

# Request for Concept Papers (RfCP) Public Policy and Accountability Grant (PPAG) Program

## ***Building Georgia's Resilience against Disinformation and other Hostile Foreign Electoral Interference***

The East-West Management Institute's (EWMI) *Advancing CSO Capacities and Engaging Society for Sustainability* (ACCESS) project invites Georgian Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to submit concept papers to the Public Policy and Accountability Grant (PPAG) program.

Under this Request for Concept Papers (RfCP), the **PPAG program aims** to help CSOs **build Georgia's resilience against disinformation and other hostile foreign electoral interference** in the run-up to the 2020 Parliamentary Elections.

### **BACKGROUND**

Georgia is highly vulnerable to Russian influence operations and disinformation as it heads to the 2020 Elections. Although, according to the opinion polls, some 80% of Georgians support the EU and NATO membership, the low rate of trust in mainstream political parties and the high proportion of undecided voters, coupled with overall political apathy and disengagement among Georgian citizens, create an opening for a populist, illiberal backlash.

According to the most recent national polls, more educated, younger, and better off urbanities exhibit pro-Western attitudes, while ethnic minorities, poor, elderly, and those living in rural areas tend to be more Eurosceptic or undecided.<sup>1</sup> Growing conspiratorialist, anti-globalist, anti-liberal, nativist, xenophobic, and homophobic moods feed on Russia's propaganda and disinformation machinery.<sup>2</sup>

Considering the global experience, the methods of foreign electoral interference may range from:

- Hacking and cyber-attacks on the voting system, democratic groups and institutions, and candidates to
- Financial and/or media support to preferred candidates and
- Voter targeting through bribes, intimidation, and disinformation.<sup>3</sup>

**The strategic outcome**, which the current call aims to support, **is a democratically elected, credible Parliament that reflects the will of the Georgian people, without foreign manipulation and/or malign influence.**

### **PPAG FOCUS**

To neutralize the negative trends described above, the PPAG program will support Georgian CSOs, CSO coalitions or coalitions between, on the one hand, CSOs, and on the other hand, formal and/or informal civic groups, journalists, PR organizations, media outlets, and/or other professional groups to pursue one or several of the following approaches/objectives:

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<sup>1</sup> ACCESS-PITA Research on the Actions Taken by Georgian Non-state Actors to Address Russian Disinformation and Propaganda

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> European Values think tank <https://www.europeanvalues.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/35-measures-in-15-steps-for-enhancing-the-resilience-of-the-democratic-electoral-process-1-1.pdf>

- Improve available data to help better **diagnose and predict** Georgia’s vulnerability to hostile foreign interference and influence in the run-up to the 2020 Parliamentary Elections and propose/take actions to address this problem;
- **Scrutinize and expose financial sources, corrupt practices, and connections** of disinformation actors, using investigative journalism and other methods of investigation;
- **Expose the real motives, inconsistencies, populism, and incompatibility** of disinformation actors with Georgian values, and national and voter interests;
- Take proactive measures to protect **vulnerable audiences** against disinformation aiming to influence their attitudes and behaviors;
- Frame and promote **Georgia’s unifying, proactive, and forward-looking narrative** to build resilience against disinformation objectives;
- **Use appealing visual materials, messages, and language** to exit from the “bubble” of well-informed and active citizens and reach disengaged, passive audiences;
- **Increase the consensus** of parties and their supporters around Georgia’s western orientation and reduce such partisan polarization/radicalization that can increase **Georgia’s vulnerability to disinformation**;
- Encourage **lasting coalitions of purpose** among non-state actors that have already developed complementary expertise in specific areas related to disinformation;
- Organize awareness and capacity building activities for **opinion-makers, journalists, politicians, and relevant civil servants** in extreme cases where demonstrable results can be achieved in terms of the activities’ impact on protecting the election from hostile foreign interference.

Proposed strategies should use one or several of the following venues/platforms:

- **Offline campaigns, face-to-face encounters**, and street activism;
- **TV** and TV campaigns;
- **Sophisticated and targeted online** communication campaigns and
- **Press** (in extreme, substantiated cases).

