U.S. AGENCY FOR GLOBAL MEDIA

Truth over Disinformation

Supporting Freedom and Democracy

March 2024 Update

USAGM STRATEGIC PLAN 2022–2026

VOICE OF AMERICA®   RadioFreeEurope RadioLiberty   Office of Cuba Broadcasting   rfa   MIDDLE EAST BROADCASTING NETWORKS, INC. MBN   OPEN TECHNOLOGY FUND

"...a free and independent media. It's the bedrock of democracy. It's how the public stay informed and how governments are held accountable. And around the world, press freedom is under threat."

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Left: Teenagers try to catch a signal to go online in the village of Chebotarevo in the West Kazakhstan region on August 27, 2021. Petr Trotsenko (RFE/RL)

Cover: Protestors hold up their smartphone lights at a rally in Hong Kong remembering detainees in Hong Kong's pro-Democracy movement. (AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein)

Introduction

We are at a geopolitical tipping point, and the legitimacy of an international system grounded in democratic, rule-based institutions is at profound risk. Disinformation, propagated by our adversaries at an alarming rate and compounded by an exponential growth in "junk" news and increasing censorship of accurate journalism, threatens the viability of fragile democracies around the world. Worse, the chaos resulting from this rise in unreliable information at the expense of truthful reporting, and the corresponding distrust in institutions, threaten the democratic model itself. This

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frailty risks emboldening authoritarian governments and violent extremists and presents a clear and urgent national security challenge to the United States. In her Nobel Lecture, 2021 Peace Prize Laureate Maria Ressa outlined the critical role of journalism in national and global security, "Without facts, you can't have truth. Without truth, you can't have trust. Without trust, we have no shared reality, no democracy, and it becomes impossible to deal with our world's

existential problems: climate, coronavirus, the battle for truth." The U.S. Agency for Global Media's 2022-2026 strategic plan, "Truth over Disinformation: Supporting Freedom and Democracy," strengthens the agency's capacity to, in the words of the National Security Strategy, support "a better future of a free, open, secure, and prosperous world."

USAGM is America's international, independent, public service media agency, encompassing the Voice of America (VOA), Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), Radio Free Asia (RFA), the Middle East Broadcasting Networks (MBN), Radio and TV Martí (under the Office of Cuba Broadcasting — OCB), and the Open Technology Fund (OTF). Combined, this global media enterprise is uniquely capable of defending press freedom and access to information in some of the most challenging countries for journalists. These capabilities stem from: (a) the scale at which the agency operates — working in 62 languages in over 100 foreign media markets around the world, with an FY 2023 measured audience of 420 million adults on a weekly basis outside the U.S.; (b) the range of local and technical expertise directly employed by the agency and its grantees, which includes several thousand journalists and experts with deep local knowledge and understanding of the environments in which they operate; and (c) the shared public-service mission of these efforts to deploy public-service journalism

and technical tools to protect the fundamental human right to seek, receive, and impart information, regardless of frontiers.

This strategic plan details a recalibration of focus, prioritizing **access** to **trusted, compelling**, and **impactful** content, in order to create a robust response to censorship and disinformation, and support democratic ideals and values. Properly honed, USAGM's networks are extremely capable first responders in the current war on truth, and through professional, meaningful, and fact-based journalism, make substantial contributions to the building blocks of healthy democratic societies, including freedom of the press, human rights, and transparency and accountability in governance.

The USAGM 2022-2026 Strategic Plan, "Truth over Disinformation: Supporting Freedom and Democracy," is the sixth strategic plan since the agency's inception in 1998. It is the first plan developed under the full implementation of the governance changes in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017. With a Senate-confirmed CEO now in place, USAGM can establish a clear strategic vision and chart a clear course to realize that vision

The global forces that shaped previous USAGM Strategic Plans have only intensified with the proliferation of disinformation and the tools and technologies of censorship, as well as deteriorating media freedom around the world. The prior Strategic Plan addressed these challenges, and U.S. international media has delivered on its goals. Signature accomplishments include launching a vibrant 24/7 Persian-language TV channel; creating signature Global Mandarin digital

MBN reporter on the ground.

products from both VOA and RFA; establishing the Russian-language Current Time brand as a go-to source that cuts through Kremlin disinformation and finding the truth about Russian, American, and global events; launching a Russia-Iran-China Investigative Unit at MBN to counter those countries' disinformation campaigns; continued migration from shortwave radio to satellite TV, FM, mobile, and social media; pioneering technologies to circumvent government-imposed internet firewalls; and providing a window on America's story through VOA's "U.S. bureau" approach for reporting to media outlets around the world.

While we measure impact beyond just audience size, USAGM audiences have grown to record levels, with a worldwide measured weekly audience of 420 million adults in 2023, doubling in the last ten years.

Yet, key challenges and opportunities remain, and USAGM seeks to organize and support its workforce in being even more effective going forward. In support of this agenda, we will develop performance plans, monitor success, and address challenges on a continual basis, and we will continue to

report on progress against our goals in each year's budget submission. Each year we also establish subordinate strategies for every language service, setting clear goals and targets in over 100 countries, while driving and measuring performance with evolving forms of research. These systems are all pegged to our comprehensive Impact Model, which tracks performance through a vetted typology of quantitative and qualitative indicators.

The fast-shifting global environment requires that we focus on continually improving our operations in order to maximize our journal-istic impact, thereby supporting American interests, American national security, and universal values of freedom. Our growing audiences throughout the world demonstrate the demand for the exceptional news and information that we offer.

We must serve this audience, while reaching out to earn the trust of new audiences, with compelling and impactful content. This is the thrust of "Truth over Disinformation: Supporting Freedom and Democracy," USAGM's Strategic Plan for 2022-2026.

VOA Persian reporter in the field.

A Global Information Challenge

USAGM pursues its mission in an increasingly challenging global environment. Global media is awash with misinformation, and in many cases, outright lies.

Our adversaries — Russia, China, Iran, and violent extremists, in particular — use an arsenal of spin, obfuscation, hyperbole, concealment, and propaganda to shape their global narratives for consumption by domestic as well as external audiences. Collectively, they use these tools to sow discord, undermine faith in governing institutions, and stoke fear and anxiety, ultimately to undermine our democratic values and foreign policy interests. For example, China is estimated to annually spend over ten billion dollars on domestic and international propaganda, targeting audiences as far away as Africa and Latin America. Disseminating disinformation is central to China and Russia fulfilling their geopolitical aspirations.

