



**International Foundation  
for Electoral Systems**

**INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR ELECTORAL  
SYSTEMS (IFES)**

**REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS (RFA)  
for  
Mapping and Countering Electoral Information Threats in  
Montenegro**

**RFA-24-004**

**January 9, 2024**

## 1. Request for Application (RFA)

### 1.1. Purpose

The purpose of this Request for Applications (RFA) is to invite civil society organization(s) to submit applications to implement a project that will contribute to building resilience and innovative responses to information threats during and beyond the election period in Montenegro. The objective of this project is to develop a new mapping methodology and response protocol monitoring disinformation, misinformation, and dangerous speech (DMDS) in the election process and share findings with the broader public, but also key electoral stakeholders, CSOs and media. The RFA provides prospective organizations with the relevant operational and performance requirements. The total value of this RFA shall not exceed **USD 20,000**.

### 1.2. RFA Schedule

IFES will conduct a competitive process to identify grantees per the tentative timeline below:

Issuance of RFA	January 9, 2024
Questions Due	January 16; by 17:00 (EST)
Response from IFES	January 18;
RFA Closes—All Applications Due	January 26; by 17:00 (EST)
Anticipated Implementation Period	March 1 – December 31, 2024

## 2. General Information

### 2.1. Background

IFES is an independent, non-governmental organization providing professional support to electoral democracy. IFES supports citizens' rights to participate in free and fair elections. Our independent expertise strengthens electoral systems and builds local capacity to deliver sustainable solutions.

As the global leader in democracy promotion, we advance good governance and democratic rights by Providing technical assistance to election officials, Empowering the underrepresented to participate in electoral and political processes, and Applying field-based research to improve the electoral cycle.

Since 1987, IFES has worked in over 145 countries – from developing democracies, to mature democracies.

## 3. Application Preparation Instructions

### 3.1. Applicant's Understanding of the RFA

In responding to this RFA, the applicant accepts full responsibility to understand the RFA in its entirety, and in detail, including making any inquiries to IFES as necessary to gain such understanding. IFES reserves the right to disqualify any applicant who demonstrates less than such understanding. Further, IFES reserves the right to determine, at its sole discretion, whether the applicant has demonstrated such understanding. Such disqualification and/or cancellation shall be at no fault, cost, or liability whatsoever to IFES.

### 3.2. Good Faith Statement

All information provided by IFES in this RFA is offered in good faith. Individual items are subject to change at any time. IFES makes no certification that any item is without error. IFES is not responsible or liable for any use of the information or for any claims asserted there from.

### 3.3. Communication

Verbal communication shall not be effective unless formally confirmed in writing by the

IFES officials identified in Section 3.5 of this RFA. In no case shall verbal communication govern over written communication.

### 3.3.1. Applicant Inquiries

Inquiries, questions, and requests for clarification related to this RFA should be submitted in writing to the representative listed below by the deadline listed in 1.2. RFA Schedule.

**Name: Ragheed Al Ameen**  
[ralameen@ifes.org](mailto:ralameen@ifes.org)

**and**

**Name: Gabriella Memarian**  
[gmemarian@ifes.org](mailto:gmemarian@ifes.org)

Questions/Answers and Addenda(s) related to this RFA can be found on [IFES Procurement Notices](#).

**3.3.2. Formal Communications** shall include, but are not limited to:

- Questions concerning this RFA
- Expressions of Interest
- Pre-award negotiations under this RFA
- Addenda to this RFA

### 3.3.3. Addenda

IFES will make a good-faith effort to provide written responses to the questions or requests for clarifications that require addenda by the date set in the RFA Schedule above. All questions, answers, and addenda will be shared with all interested organizations.

## 3.4. Eligibility

Locally registered Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), or other similar not-for-profit institutions are invited to apply.