EWMI ACCESS will prioritize the Concept Papers that:

- Do not aim to counter anti-western disinformation and propaganda in general, but **specifically target electoral processes** – protecting voters and society from falling victim to divisive, malign narratives, tactics, and forces;
- Have the potential to **reach a significant number of the target audience**;
- Propose **proactive** measures to lessen the intended impact of disinformation;
- **Can be measured** against the preset objective(s) and indicators; and
- Are **agile and flexible** to adapt to ongoing developments and emerging needs/themes.

## GRANT AWARDS

EWMI ACCESS will award up to 3 grants under this RfCP. The maximum grant award for each project will be \$70,000 USD and the maximum grant period will be 12 months. EWMI ACCESS reserves the right to fund any or none of the applications submitted.

EWMI ACCESS will award PPAGs as Standard Awards.

## CONCEPT PAPERS

Interested applicants are encouraged to submit brief Concept Papers that outline their proposed strategies. The Concept Papers must describe the specific objective(s) that the applicant aims to achieve; propose the strategy to achieve the objective(s); share the information about past performance and proofs of the proposed strategy (potentially) being effective; state the official partner organizations/groups (if any); and list other individuals/professionals that it plans to engage in developing a more concrete action plan.

The concept papers will serve as a platform for further discussion between the applicant organization and EWMI ACCESS. EWMI ACCESS will review the received papers and select the

most promising among them. It will then work with the shortlisted applicants to assist them in transforming the project concepts into comprehensive implementation plans, i.e. **activity plans and budgets** for their PPAG projects. To this end, EWMI ACCESS, in close cooperation with the respective applicant, will organize the so-called **Social Lab discussions**, i.e. expert and key informant discussions, composed of individuals/groups with the relevant knowledge and insights to detail the strategy, as well as those with creativity to offer innovative approaches and those with hands-on experience to validate ideas from a practical perspective. The discussion will also help secure a closer collaboration of the people required to achieve success (e.g. members of the target group). By applying for this grant competition, applicants consent to the proposed **inclusive (co-creation) process** of developing their projects.

## ELIGIBILITY

Think tanks, watchdog and other types of CSOs registered in Georgia, CSO coalitions, and coalitions between CSOs, formal and informal groups and media organizations are eligible to submit proposals for the PPAG program. Applicants should meet the following criteria:

- Have at least two years of operational experience. As a rule, EWMI ACCESS will not provide “start-up” funding, although EWMI ACCESS may make an exception if sufficient evidence is presented to show that the organization’s directors and experts have adequate prior experience and the organization is filling a niche that has been underserved in the past.
- Have the governance structure that ensures proper rotation of leadership and delegation of power, including at least a Board of Directors, a Chairperson, and an Executive Director. The same individual should not hold the position of the Board Chairperson and the Executive Director, unless the size of the organization precludes this separation. If the above criteria are not met, the applicant must submit a proposed reform process that will work towards meeting these standards.
- Have a transparent system of bookkeeping that is in compliance with Georgian legislation and International Accounting Standards (IAS). If such a system is not in place, the grantee must work closely with EWMI ACCESS to ensure that accurate expense reports are prepared and a transparent bookkeeping system is put in place.
- Must not be a debtor, must have canceled any debt to the state, or have arranged for debt collection prior to receiving the first disbursement of EWMI ACCESS grant funds.
- Must operate as an independent, non-politically affiliated organization.
- Must have a DUNS Number.

Civil servants, political appointees, members of the current parliament, the staff of public broadcasting companies, and/or leaders of political parties cannot participate in a grant project as a director. In most cases, these individuals are also excluded from being grant-remunerated participants in projects.

EWMI ACCESS will not fund the projects that propose any of the following:

- Support for or lobbying on behalf of a particular political party or against a political party;
- Religious activities. However, EWMI ACCESS may support a religious organization for non-religious aims if its proposal corresponds to PPAG objectives;
- Humanitarian activities;
- A major research other than target audience analysis; or
- Individual and/or group travel as a primary project activity.

Grantees must ensure **political neutrality** during the electoral period.

## APPLICATION SUBMISSION PROCEDURES

EWMI ACCESS will accept concept papers in **English**. The concept papers must be emailed to the email address indicated below.

Submitted concept papers must be the original and sole work of the applicant organization. Plagiarism will result in disqualification from the grant competition. EWMI ACCESS will retain all

materials and documents submitted by applicants. It will not use this information for purposes other than proposal review and will not share it with other persons or institutions, except when required by Georgian law or requested by USAID. Please note that in line with our donor coordination efforts, we will share the names of the applicants and a short description of their respective projects with other Georgian and international programs that support CSOs in Georgia.

