IF Program efforts will be in support of the USAGM mission and priorities and consider past Congressional directives that Internet Freedom "programs shall be prioritized for countries whose governments restrict freedom of expression on the Internet, and that are important to the national interests of the United States."[5] Each year the CEO, in consultation with the Board, shall determine the IF Program priorities that best support the overall USAGM mission and priorities.

5.2 Agency, Interagency & Private Sector Coordination: IF Projects that duplicate ongoing efforts, whether by the USAGM or another agency, should not be funded. The USAGM will coordinate with other Agencies funding Internet Freedom programs, as appropriate, to share information, technologies, and best practices, to identify related efforts, to delineate and streamline overlapping efforts, and minimize redundancy.[6]

The IF Program may consider IF Projects that complement other U.S. Government and private sector efforts, while remaining in support of the USAGM mission and priorities. The IF Program shall consider IF Projects which are jointly developed and funded by the private sector, consistent with past Congressional directives ("funds made available pursuant to this section shall be matched, to the maximum extent practicable, by sources other than the United States Government, including from the private sector.") [7]

6. MEASURING IMPACT AND SUCCESS: The USAGM wants to ensure that federal funds are put to the best use. By their very nature, these programs do not always lend themselves to hard metrics. However, all IF Program efforts must have an intended impact, and metrics for measuring compliance with the elements of this framework, including use and cost-effectiveness.

The IF Program will develop metrics to anticipate and analyze how efforts support IF Program objectives and to support funding decisions. The metrics will be included as part of the Internet Freedom Program Governance document.

6.1. Ensuring that implementation matches goals: IF Projects must be capable of being implemented with sufficient speed and scope to meet IF Program requirements.

6.2. Cost-effectiveness: Efforts should look to maximize value and minimize costs.

6.3. Requiring methods for defining and measuring success: IF Projects must meet with IF Program metrics to define and measure compliance with this framework document, including impact and support for program goals. These metrics should, to the extent practicable, be consistent across projects. Additional funding of a previously-funded project should be based on such metrics.

7. SAFEGUARDS: IF Projects shall establish practicable safeguards to prevent or mitigate against the risk that efforts may be used for illicit purposes. Illicit purposes would include terrorism and other criminal activity. Congress has continually directed that Agencies provide the Congress descriptions of safeguards "established … to ensure that such programs are not used for illicit purposes."[8] These safeguards further the purposes of statutory (reporting) requirements designed to prevent the USAGM or one of its grantees from becoming "an open platform for international terrorists or those who support international terrorism."[9]

8. COMPLIANCE WITH US LAWS, REGULATIONS, AND POLICY: IF Projects must be capable of being undertaken, funded, and performed in ways consistent with all relevant federal and state laws and regulations, and USAGM and USG policy.

9. SELECTED PURSUANT GOVERNANCE DOCUMENT PROCESS: IF Projects must be selected pursuant to the process set forth in the Internet Freedom Governance document. That document provides a methodology for the selection, evaluation, and funding of IF Projects, and related compliance and oversight processes.

ENDNOTES

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[1] The USAGM mission statement is found in the USAGM Strategic Plan (the most recent version is the 2014-2018 plan). [2] USAGM 2014-2018 Strategic plan, at page 13:

> Strategic Objective 3: Overcome censorship: For almost 70 years, U.S. international broadcasting has fought censorship in all its forms. Today, as the global media environment undergoes a dynamic revolution, access to a truly free press is actually in decline. Jamming of radio and TV broadcasts, including our own, continues in a number of countries. Journalists suffer harassment and violence daily. National media laws often restrict free flows of information, limiting the ability of international news organizations to distribute their content. Intimidation of journalists results in self-censorship. **The Internet in particular is under assault.** The USAGM upholds the universal right of citizens everywhere to receive and impart information without restriction. **We work on many fronts to make news and information accessible to our global audiences with the aim of enabling not only unfettered access to our own products but also the full spectrum of independent news sources on the Internet**. (emphasis added).

Strategic element #3 also contains examples of projects which would be in furtherance of the mission:

- "Lead in assisting the world's citizens to gain access to information on all platforms, advocating on the international stage and coordinating within the U.S. government and with international broadcasters and other allies.
- Help audiences understand through journalistic reports the practices and policies of Internet censorship and circumvention.
- Expand the usage and knowledge of tools that enable circumvention of censorship in closed information societies.
- Fund technologies that counter Internet censorship and Internet blocking.
- Increase effective use of social media and digital platforms to combat censorship.
- Provide in-house digital expertise to address real-time censorship and jamming issues in targeted regions.
- Support the independence of media organizations in places where media freedom is threatened through a strong affiliation program that supports their viability through content, training, and other professional services."

[3] Research may include assessments of effectiveness of existing products.

[4] See section 7078 of the State, Foreign Operations, and Related Agency Appropriation Act (SFOAA) for FY'15. The same language appears in section 7080 of the FY'14 SFOAA. This same language appears in draft of the FY'16 SFOAA. However, even if this language does not appear in subsequent appropriation acts, it is valuable as a political directive from Congress.

[5] *see* note 4, supra.

[6] This is consistent with the following Congressional directives in section 7078 of the FY'15 SFOAA:

- "the Secretary of State, in consultation with the USAGM, shall coordinate any such research and development programs with other relevant United States Government departments and agencies in order to share information, technologies, and best practices, and to assess the effectiveness of such technologies."
- "relevant agency heads [shall consult] to coordinate and de-conflict planned activities"
- research and development should be aimed at "maintaining the United States Government's technological advantage over censorship techniques."

See also note 4, supra re similarities in FY'14 and FY'16 Acts.

[7] *see* note 4, supra.

[8] *See, e.g.*, section 7078 (c) of the FY'15 Act (requires Agency Internet Freedom spend plans to "include a description" of such safeguards.)

[9] The International Broadcasting Operations heading of the annual appropriation act contains the requirement that the "USAGM shall notify the Committees on Appropriations within 15 days of any determination by the Board that any of its broadcast entities, including its grantee organizations, provides an open platform for international terrorists or those who support international terrorism…"