Individuals and the following organizations are **not eligible** to access funding:

- Governmental and semi-governmental institutions
- International organizations
- Political parties or organizations affiliated with or engaging in partisan activities
- Organizations running on a for-profit basis

## 3.5. Application Instructions

All applications should include the following, in order for their application to be considered:

### 3.5.1. Technical Application

The Technical Application must include a written application in English describing in detail the applicant's (a) Technical Approach, (b) implementation timeline, and (c) results framework to implement the Program Description as described in Article 4 of this RFA. The evaluation criteria can be found in Article 3.6. Applicants should use the technical narrative template in Attachment A.

### 3.5.2. Cost Application – Budget & Budget Narrative

- The Budget should reflect costs associated with the technical activities and deliverables. All applicants must use the budget template provided in Attachment B and submit it in Excel format as part of their application. The Budget should be presented in **U.S. Dollar (USD)**, with applicable taxes/charges clearly identified. Unit costs are required and, in the case of discrepancies between unit costs and total costs, the unit cost will be taken as the reference basis in the evaluation.
- The applicant must agree to keep these costs valid for a minimum of 90 calendar days.

- The Cost Application should include a Budget Narrative that describes each cost element of the Budget (see column H of Attachment B).
- The total value of this RFA shall not exceed **USD 20,000**.

### **3.5.3. A brief outline of the applicant's organization and experience.**

Organizations should demonstrate prior experience working on information integrity, media monitoring, election process strengthening, and/or institutional oversight.

### **3.5.4. Additional documentation**

- A copy of the organization's most recent final, signed audits/financial statements
- Proof of organization's registration.
- CVs of key personnel including the organization's Director and anticipated program manager.
- Any other supporting document that will strengthen the application.

### **3.6. Application Submission**

Applicants must send final applications in electronic copy via e-mail to the point of contact identified in 3.3.1 on or prior to the closing date and time shown in the *Schedule of Events*.

### **3.7. Criteria for Selection**

The evaluation of each response to this RFA will be based on its demonstrated competence, compliance, format, and organization. The purpose of this RFA is to identify those organizations that have the interest, capability, and financial strength to implement the project as described in Article 4 of this RFA.

#### **1. Technical Approach, Implementation Timeline, Results Framework (40 points)**

- Demonstrated understanding of the RFA and of IFES's requirements
- Soundness and feasibility of technical approach
- Innovative technical approach with creative and experimental suggestions
- Reasonable implementation timeline and results framework

#### **2. Competitive Budget with efficient and reasonable cost structure (30 points)**

- Cost realism in response to RFA requirements
- Clear budget presentation of necessary, allocable and reasonable costs
- Appropriate balance of budget between operational/personnel costs and activity costs

#### **3. Past Performance and Organizational Capacity (30 points)**

- Demonstrated capacity to organize, manage and implement full range of activities required to achieve program goals and objectives
- Demonstrated flexibility to adjust implementation in response to changing environments
- Demonstrated strong past performance in implementing programs of similar size, scope and complexity
- Demonstrated presence and/or networks in the proposed target districts

### **3.8. Selection and Notification**

Applicants determined by IFES that possess the capacity to compete for this project will be selected to move into the negotiation phase of this process. Written notification will be sent to these applicants via e-mail. Those applicants not selected for the negotiation phase will also be notified.

#### 4. Scope of Work

The spread of new technology-fueled and social media-enabled disinformation and hate speech campaigns increasingly contributes to deepening societal polarization and leads to expansive information threats, which in return negatively affect the integrity of elections and undermines public trust in democratic institutions. As demonstrated by the experience of previous electoral cycles, in particular the 2016, 2020, and 2023 parliamentary and presidential elections, Montenegro continues to face challenges in addressing this problem.

IFES intends to support project activities designed to formulate effective programming to monitor, counter, and mitigate the effects of disinformation and hate speech campaigns in view of ensuring accuracy of election-related information as well as equal and inclusive application of voters' rights, especially those targeting women, LGBTQI+, and other vulnerable voters and candidates.