After selecting the Concept Papers and before making the final decision, EWMI ACCESS may request additional documentation, such as:

- CVs of project staff;
- A copy of the organization’s most recent Public Registry Record printed out from [www.reestri.gov.ge](http://www.reestri.gov.ge);
- A copy of the organization’s most recent Act of Comparison printed out from [www.rs.ge](http://www.rs.ge);
- An auditor’s report;
- Financial Statements (balance sheet showing profit and loss and cash flow);
- Organizational policies;
- A copy of the organization’s Annual Report, both financial and technical (if available);
- Other documentation, as needed.

**EVALUATION PROCESS AND CRITERIA**

A Grants Review Committee (GRC) established by EWMI ACCESS will review all proposals and select the awardee. The GRC will be composed of EWMI ACCESS staff and independent experts. Shortlisted applicants may be asked to provide additional information.

EWMI ACCESS will assess proposals based on the following main criteria:

- Technical approach, including:
  - Overall compliance with the PPAG program goal, objectives, and priorities;
  - Overall effectiveness of the proposed strategy to achieve the set objective(s);
  - Partnerships among CSOs and/or between CSOs and other individuals or organizations;
  - Well-thought-through list of individuals and organizations to co-create the final project with;
- Organizational capacity and management, including:
  - Applicants’ and, if any, partners’ past performance;
- Budget proposal, including:
  - Cost-effectiveness of the proposed budget;
  - Proposed co-funding (including in-kind contributions), especially from local sources (e.g. business, crowdfunding, volunteers) and/or other donors, media, and/or partner organizations

Applicants should respond to all of the requirements of the grant application form.

**TIMELINE**

RfCP launch date	December 11, 2019
Open Door Day at the EWMI ACCESS office and/or online	December 17, 2019, 11:00 AM
Open Door Day at the EWMI ACCESS office and/or online	December 18, 2019, 11:00 AM
<b>DEADLINE FOR SUBMITTING CONCEPT PAPERS</b>	<b>January 10, 2020</b>
Evaluation of concept papers	January 15, 2019
Joint work to develop a detailed activity plan and budget	January 22, 2019
Grant agreement signing	February 1, 2019

*Please note that evaluation and award dates are subject to change*

## CONTACT INFORMATION

**Concept Paper Form:** To download the Concept Paper form, please visit the EWMI ACCESS website [www.ewmi-access.org](http://www.ewmi-access.org) or see the PPAG announcement on [www.jobs.ge](http://www.jobs.ge).

**Clarifications:** Requests for clarification should be sent to the ACCESS Public Policy and Accountability Advisor (PPAA) Nodar Tangiashvili at [ntangiashvili@ewmi.org](mailto:ntangiashvili@ewmi.org). EWMI ACCESS will issue clarifications to all interested organizations via e-mail.

**Concept Papers:** Applicants should submit their concept papers via e-mail to [grants@ewmi.org](mailto:grants@ewmi.org). E-mails must have “**PPAG PROGRAM**” in the subject line.

## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Successful COG applicants will be eligible for the Technical Assistance (TA) activities that EWMI ACCESS offers to its grantees. This TA includes an Organizational and Advocacy Capacity Assessment (OACA) for willing grantees, leading to the development of an individualized Capacity Development Plan (CDP). Demand-based on-the-job consulting and mentoring will be available to grantees to assist them in implementing their CDPs. The TA will be delivered during, and potentially beyond, project implementation.

COG applicants may also identify their organizational/institutional development needs in the proposed projects and include respective costs in their budgets.

## ABOUT ACCESS

The Advancing CSO Capacities and Engaging Society for Sustainability (ACCESS) is a six-year USD 8,996,947 project funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by East-West Management Institute (EWMI) and its local partners.

ACCESS began in November 2014 and works to enhance the effectiveness of civil society organizations (CSOs) in Georgia through: (1) increasing public confidence in CSOs and citizen participation in CSO initiatives, and (2) assisting CSOs to develop into stable and sustainable organizations. By empowering CSOs to become respected citizen representatives capable of leading public debate and collaborating with government, ACCESS contributes to more transparent and accountable governance in Georgia.