Moreover, efforts to suppress and control information are increasing in number and effectiveness. These efforts include the deployment of technical systems for information control, often developed and propagated by America's adversaries; enhanced regulatory schemes to limit the flow of foreign news and the presence of foreign

journalists; and threats of and, in some cases, actual violence inflicted upon professional journalists working to ensure access to fact-based news.

Continued modernization is essential for USAGM to effectively compete with the increasingly successful efforts of adversarial governments and violent extremists.

Our adversaries are utilizing these tactics in conjunction with a broader suite of information statecraft tools to challenge U.S. leadership, democratic values, a shared conception of truth, and the foundational norms of the international system that facilitated economic prosperity and relative peace and stability for much of the previous 75 years.

The Administration's National Security Strategy frames these challenges and the necessary response:

Actions to bolster democracy and defend human rights are critical to the United States not only because doing so is consistent with our values, but also because respect for democracy and support for human rights promotes global peace, security, and prosperity. Global threats to accountable and transparent governance also threaten our own democratic system. We will continually update our range of tools to advance democracy and counter authoritarianism... we are responding to the ever-evolving ways in which authoritarians seek to subvert the global order, notably by weaponizing information to undermine democracies and polarize societies.

We are doing so by working with governments, civil society, independent media, and the private sector to prevent credible information from being crowded out, exposing disinformation campaigns, and strengthening the integrity of the media environment — a bedrock of thriving democracies.

USAGM's journalists counter these campaigns by broadcasting accurate, trusted, and reliable news and information. Continued modernization is essential for USAGM to effectively compete with the increasingly successful efforts of adversarial governments and violent extremists.

Mission: How We Support U.S. Interests

Guided by its mission **to inform, engage, and connect people around the world in support of freedom and democracy**, and with its first-rate global communications capacity, USAGM is uniquely capable of defending press freedom and access to information in some of the most challenging markets for journalists.

The mission of the agency, and its foundational journalistic charter, remain as relevant as ever to the national security of the United States. Consistent with the American values of free speech and free expression, USAGM networks advance U.S. national interests by providing audiences in closed societies, or where free media is not yet fully established, with consistently accurate reporting and other content that opens minds and stimulates debate. Even as repressive actors around the world work to keep information from their citizens and propagate false realities through disinformation, USAGM networks inform, engage, and connect these very populations in support of freedom and democracy. Professional journalism and related support for sustainable independent media have enduring value in helping

to foster free, open, democratic societies, supporting a shared conception of truth and the foundational norms of the international system. That is why they are critical to U.S. national interests and foreign policy, and why USAGM's role in supporting their development matters.

Nandar Chann and Saw Phoe Khwar on the RFA Burmese Service's "Evening Show."

JOURNALISTIC CHARTER AND FIREWALL

Since their founding, the networks of USAGM have been dedicated to journalistic accuracy and objectivity.

From its very first broadcast in German in 1942, VOA made this commitment to its audiences: "The news may be good for us. The news may be bad. But we shall tell you the truth."

In 1976, President Gerald Ford signed the principles of the VOA Charter into law:

The long-range interests of the United States are served by communicating directly with the peoples of the world by radio. To be effective, the Voice of America must win the attention and respect of listeners. These principles will therefore govern Voice of America (VOA) broadcasts.

> **1. VOA will serve as a consistently reliable and authoritative source of news. VOA news will be accurate, objective, and comprehensive.**

> **2. VOA will represent America, not any single segment of American society, and will therefore present a balanced and comprehensive projection of significant American thought and institutions.**

> **3. VOA will present the policies of the United States clearly and effectively, and will also present responsible discussions and opinion on these policies.**

These are now enshrined in the U.S. International Broadcasting Act of 1994, as amended. That Act also sets forth fundamental broadcasting principles for all USAGM networks, including the requirements that United States international broadcasting shall include:

- **news which is consistently reliable and authoritative, accurate, objective, and comprehensive;**

- **a balanced and comprehensive projection of United States thought and institutions, reflecting the diversity of United States culture and society;**

- **programming to meet needs which remain unserved by the totality of media voices available to the people of certain nations;**

- **information about developments in each significant region of the world;**

- **a variety of opinions and voices from within particular nations and regions prevented by censorship or repression from speaking to their fellow countrymen;**

- **reliable research capacity;**

- **adequate transmitter and relay capacity; and**

- **training and technical support for independent indigenous media through government agencies or private United States entities.**

That Act also established the core principles of a firewall to preserve the editorial independence of USAGM networks. The firewall prohibits interference by U.S. government officials in the objective and independent reporting of news by the agency's networks, thereby safeguarding the ability of USAGM journalists to develop content that reflects the highest professional standards of journalism, free of political interference.

Vision: How We Achieve our Mission

USAGM is setting out a vision to **ensure access to trusted, compelling, and impactful content** in order to create a robust response to censorship and disinformation and support democratic ideals and values.

Trust

Trust begins with an unbreakable pledge to audiences to ensure independent reporting without bias or prejudice, accompanied by training and oversight to ensure that the journalism of every language service meets the highest possible standards and ethics. It requires a collective effort to prioritize editorial transparency and accountability, the acquisition of additional fact-checking and fact-finding capabilities, implementing advanced and ongoing training to ensure journalistic excellence, and recruiting expertise across the agency's networks. The result will strengthen a global network of highly capable journalists combatting disinformation campaigns around the world with factual and captivating content, reporting in the preferred languages of our priority audiences.

Prioritizing trust and journalistic independence ensures internal attention and resources are focused on the integrity of the journalism. But trust and independence must be paired with a specific, and tangible, outward-focused value proposition — *creating compelling and impactful content* — to ensure this trust is leveraged to fulfill the agency's mission.

Compelling and Impactful Content

Creating *compelling and impactful content* requires the agency's networks to develop programming that adds significant value compared to competitors, including reporting from places where others cannot or will not. This content must be tailored to meet the needs of local target audiences and be curated with the purpose of supporting an active and democratic citizenry. Compelling content is not an end in and of itself, nor is programming impactful if it is unable to draw a meaningful audience. Putting resources toward producing content that is both compelling and impactful is essential to ensure USAGM's programs are able to attract new audiences, while also improving the quality of the democratic experience.

In the modern media marketplace, news organizations often find themselves trying to adopt every new platform in every target market. This can result in stretching resources so thinly that content is rarely effectively tailored for a specific platform, and thoughtful projects may be overlooked for the sake of trying to be everywhere, all the time. Similarly, linear broadcasting, whereby audiences access content at a specific time,

via a specific platform, is increasingly outdated. Accessing content on-demand is the new norm for more and more media consumers around the world. It is difficult to overstate the potential significance of this shift to USAGM's operations. Long-standing models for effective news organizations are being turned on their heads, and the currency of success is no longer being everywhere for everyone. Instead, the most effective news organizations must have a clear sense of their target audience, an ability to articulate a specific editorial proposition for these audiences, and the ability to follow through with authentic and meaningful content.