Anticipation and efficiency of response mechanisms heavily rely on a thorough in-depth analysis of previously identified DMDS sources and their *modus operandi*, comparative research of effective prevention and counterstrategies, as well as capacity of applicant to deploy a multi-stakeholder approach, i.e., coordinated effort of relevant state institutions (primarily the State Election Commission [SEC] and Agency for Electronic Media [AEM]), media, civil society, and the larger voter community.

Leveraging 2024 as a non-electoral year, efforts should be focused on capacity building, methodological design, and peer learning. IFES will provide its expert support to the awarded organization to realize these goals, applying global evidence in information threat analysis, including IFES's *Chain of Harm* and *Violence against Women in Elections* resources.

More specifically, this project activity aims to achieve the following:

1. Building on lessons learned and best practice, develop a methodology for effective monitoring and response to electoral disinformation and hate speech in Montenegro;
2. Utilize multi-stakeholder network and innovative technological tools to enhance public resilience to disinformation and hate speech in advance of the next elections, and jointly promote verified sources of electoral information;
3. Provide recommendations to the SEC and AEM on how to enhance coordination and develop timely response protocols and powerful counter-narratives to instances of electoral disinformation and hate speech;
4. Empower voters, especially women, LGBTQI+ persons, and other vulnerable groups, to combat hate speech and ensure protections of their right to active and passive suffrage.

#### Description of Activities:

Applicants will provide a detailed description of activities in the submitted Technical Application. The final description of anticipated activities will be decided in consultation with IFES. This consultation will take the form of a participatory co-design workshop utilizing IFES's Chain of Harm Program Design Workshop methodology. The workshop will focus on refining the program activities proposed by the applicant and ensuring that they are responsive to the differential experiences of marginalized and underserved communities. An illustrative list of activities is provided below but is by no means an exhaustive list.

- Facilitate focus group discussions with target groups to collect an evidence-base for the drivers and enablers of electoral disinformation and hate speech;

- Conduct in-depth analysis of previous election-related DMDS cases, identify networks and *modus operandi*, targeted groups, narratives, and risks;
- Conduct research of effective counter and DMDS-mitigation strategies used by civil society in global contexts and utilize IFES's Disinformation Guide,<sup>1</sup> Chain of Harm<sup>2</sup>, and Violence against Women in Elections<sup>3</sup> to inform and aid development of the methodology;
- Identify and utilize efficient civic tech or online platforms to track, analyze, respond to, and report on violations related to electoral disinformation and hate speech;
- Build and support multi-stakeholder network to prepare for future election periods so that voters are informed of monitoring findings, identified vulnerabilities, and threats in the information environment, and can hold malign actors accountable;
- Share collected information on DMDS campaigns deployed in previous electoral cycles as well as on current threats, alongside the development of timely coordination mechanism to alert the SEC, AEM, and relevant stakeholders of when such instances occur;
- Organize public events to exchange opinions and experience with relevant actors as well as to inform, sensitize, and educate the interested public on the newly developed methodology;
- Participate in and leverage regional peer networks to encourage cross-border learning and coordinated response to transnational DMDS;
- Advocate for and directly support creation of a unified communication channel for collection and dissemination of accurate election-related information, data, and monitoring results.

Applicants are encouraged to review the [Countering Disinformation Guide for Civil Society Capacity to Mitigate and Counter Disinformation](#).

**Note:** All applicants are obliged to include an overview of measures to be undertaken with the aim to ensure high quality, timely completion, and sustainability of project results and activities. In addition, the applicants are required to describe their Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Plan and related indicators. The proposed progress indicators proposed should be relevant, measurable, achievable, and time-bound.

All activities must be completed within the established timeline. To ensure timely and high-quality project implementation, the awarded organization undertakes to attend biweekly coordination meetings with a designated IFES representative, provide accurate information on project progress, and request IFES expert guidance when needed and appropriate.