To take advantage of these shifts, USAGM will adopt a quality-over-quantity approach. Stories and programs that do not add significant value to an existing market will be de-emphasized in favor of original and unique content that aims to improve the democratic and lived experience of our target audiences. Impactful journalism in authoritarian countries and places of conflict can put journalists and their sources in harm's way, so USAGM will also prioritize the training and tools necessary to ensure their physical and digital security. Prioritizing the compelling and impactful content that USAGM networks can uniquely produce will provide much needed focus as the agency and its networks go about implementing this strategic plan. Resources will shift towards brands and projects that add clear value to a given market, and that are curated to support an engaged, responsible, and thoughtful citizenry.

Implementation of this approach will vary from market to market, but it will require increased investment in innovation, new

technology, and specific tools and expertise, including in visual storytelling, as well as a detailed understanding of each USAGM market and target audience. Media technology has shifted dramatically in recent years, opening up new opportunities for cloud-based, story-centric production and distribution. To reach new generations of audiences, USAGM must be forward-thinking and innovative, investing in the technology and expertise to compete in our rapidly changing global markets.

We must leverage the technological and entrepreneurial talent that audiences expect from a U.S.-based media enterprise and deploy this expertise to engage vulnerable and underserved audiences, including young people, women, and marginalized populations to ensure USAGM will achieve the greatest impact. Remaining competitive will also require a renewed commitment to a robust toolkit of research and analytics, in order to continually identify and prioritize the types of content that are both compelling and impactful.

Ensuring Access

Ensuring access for all our audiences despite increasing authoritarian attempts to close information flows both inside and outside their countries is central to our mission. Facilitating access requires leveraging existing tools and the incubation of next-generation technologies to ensure that, even in the most restricted environments, factual journalism can prevail in the face of censorship and dis- and mis-information. This requires continued focus on circumvention tools that allow users to access websites and digital properties that are otherwise blocked, as

Police arrest a man during a march calling for the release of jailed opposition leader Aleksei Navalny in Kazan, Tatarstan, Russia on January 31, 2021. Andrey Grigore (RFE/RL)

well as secure communication platforms that enable safe communication between journalists and their sources, and facilitation of the sharing of our content. Beyond enabling technical access, USAGM also needs to prioritize the promotion of our content, especially in highly competitive markets where there are numerous brands competing for attention.

Guaranteeing this access will require additional investment in the development and testing of new tools, training and marketing to increase awareness of these products, and robust engagement with the private sector on implementing circumvention and secure communication tools at scale across platforms.

Combined, focusing on building trust, producing compelling and impactful content, and ensuring access to the global marketplace of ideas provides a path for expanding the population of informed, engaged citizens who are more invested in democratic systems of government and far less vulnerable to disinformation.

Overarching Strategic Goals: The Impact of our Work

USAGM's mission of supporting freedom and democracy is defined by two overarching, long-term strategic goals: (1) expanding freedom of information and expression, and (2) sharing America's democratic experience and values.

The goals flow directly from the U.S. International Broadcasting Act, USAGM's enabling legislation. Congress mandates USAGM to do accurate, credible, and comprehensive news coverage; to represent American society; and to present and discuss U.S. policy — all consistent with the standards of professional journalism and with independence and integrity. According to the International Broadcasting Act, by carrying out this mission the Agency "contributes to international peace and stability" and serves "to support freedom and democracy — in a rapidly changing international environment."

Both of these goals serve to further the USAGM mission, as free press and free expression are universally acknowledged as key to open, democratic societies.

Expanding Freedom of Information and Expression

Expanding the number of free, open, democratic societies supports U.S. interests because democratic countries enjoy greater stability and prosperity, live in peace with their neighbors, reject terrorism and extrem-

ism, and make better political allies and trade partners for the United States.

This work in support of democracy supports key efforts outlined in the Administration's National Security Strategy:

We will work to strengthen democracy around the world because democratic governance consistently outperforms authoritarianism in protecting human dignity, leads to more prosperous and resilient societies, creates stronger and more reliable economic and security partners for the United States, and encourages a peaceful world order.

We see the role of journalism in supporting free, democratic, and peaceful societies in the daily work of USAGM networks around the world as follows:

- In **Ukraine**, where Russia's invasion brought chaos and carnage as well as disinformation campaigns and threats to free media, USAGM networks surged breaking news coverage and expert perspectives on the war for audiences around the region and throughout the world.

- In **Russia** and **Belarus**, where growing opposition and dissent have been met with unprecedented crackdowns, USAGM networks provide breaking news coverage, analysis, and diverse perspectives, in the face of growing threats to press freedom, heightened propaganda, and sophisticated disinformation campaigns.

- In **China** and **North Korea**, USAGM reporters have been able to tap into networks of local sources and utilize the latest open-source intelligence-gathering techniques to tell the world about the genocide in Xinjiang, the increasingly aggressive crackdown on dissent within China, and the looming humanitarian crisis in the DPRK.

- From Central Asia to the Middle East, the Sahel and beyond, USAGM counters violent extremist propaganda with discussions of the root causes of extremism, challenge its ideological dimensions, and explore solutions to issues such as poverty, marginalization and accountable governance.

- From Latin America to Africa to Southeast Asia, our networks offer unique reporting with an independent perspective on China's global expansion efforts, and the cascading effects on local societies, economies, and media landscapes.

- In countries like **Russia**, **China**, **Iran**, **Burma**, and **Cuba**, we combat censorship by supporting cutting-edge open internet and circumvention tools that enable USAGM and other journalists to report throughout political upheaval and uncover major stories such as high-level

corruption and human rights atrocities, and to deliver those stories to audiences seeking accurate news and international perspectives from behind digital firewalls.

In this July 11, 2021 photo, plainclothes police detain an anti-government protester during a demonstration over high prices, food shortages and power outages, while some also called for a change in the government, in Havana, Cuba. (AP Photo/ Ramon Espinosa)

- In places that have suffered natural disasters and violent conflict, from **Haiti** to **Afghanistan** and **Ethiopia**, we provide a humanitarian lifeline of fact-based and current information to people in extreme distress.

- During global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, USAGM provides reliable, life-saving information to hundreds of millions about how to manage their health, avoid misinformation, and understand the rapidly changing circumstances around them.

- In providing independent, comprehensive, and objective news coverage, and in promoting media literacy and civic engagement, USAGM helps to enhance societal resilience, providing for a strong, proactive defense against propaganda and disinformation.

Sharing America's Democratic Experience and Values

Sharing America's democratic experience and values serves the same purpose. In covering the United States, USAGM's networks open a window into democracy in action in our society. The networks — particularly VOA and MBN — cover the fullness of the American experience in all its diversity and complexity. They share the nation's democratic journey so that audiences struggling to establish, nurture, or sustain their own democratic systems might see their stories reflected in ours. This role is more important than ever due to the distortion of U.S. policy and society by adversarial media outlets controlled by foreign-state and non-state actors.

VOA Russia Service reporter Victoria Kupchinetsky reporting on the Democratic Party primary elections in New York City in June 2020.

Conveying and critically assessing official U.S. policy — what it is, which parts of our government make and articulate it, and how there are at times sharp policy differences —

is a key component of America's story. U.S. leadership in the world depends, in part, on global audiences knowing where the United States stands on the issues of the day, and what other governments think of the U.S. positions on those issues.

The five USAGM networks, along with OTF, pursue the USAGM mission and strategic goals through complementary, reinforcing roles. RFE/RL, RFA, and OCB act as surrogate broadcasters that emphasize local and regional news for their geographically defined audiences. Their specialty is covering developments specific to defined target markets, most notably in countries without a free press or in transition between free and repressive systems. At the same time, each also covers limited regional and international issues and events (including those in the United States, as warranted) to ensure comprehensive news coverage. VOA emphasizes international and regional news and in-depth coverage of the United States. The network also covers significant domestic events to ensure comprehensive news coverage, especially in areas where it is the only USAGM presence, such as sub-Saharan Africa. MBN provides a full range of international, regional, and local news in Arabic as well as thorough coverage of the United States and American society, culture, and politics. Finally, OTF supports global internet freedom, countering repressive censorship and surveillance and enabling citizens worldwide to exercise their fundamental human rights online.

English teachers attend training at Camp 4 refugee camp in Cox's Bazar Mar. 30, 2019. (VOA)

COMMITMENT TO EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY, EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

In pursuing its goals, USAGM is committed to promoting equal employment opportunity (EEO), equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in all aspects of employment and professional development. USAGM sees this as the work of all managers and employees, applying both in serving our audiences and in managing our workforce.

USAGM is committed to incorporating principles of EEO and EDI as core values to create an inclusive environment and culture for everyone with unique differences and shared values. Empowering a workforce that includes diversity of thought, diversity in its people, and diversity in its business practices demonstrates that we are capable of understanding and responding effectively to the needs of our workforce and to our mission. We pledge to create and promote a workplace free from discrimination, where the talents of all individuals are recognized and appreciated.

This commitment to EEO and EDI plays a particularly important role in Agility Objective (4):

- Foster engagement, development, and equity in a diverse workforce.

Impact and Agility Objectives

To support USAGM's mission and vision, we have developed two sets of objectives to underscore two key themes — Impact and Agility.

"IMPACT" is the concrete change that happens in the world as a result of our work. It reflects our effectiveness in planning, execution of our mission, and measuring our results. "AGILITY" means being structured, organized, and equipped to do our work in the most efficient, flexible way possible, able to adapt to fast-changing media markets and short-notice global developments, and to hold ourselves accountable for success — as measured by the agency's ability to support the mission of all its networks and grantees. Agility begins with our mindset and encompasses our content production, technology, and support services organized to support our core functions.

What follows are eight impact objectives and four agility objectives that drill down into the specific work of the agency in support of the goals and the mission. These objectives will be pursued at the agency level through the strategies listed below and assessed by annual measurable performance goals. For simplicity of presentation, examples of these performance goals for each objective are given below. The full performance goals, with measurable targets, can be found in the Performance Budget section of the Congressional Budget Justification. In addition, these objectives are carried out through the annual formulation of strategic audiences, goals, tactics, and targets by each USAGM language service — ensuring connection between the overall strategy and what is implemented on the ground.

Mission:

To inform, engage, and connect people around the world in support of freedom and democracy

Strategic Goals:

Expand freedom of information and expression

Share America's democratic experience and values

Objectives:

Impact Objectives

Agility Objectives

IMPACT OBJECTIVES:

1 Produce and curate compelling and impactful content that audiences use and trust

2 Prioritize audiences that are information-denied or targets of dis-information and extremist rhetoric

3 Reach and engage underserved audiences, including women, youth, and marginalized populations

4 Overcome censorship to ensure access and connect audiences in closed societies

5 Optimize program delivery and digital engagement

6 Engage and empower local media and populations

7 Serve as an authoritative source of information on U.S. news, policy, and society

8 Serve as a surrogate news operation, delivering information otherwise not available in local markets

AGILITY OBJECTIVES:

1 Manage a nimble, resilient, sustainable, efficient, and mission-focused modern media enterprise

2 Enhance transparency, communication, and strategic cooperation across USAGM networks and offices

3 Enable greater impact and accountability through data-driven evaluation and decision-making

4 Foster engagement, development, and equity in a diverse workforce

Impact Objective 1

Produce and curate compelling and impactful content that audiences use and trust

Journalism is the daily work of USAGM networks, and building trust in that journalism is paramount. Creating compelling and impactful content requires the agency's networks to create programming that provides unique value in comparison to competitors, is tailored to meet the needs of local target audiences, and is curated with the purpose of supporting an active and democratic citizenry. This task requires the networks' rigorous adherence to the highest professional standards of journalism and the agency's preservation of the editorial firewall that protects programming from outside interference.

USAGM and its networks will:

- Preserve the editorial firewall, protecting the independence and integrity of the networks' journalism through defined rules, regulations, and processes;

- Provide news and other programming that is accurate, objective, and comprehensive and in accordance with the highest professional standards of journalism;

- Produce news and information, consistent with audience needs and mission requirements, on issues that are not addressed adequately by media in the target area;

- Offer relevant and informative content that research, web analytics, and audience and affiliate feedback show is of vital interest to audiences, including reporting on health, climate, and technology;

- Produce enterprise reporting through deep and agenda-setting exploration of critical issues; and

- Curate content from and co-create content with reputable partners, as consistent with agency standards and editorial guidelines.

Examples of performance goals (and measures):

- Reach significant audiences (measured weekly audiences)

- Provide programming that audiences find trustworthy (program credibility)

- Strengthen processes, rules, and guidance designed to reinforce good journalistic governance and protect editorial independence

Left: Ginny Niwa and Roger Muntu, hosts of VOA
French to Africa Service's "Vous et Nous" in the studio.