IFES encourages unique, innovative, and experimental technical approaches to activities proposed, as noted in 3.7.

### **Anticipated Results:**

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://counteringdisinformation.org/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ifes.org/programs-initiatives/chain-harm-methodology>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ifes.org/publications/violence-against-women-elections-online-social-media-analysis-tool>

- The awarded organization has developed a new mapping methodology and response protocol monitoring DMDS in the election process;
- Established response protocol deploys a multi-stakeholder network to inform the public and counter identified threats with responsive and efficient messaging;
- Close consultations and cooperation with the SEC and AEM during the process of developing the methodology to ensure that effective communication with the institutions is established in order to ensure more proactive and quick response to information threats;
- Increased opportunities for Montenegrin voters, and in particular women and LGBTQI+ persons, to access accurate and empowering messages during election periods.

### **Anticipated Milestones:**

The accomplishment of each objective will be based on the completion of defined tasks and/or deliverables defined in the proposal. Illustrative deliverables include, but are not limited to:

- Completion of focus groups and participation in IFES design workshop;
- Developed monitoring and reporting methodology;
- Research and analysis documentation;
- Published reports, articles, videos, informative materials, and social media posts;
- Press releases, announcements, meeting minutes, and media articles;
- Memorandum of Cooperation or other coordination mechanisms to alert stakeholders of critical disinformation and hate speech cases.

## **5. Functional Requirements**

### **5.1. Timeline:**

Applicants must submit a detailed timeline in their Application showing the time required to implement the services requested. IFES requires all deliverables to be completed not later than December 31, 2024.

### **5.2. Monitoring & Evaluation**

- As part of its due diligence, IFES conducts pre-award surveys on all potential grantees to assess capacity and inform the appropriate grant mechanism. In addition, applicants expected to expend \$750,000 or more in U.S. funded awards during their fiscal year must have an audit conducted in accordance with 2 CFR Part 200, Subpart F—Audit Requirements. If Applicable, applicants must ensure that funds are included in the grant budget for an audit.
- IFES will issue the appropriate grant mechanism depending on the nature of the work, the capacity of the grantee, the duration of the grant, and the overall value of the grant.
- IFES will provide continuous mentorship, training and oversight to ensure grant management practices are in line with anti-corruption principles as well as to build capacity of local grantees to fully manage and implement their programs in adherence to donor regulations and with a view towards sustainability.

### **5.3. Deliverables:**

Specific deliverables and reporting will be determined based on the grant activities proposed and negotiated during the negotiation phase.

## **6. Additional Terms & Conditions**

**6.1. Non-Disclosure Agreement**

IFES reserves the right to require any applicant to enter into a non-disclosure agreement.

**6.2. Zero Tolerance for Fraud**

IFES has zero tolerance for fraud. Fraud is any act or omission that intentionally misleads, or attempts to mislead, to obtain a benefit or to avoid an obligation. If you have concerns about potential fraud in any way related to IFES projects, contracts, or activities, please contact IFES' Compliance Hotline at [compliance@ifes.org](mailto:compliance@ifes.org) or at +1 202-350-6791.

**6.3. Intellectual Property**

Applicants should not use any intellectual property of IFES including, but not limited to, all logos, registered trademarks, or trade names of IFES, at any time, without the prior written approval of IFES, as appropriate.

**6.4. Applications**

All accepted applications shall become the property of IFES and will not be returned.

**6.5. Governing Law**

This RFA and the applicants' applications shall be governed by the laws of the Commonwealth of Virginia, USA.

**6.6. Partial Awarding**

IFES reserves the right to accept all or part of the application when awarding the grant. IFES also reserves the right to issue multiple awards and procure only items or services from selected applicants.

**6.7. No Liability**

Issuance of this RFA does not constitute a commitment on the part of IFES to make an award nor does it commit IFES to pay for costs incurred in the preparation and submission of any application in response to this RFA. Further, IFES reserves the right to reject any or all applications received or stop solicitation process at any time, without assigning any reason or liability.