Impact Objective 2

Prioritize audiences that are information-denied or targets of disinformation and extremist rhetoric

In choosing languages and target areas, USAGM considers the local media situation, along with U.S. strategic interests, and prioritizes countries that lack a free or developed press. Special consideration is given to populations in information-denied environments and at risk due to disinformation campaigns, extremist propaganda, and digital authoritarianism.

USAGM prioritizes reaching audiences in areas where extremist and foreign propaganda stymie free, open, democratic societies, thus threatening U.S. and regional security. Another key focus area is audiences subjected to censorship and state-sponsored disinformation campaigns, which seek to undermine democratic norms and the very idea of objective truth.

USAGM and its networks will:

- Prioritize countries lacking freedom and democracy or faced with disinformation or extremism, where accurate, credible news and information are lacking. Enhance services to these areas, where feasible;

- Introduce service in selected new languages to reach sizable new audiences in countries where USAGM products are urgently needed;

- Serve as a conduit for the transmission of reporting from inside closed societies lacking press freedom to outside audiences through expanded translation capabilities;

- Use a broad range of tools to respond to disinformation, including creating compelling original content, fact-checking, exposing disinformation campaigns, and ensuring secure access to uncensored platforms;

- Ensure strong local news coverage, as warranted by events, to meet urgent audience needs in areas of crisis; and

- Draw on the experiences of the world's many models of free societies, in particular the U.S., to present a broad array of political views and debates.

Examples of performance goals (and measures):

- Achieve significant audience reach in environments subject to extremist rhetoric and violence, including Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan (measured weekly audience in target countries).

- Reach audiences in information-denied environments, including China, Iran, and Cuba (measured weekly audience in target countries).

- Reach audiences in environments targeted by state-sponsored disinformation and influence campaigns (measured weekly audience in target countries).

- Explore technologies, including AI and machine learning tools, for monitoring at scale the performance of malign-actor narratives in comparison to factual and objective reporting from USAGM networks; incorporate related metrics into subsequent performance reporting.

Alhurra reporting from a refugee camp in Lebanon.

Impact Objective 3

Reach and engage underserved audiences, including women, youth, and marginalized populations

In all target markets, the USAGM networks seek to grow their audience base and reach those traditionally underserved by USAGM broadcasts. In many contexts, USAGM audiences have skewed older and male. Populations in the target countries are overwhelmingly young — a challenge, but also a chance to connect with a demographic that in many cases is unfamiliar with USAGM's networks and brands. The agency strives to serve the information needs of other marginalized populations, including refugees, religious and ethnic minorities, diaspora communities, people with disabilities, and sexual minorities.

USAGM and its networks will:

- Reach out to groups in target markets that traditionally have been underserved by news media, including women and youth, as well as refugee communities, with compelling programming that will inform and empower them;

- Increase the visibility in programming of members of underserved groups, especially encouraging their participation as authoritative experts, and address issues of concern and relevance to their lives;

- Sharpen audience segmentation and targeting to drive content strategies and better address gender and age demographics, as well as psychographic segments; and

- Increase research to understand societal and systemic issues that influence media use by underserved audiences in order to adjust content and delivery decisions.

Examples of performance goals (and measures):

- Increase reach among traditionally underserved demographics, including youth and women.

Impact Objective 4

Overcome censorship to ensure access and connect audiences in closed societies

For almost 70 years, U.S. international broadcasting has fought censorship in all its forms. Today, as the global media environment continues to rapidly evolve, access to free and independent media is in decline. Digital censorship and jamming of radio and TV broadcasts, including those of USAGM, are growing in key markets. Journalists suffer harassment and violence daily. Media laws often restrict free flows of information, limiting the ability of international news organizations to distribute their content. The internet in particular is under assault as individual countries aggressively implement sophisticated digital firewalls and surveillance systems to censor and control digital ecosystems, preventing audiences from freely exploring and sharing our content on digital platforms.

USAGM upholds the universal right of citizens everywhere to receive and impart information without restriction. The agency works on many fronts to make news and information accessible to its global audiences with the aim of enabling not only unfettered access to network content but also the full spectrum of independent news sources on the internet.

USAGM and its networks will:

- Lead in assisting the world's citizens to gain uncensored access to information on all platforms, advocating for this fundamental human right on the international stage, and coordinating within the U.S. government and with international broadcasters and other allies;

- Help audiences understand the practices and consequences of internet censorship and surveillance;

- Fund and promote technologies and train journalists to adopt tools and applications that counter internet censorship and internet blocking and allow citizens and journalists to operate securely online;

- Increase effective and safe use of social media and digital platforms to combat censorship and increase audience access points;

- Provide in-house digital expertise, working closely with journalists, to address real-time censorship and jamming issues in targeted regions; and

- Cultivate information-sharing relationships and partnerships on internet freedom matters with interagency partners, nonprofits, and the private sector.

Example of performance goal (and measures):

- Increase usage of internet freedom products (weekly unique users of proxy tools, weekly visits to USAGM sites through proxy tools)

MBN reporter on the ground.

Impact Objective 5

Optimize program delivery and digital engagement

To be effective, USAGM networks must have a clear sense of their target audiences, the ability to articulate a specific editorial proposition for these audiences, and the capability to follow through with authentic and meaningful content. USAGM will adopt a quality-over-quantity approach, de-emphasizing stories and programs that do not add significant value to an existing market in favor of original and unique content that aims to improve the democratic and lived experience of our target audiences. USAGM will continue to grow and enhance new distribution methods, with specific attention to reaching audiences on their preferred media platforms.

USAGM and its networks will:

- Increase distribution on platforms that audiences use — social media, FM, satellite, and digital and broadcast television — migrating away from legacy platforms where they do not reach large or target audiences;

- Expand reach on digital platforms, including new streaming and over-the-top platforms, with compelling content and tailored formats;

- Where possible, take advantage of the interactivity of social media platforms to focus on audience participation and engagement;

- Draw on research and other inputs to tailor format and presentation styles to audience needs and media usage habits, emphasizing high-quality, unique content that can break through saturated information ecosystems;

- Modernize USAGM production and distribution capabilities to support growing audience appetite for visual storytelling and incorporate new story-centric production methodologies; and

- Closely monitor shifts in content consumption by young audiences to identify emerging digital platforms for adoption.

Examples of performance goals (and measures):

- Increase web traffic (weekly visits to websites)

- Increase audience interaction via social media (weekly digital engagement actions)

Impact Objective 6

Engage and empower local media and populations

Local media affiliates are the primary means through which the USAGM networks reach their target audiences in most markets. Deepening the relationship with these media partners assists not only with content delivery but also in fostering rich, open media ecosystems. The agency leads by example in its journalistic practices and increasingly partners with affiliates on content co-creation. Our professionals also provide training to indigenous media on topics ranging from journalism principles to business practices. In a similar way, USAGM works to connect audiences to one another and to foster the free flow of information, often through a wide array of web, mobile, and social media tools. These tools have made media personal, moving the power from centralized broadcasters to a new class of influencers, activists, videographers, and a content-generating public. They are using media not only to tell their stories on a digital world stage but also to connect with one another to chart the future of their communities and build new forms of civil society.

USAGM and its networks will:

- Expand local distribution, promotions, and co-productions through affiliation with strong local television and FM radio stations and digital platforms;

- Deepen relationships with key local media affiliates, providing editorial guidance, co-production opportunities, and other resources to strengthen local, independent media sectors;

- Offer training and technical assistance to local journalists on a range of topics, including journalistic standards, business practices, and safety and security;

- Nurture good journalism practices and leverage vetted, verified user-generated content from inside repressive states;

- Link democratically oriented citizens within repressive societies to one another and to key influencers through social media and training alumni networks;

- Facilitate dialogue across religious, national, and ethnic groups; and

- Continuously converse with USAGM audiences by using social media tools to identify, source, and distribute news content into the channels where people are having conversations about their community and the world.

Examples of performance goals (and measures):

- Build strong affiliate relationships (number of affiliations)

- Increase engagement with local media outlets (number of affiliate networks that serve multiple cities or markets, weekly downloads from affiliate content distribution portal, number of journalists trained)

- Increase sharing of USAGM programming (percent of weekly audience that share content)

During this international media training with affiliates in Cote d'Ivoire, participants learned skills in fact-checking and fighting disinformation.

Impact Objective 7

Serve as an authoritative source of information on U.S. news, policy, and society

Representing American society and presenting and discussing U.S. policy are legislated mandates for the agency and thus constitute mission imperatives, especially for VOA, OCB, and MBN. Their coverage of the U.S. is comprehensive across all elements of society and aims to convey the practice of democracy in all of its complexity in the most credible way. It is not about persuading audiences to admire the U.S.; it is about helping them see how the U.S. manages the challenges of a democratic society – from economic growth to fiscal crises to race relations to educating youth to addressing environmental change. These topic areas find ready comparisons in USAGM's target countries and resonate with audiences in practical, meaningful ways.

Carrying out this element of our mission requires sensitivity and creativity. Currents of anti-Americanism still run strong in some parts of the world, necessitating deft outreach that stresses dialogue, not monologue. The way people interact with media today, with emphasis on interaction, further affirms this approach. At the same time, America's still dominant role on the global stage makes it a focal point of international attention, and its national language is the one that tens of millions of people around the world seek to learn. VOA, in particular, is uniquely mandated and positioned to leverage these advantages to connect with diverse international audiences, serving as a U.S. news bureau for affiliate partners and providing English-learning programming.

USAGM and its networks will:

- Expand the successful U.S. bureau model to more media outlets across the world that wish to engage with us for news, analysis, and perspectives from the United States — building on success in Ukraine, Latin America, Nigeria, Indonesia, and elsewhere;

- Portray the breadth and diversity of the American experience, both positive and negative, with particular attention to diaspora communities and Americans outside of major cities;

- Expand fact-checking sites to timely debunk bad actors' narratives undermining U.S. values and its relationship with allies.

- Emphasize English learning as a vehicle for positive audience engagement and interaction as well as information on American society and culture;

- Leverage the global interest in American politics with in-depth coverage and analysis of national elections and coverage of other political events to impart the news and to elucidate the democratic process, while localizing stories to make them compelling to target audiences; and

- Satisfy the world's growing appetite for learning English through innovative social media videos, TV and radio programs, and online instruction.

Example of performance goal (and measures):

- Provide programming that increases audiences' understanding of the U. S. (understanding of American society, understanding of U.S. foreign policy)

VOA Ukrainian reporting from the Capitol in Washington, DC.

Impact Objective 8

Serve as a surrogate news operation, delivering information otherwise not available in local markets

In markets without an established free press, or where state-run media are dominant, the USAGM networks play a surrogate role, fulfilling the role of highly professionalized local press. In this role, the networks emphasize domestic news for their geographically defined audiences and cover developments specific to defined target markets, especially in fragile democracies. Programming focuses on local news events not covered in state-controlled domestic media, as well as other sensitive topics, including religion, science, and locally banned literature and music. In turn, the networks give voice to underserved populations, dissidents, and civil society — while maintaining balanced coverage — and serve as platforms for a range of opinions and voices from these countries.

USAGM and its networks will:

- Build strong networks of local stringers across target regions;

- Where possible, maintain a robust on-the-ground bureau presence, to report local news from a local perspective;

- Where in-country access is limited, cultivate networks of trusted contributors and influencers and closely monitor official and alternative media;

- Use social media and other interactive tools to gather information from closed societies, amplifying the voices of those struggling for free expression; and

- Provide platforms for free expression of various viewpoints and work to help people bridge traditional divides, including class, ethnicity, and religion.

Examples of performance goals (and measures):

- Provide programming that increases audiences' understanding of current events in target countries (understanding of current events in target country)

- Provide exceptional news and information (uniqueness)

RFA reporter interviews villagers in Kondeang District, Pursat Province about land conflict involved a Vietnamese association took villagers' land to make burial grounds.

Agility Objective 1

Manage a nimble, resilient, sustainable, efficient, and mission-focused modern media enterprise

By virtue of historical circumstance, USAGM's operations fall under six separate entities and respective support organizations. This structure has resulted in strong and trusted brands, but it presents challenges with federal and non-federal components operating under different legal and administrative frameworks. USAGM must maintain a focus on the missions of its networks and grantees, and it must have the agility to operate in a rapidly evolving and challenging global media environment with the simplification, standardization, or interoperability of tools and processes to enable nimble resource allocations and rapid evolution to location-independent collaborative cloud-based workflows. The agency continues to transform its operations in order to fulfill its charter and meet the challenges of growing geopolitical instability, technological change, and growing threats to free media.