IFES shall not be liable to any applicant, person, or entity for any losses, expenses, costs, claims, or damages of any kind:

- Arising out of, by reason of, or attributable to, the applicant responding to this RFA; or
- As a result of the use of any information, error, or omission contained in this RFA document or provided during the RFA process.

**6.8. Entire RFA**

This RFA, any addenda to it, and any attached schedules, constitute the entire RFA.

**6.9. Attachments**

Attachment A: Technical Narrative Template

Attachment B: Budget Template

Attachment C: Organizational Capacity and Past Performance Template

**End of RFA**



**ATTACHMENT A**  
**Technical Narrative Template**

**I. General Information**

---

Complete Legal Name of Applicant Organization

---

Office Address

---

Legal Mailing Address (if different)

---

Office Telephone Number(s)

---

E-Mail Address(es)

---

Director of Organization

---

Project Manager/Contact Person

---

Project Dates (month/year – month/year)

---

Project Title

---

Unique Entity Identifier (UEI)<sup>4</sup>

---

PAN Number

---

<sup>4</sup> Only organizations with Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) are eligible to receive a subaward under this RFA. If your organization does not have a UEI, please visit [www.SAM.gov](http://www.SAM.gov) to get a Unique Entity ID only (no entity registration required).

**II. Technical Approach:**

*Please include the following components in in a maximum of 5 pages*

- A. Project Summary:** describe your project in one paragraph, including objectives, issue, target audience, and geographic coverage.
- B. Need for the project:** identify the problem your project would help to solve. Why is this project important?
- C. Project’s Goal and Objectives:** what is the specific goal of your effort? Does it comply with the goals and objectives of the competition?
- D. Target Audience and Stakeholders:** what is your main target audience? What groups of stakeholders will the project primarily serve?
- E. Activities:** identify and describe in detail each activity to be undertaken to produce results, justifying the choice of activities.
- F. Expected Deliverables:** identify specific deliverables that you expect to develop within your project (research/analytical reports; specific strategies; public policy recommendations; etc.).

**III. Implementation Timeline**

*Please use the following format to provide an implementation timeline*

Project Month	Activity	Expected Result	Involved Stakeholders

**IV. Results Framework**

*Please identify specific results that you expect to realize upon completion of your project and the quantitative and qualitative criteria for the project’s success. How will you determine that the project goals have been accomplished? The framework should include:*

- A list of results you expect to accomplish throughout the project
- 1-4 performance indicators for each result including a detailed definition for each
- The source, method, frequency and schedule of data collection,
- Staff responsible for collecting data.
- How the performance data will be collected
- How data will be reviewed, analyzed and reported

**ATTACHMENT B**  
**Budget Template**

[CLICK HERE](#) to visit IFES Procurement Notices page and download the budget template.

**ATTACHMENT C  
Organizational Capacity and Past Performance Template**

**I. Summary**

*Briefly present your organization’s mission, its core activities, and why it is best suited for this project*

**II. Human Resources**

- A. *Please provide full legal name of organization’s Director and / or Chief Executive Officer.*
- B. *Please provide CVs for the core technical members of the team (the director of the organization, training or curriculum experts, project manager, etc.).*
- C. *Please provide hiring plan for full and part-time positions the organization including a list of positions and recruitment plan or cost-share with existing positions.*

**III. Past Performance**

- A. *Briefly describe how your organization’s previous experience prepares it to successfully implement the proposed project; highlight the organization’s relationship and work experience with lawmakers, political parties or government officials if applicable.*
- B. *Please specify previous work in the relevant field.*
- C. *Please list the organization’s major projects from the past five years in the following format:*

<i>Project Name</i>	<i>Project Activities</i>	<i>Donor</i>	<i>Award Amount</i>	<i>Period of Award</i>

**IV. References:**

*If applicable, contact information for three references from donor funded projects similar in scope.*