USAGM and its networks will:

- Coordinate the allocation of resources through standardization and interoperability;

- Assess the usefulness of the hybrid grantee-government network model now in place;

- Evaluate and seek opportunities to move the federal elements of the agency from outdated and inefficient facilities to modern, cost-effective new headquarters, while updating the agency's media production infrastructure to better meet current and future audience needs;

- Modernize its technological platforms and workflows, enabling it to seamlessly meet and exceed global standards in content creation, acquisition, and distribution, while closely tracking and adjusting to audience consumption behaviors;

- Assess and update internal processes and procedures for simplicity, efficiency, and mission-focus;

- Streamline and, where possible, automate business processes and workflows;

- Employ cloud-based and other technologies to maximize nimbleness, resilience, and cost savings;

- Evaluate the utilization of new corporate or governance structures to most effectively and efficiently carry out agency oversight responsibilities;

- Ensure the safety and security of our journalists, wherever they are, through systems to monitor and improve responsiveness and efficacy of safety measures;

- Ensure that all USAGM journalists are given the tools and training they need to stay secure and to practice the highest possible standards and ethics;

- Protect USAGM from persistent threats posed by state and non-state actors through enhancements to its cybersecurity posture;

- Improve the environmental sustainability of agency operations;

- Leverage new hybrid, mobile, and agile workflows to reduce physical space requirements;

Examples of performance goals (and measures):

- Streamline program delivery (milestones related to shifting to more efficient delivery pathways)

- Automate and streamline key business processes (milestones related to business system automation)

- Develop and monitor goals and targets to track network and other internal customer perceptions of process improvements.

- Develop and track participation in safety and security training programs for journalists.

Agility Objective 2

Enhance transparency, communication, and strategic cooperation across USAGM networks and offices

USAGM is one of the world's largest newsgathering and reporting enterprises with 50 overseas news bureaus and production centers, 3,500 employees, and 2,800 stringers and freelancers. Each of the agency's five public service media networks generates original reporting every day from in and around the world's hotspots — including Afghanistan, Burma, China, Haiti, Iran, North Korea, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, the Caucasus and Central Asia, the Sahel and Central Africa, Syria, Venezuela, and Yemen — primarily in vernacular languages for target audiences in these areas.

The themes covered in original reporting from these locations — highlighting human rights, authoritarian repression, disinformation campaigns, etc. — resonate with audiences around the world. USAGM's networks strive to make this content available in English and vernacular languages to serve broader audiences. Specifically, the agency facilitates communication and coordination among broadcast networks and support offices, reinforcing their unique and respective mission-driven legislated roles in areas served by multiple broadcasters. The agency will continue to collaborate with other U.S. government entities on areas of shared interest or concern.

USAGM and its networks will:

- Improve internal communication and transparency of shared support services operations;

- Ensure coordinated and complementary mission-driven operations and content in markets served by two USAGM media entities;

- Build and sustain internal content-sharing mechanisms, aligning internal editorial support and coordination, as needed;

- Develop content-sharing mechanisms to channel original reporting from the language services to the central newsrooms and across USAGM to fully leverage the agency's expansive global network of field-based reporters;

- Better leverage newsgathering, including stringer and correspondent networks or rotating correspondents, across USAGM to ensure editorial coordination and avoid redundancy;

- Align all support functions to USAGM's vision, strategic priorities, and goals; and

- Participate in inter-agency meetings, committees, and strategies in support of U.S. government priorities to ensure that USAGM capabilities, expertise, actions, and impact are fully and accurately shared with other government entities.

Examples of performance goals (and measures):

- Support network-led initiatives to share content across networks and services (milestones related to collaboration initiatives)

- Build systems to support sharing content across networks and services (milestones related to content systems)

- Improve platforms for and increase engagement with agency-wide communication tools.

Agility Objective 3

Enable greater impact and accountability through data-driven evaluation and decision-making

USAGM is focused on improving the collection, distribution, and use of research, evaluation, and performance data to facilitate informed strategic decisions. The agency organizes this work around an impact framework that outlines how it measures effectiveness in achieving the mission. In ongoing efforts to implement contemporary media practices and maintain competitive relevance in the marketplace, USAGM has developed a strong body of evidence to address these questions and is actively working to standardize, consolidate, and govern this data to make it more accessible and actionable for decision-makers at all levels.

USAGM and its networks will:

- Annually collect data measuring audience size and impact, even in closed societies;

- Establish and maintain a robust data management system standardizing practices for storing, processing, accessing, and analyzing data to accurately measure USAGM impact, reach, and credibility;

- Prioritize evaluation and learning agendas to ensure that data and corresponding analysis continuously inform decision-making processes;

- Develop data evaluation skills across the workforce and feed impact data into planning and decision-making at all levels of the agency; and

- Continue to implement and refine the USAGM Impact Model as needed to reflect changes in media consumption in target markets.

Examples of performance goals (and measures):

- Strengthen research program (number of full media surveys and omnibus surveys within the last two fiscal years)

- Conduct rigorous annual content reviews for each language service (percentage of language services with completed program review)

- Build systems and processes to support data-driven evaluation and decision-making (milestones for instituting evidence best practices and establishing unified data system)

Pedestrians use their smartphones to surf the Internet by the roadside in Hong Kong, China. (Imaginechina via AP Images)

Agility Objective 4

Foster engagement, development, and equity in a diverse workforce

USAGM's diverse, multi-cultural, and multi-talented workforce offers a rich range of experience and expertise to carry out the agency's mission. In order to succeed in the rapidly changing, highly competitive global media environment, this workforce needs the right skillsets to develop and implement innovative solutions for target countries consistent with emerging priorities, programming formats, and advances in technology.

Additionally, employees and contractors will be most effective when they are fully engaged, motivated, and respected. Equity needs to be the job of every office, manager, and employee, empowering a workforce that includes diversity of thought, diversity in its people, and diversity in its business practices. Employees must be evaluated fairly; thus, USAGM has renewed its focus on personnel appraisals and is currently undertaking several initiatives that will strengthen this important accountability tool. In addition, USAGM is dedicated to recruiting and retaining an inclusive and diverse workforce.

USAGM and its networks will:

- Create and promote a workplace where the talents of all individuals are recognized and appreciated;

- Enhance recruitment, hiring, and personnel management policies that advance inclusion and diversity;

- Increase non-traditional accessions and expedite hiring;

- Explore creative and adaptive workforce retention policies for mission-critical skills;

- Improve workforce career development to ensure we are an employer of choice;

- Support the health and wellness of all employees and contractors and ensure a safe and secure work environment for all;

- Consistently communicate organizational goals, objectives, priorities, and performance expectations in a timely manner to staff at all levels in the agency;

- Develop cross-training and internal development standards and procedures, as applicable;

- Promote human capital planning and management as a top priority for senior executives, managers, and supervisors throughout the agency; and

- Improve the consistency and credibility of agency performance management processes.

Examples of performance goals (and measures):

- Improve workforce engagement (FEVS engagement index score among federal workforce)

- Address equity and increase diversity in management (percentage of GS-14 and above employees who are minorities and women)

Building Evidence and Measuring Success

Executing on the vision of this Strategic Plan requires enhanced capabilities for the collection, distribution, and use of research, evaluation, and performance data to inform decisions.

The scaffolding for this approach is in place — aligned with Agility Objective 3: Enable greater impact and accountability through data-driven evaluation and decision-making. USAGM has an established and updated impact framework with pillars representing the key questions that define whether we are effective in achieving our mission (described in the appendix). The agency has also developed a strong body of evidence to address these questions, drawn from survey research, digital analytics, and structured, verified case studies.

USAGM uses this evidence in its strategy and decision-making processes, including Language Service Review, which encompasses the agency's annual assessment of broadcast languages and the process through which each network sets annual strategies for all of its language services.

In order to empower leaders at every level of the organization to make smart, data-driven decisions, USAGM needs to further integrate this evidence into its strategy and decision-making processes. This plan requires an enhanced focus on collecting and managing a diverse body of evidence, new tools for analysis, and improved capabilities for ensuring data and evidence are accessible and usable across the agency and its networks in real-time. It also requires a systematic capacity to not only track key performance indicators, but also to learn from what works, what does not, and to be able to understand why. This learning component is essential to establish best practices across the agency and empower decision-makers to align their resources with the services, tools, and programs most likely to result in demonstrable, mission-focused impact.

The next steps in advancing this initiative will focus on making this diverse body of evidence more available and more useful to agency employees and leadership at all levels.

The next steps in advancing this initiative will focus on making this diverse body of evidence more available and more useful to agency employees and leadership at all levels. In the coming years, our plans include:

Georgians rally in support of Mikheil Saakashvili, who was on hunger strike in prison, on November 15, 2021 in Tbilisi. Mzia Saganelidze (RFE/RL)

- Adopting best practices outlined in the Evidence Act, including conducting a formal Capacity Assessment and drafting a Learning Agenda and Annual Evaluation Plans;

- Deploying more resources to collect data from target countries more frequently; and

- Building an enterprise Data Management System to bring all audience data assets together, allowing for greater automation and analysis.

Stakeholder Engagement

In developing this 2022-2026 Strategic Plan, USAGM consulted a broad range of stakeholders at all levels, within the agency and outside.

The development of this plan began with consultations with leadership teams at all USAGM networks and offices. Through a series of 14 meetings with 57 individuals, the strategic planning team gathered over 323 data points and used a design thinking process to cluster and draw insights from the feedback. These findings, along with consideration of administration priorities, led directly to changes in the strategic framework of this plan.

USAGM gathered feedback from its workforce — both federal and grantee employees and contractors — through a variety of methods. An anonymous feedback form was established and promoted through CEO correspondence, weekly newsletters, agency intranet, and internal social media. In addition, two feedback sessions were held for employees and contractors who were interested in learning more about the process and directly contributing to the process.

A protester runs through teargas as Kurdish security forces approach during anti-government demonstrations in Sulaymaniyah, Iraq in December 2020. Rebaz Majeed (VOA)

USAGM reached out to external stakeholders through a feedback form, targeted email, agency events, web posting, social media, and a Federal Register notice to gather input from external experts in NGOs, think tanks, academia, partner organizations, and the general public.

Throughout the development of the plan, USAGM used existing and emerging processes to gather additional input. During the 2021 Language Service Review process, USAGM solicited input from all language service directors on the draft strategic framework during regional meetings. It also requested input on the 2022-2026 Strategic Plan from the U.S. Department of State through the annual request for language prioritization input. Additional interagency feedback was collected through the interagency Strategic Plan Working Group in a breakout group on international affairs. Members of USAGM's strategic planning team participate in the newly formed USAGM Equity Team, responding to the Administration's equity initiatives, and in regular Enterprise Risk Management processes.

This second round of feedback, from internal, interagency, and external sources, consisted of 13 meetings, 103 individual submissions, and the collection of 480 data points. This information was also run through a design thinking process with clustering and insight generation; those findings directly informed the strategic plan objectives and narrative. After consultation with the Office of Management and Budget, USAGM reached out to our Congressional committees, soliciting both majority and minority input from Senate and House authorizing and appropriations committees through two meetings and incorporating feedback received.

In FY 2023, after the Senate confirmation of a new USAGM CEO, the agency began a process to make minor updates to the plan to better align with an evolved articulation of its priorities. Proposed changes were reviewed with the agency's senior management and the leadership of its networks for input. This version, reflecting agency stakeholder feedback or approval, was sent by the USAGM CEO to the relevant committee of the newly formed IBAB for consultation. IBAB feedback was then incorporated, and the final document shared with OMB for review and approval to publish.

Appendix: Impact Model

USAGM has developed an Impact Model to serve as a framework for collecting data on our audiences and measuring the effectiveness of our media programming. The Impact Model is comprised of over 30 indicators organized around the agency's mission: to inform, engage, and connect people around the world in support of freedom and democracy.

The model looks beyond sheer audience size to assess the concrete change that the news and information USAGM networks provided has made in the lives of audience members, in the local media sector, and among governments. The Impact Model draws from diverse sources of evidence:

SURVEY DATA
- USAGM Surveys
- Omnibus Surveys
- Ratings Data

DIGITAL METRICS
- Website Analytics
- Social Media Analytics (from platforms and third-party services)
- Digital Ratings and Comparison Tools

ANECDOTAL
- Evidence on guest appearances, impact stories, news pick-ups, government reactions, etc.
- Audience and expert review panels

OTHER
- Databases (CRM, etc.)
- Internal quality and program review

USAGM Impact Indicators

USAGM periodically examines and revises these Impact Model indicators to ensure that they align with the ways in which media consumption continues to evolve. The Impact Model indicators serve as the basis for performance planning at both the agency and language service levels. Aligned with its strategic plan, USAGM establishes annual performance goals with measurable impact indicators. In addition, each language service establishes an annual strategy with targets drawn from the Impact Model.

Right: A medic checks a patient in a hospital that is overcrowded with COVID-19 patients in Lviv, Ukraine on April 6, 2021. Maryan Kushnir (RFE/RL)

"Journalists uncover the truth, check the abuse of power, and demand transparency from those in power. They are indispensable to the functioning of democracy... And, at a time when the truth is increasingly under attack, our need for accurate, fact-based reporting, open public conversation, and accountability has never been greater."

President Joe Biden, World Press Freedom Day, May 3, 2021

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