

## Research Program Evaluation Terms of Reference (ToR) Internet Society Foundation

### Summary

The Internet Society Foundation is seeking a qualified team of experts for an evaluation of its [Research Program](#). In addition to reflecting on the effectiveness of the program's approach using thematic areas and the effects of the research produced by the grantee community, the evaluation findings should directly feed into the program design efforts for the next phase of the program. The selected consultants will therefore need to be highly effective facilitators with expertise in program design, participatory evaluation methodologies and learning oriented. The evaluation should take place between mid-November 2023 and March 2024 and involve extensive engagement with ISOC Foundation appointed staff. Applications are due by November 3<sup>rd</sup> and the contract would begin shortly thereafter.

### Context

The Research Program constitutes one of the initial funding areas of the Internet Society (ISOC) Foundation. Launched in 2020, the Research program's grantmaking is focused on the following objectives:

- Promote novel methodologies that generate solutions to Internet-related challenges.
- Identify and support a diverse and collaborative group of researchers and research institutions.
- Facilitate access to intersectional research that can be applied to decision-making in government and industry.

With an intended impact of advancing interdisciplinary understanding of the Internet by funding both individual researchers and public research institutions, this program supports research in four thematic areas:

1. Greening the Internet
2. Trustworthy Internet
3. Decolonizing the Internet, and the
4. Internet Economy

The program has been particularly well received by the research community, attracting over 200 applications in a recent application cycle, and has funded a total of USD 9.6 millions in grants to date. After four years of operations, the ISOC Foundation is interested in exploring the relevance, coherence, and sustainability of our overall approach as we prepare to design the next phase of the program.



Past and current grantees have presented / published their work in distinguished fora such as RightsCon, ICANN, MozFest and many others. Throughout its operation, the program has strongly emphasized the importance of collaboration, knowledge exchange and relationship building within and outside the grantee community, and has aimed to support, record and facilitate these connections in different forms. For example, some of our grantees have had fruitful partnerships and/or collaborations with experts from the Internet Society, and with local chapters from the Internet Society.

Through its Learning Agenda, the Research Program has engaged with grantees from all cohorts, and conducted regular Learning Sessions and Reflection calls, from which significant insights to improve the research program have been captured such as: alternative funding models (unrestricted, multi-year, fellowships), and encouraging cross pollination practices among researchers working in the same thematic areas through Communities of Practices (COPs) or Technical Innovation Groups (TIGs).

In addition, given that the program has generated encounters and discussions among professionals and researchers that engage / act directly or indirectly in academia, policy and regulatory environment, on Internet knowledge, we also want to ensure that an evaluation can support the understanding of how the research and findings produced by our grantee community have been integrated and / or used by the audiences and purposes these were intended (and beyond).

We are seeking an evaluation consultant team to help give us a holistic review of the program's success thus far and strategic input for future of the program. We are interested in addressing: 1) the effectiveness of the program's approach using thematic areas, and 2) the effects of the research produced by the grantee community. Importantly, we seek that the evaluation process be participatory and learning oriented, that is, to include the Foundation and Internet Society staff as Learning Partners, to further refine and contextualize the findings and to secure buy-in from relevant programmatic stakeholders for the evaluation process.

## **Purpose**

1. To assess the effectiveness of the current funding approach based on the four thematic areas. This component will focus on the Research Program's effectiveness in funding individuals and organizations working specifically on any of the four thematic areas referenced above (what worked, how, for whom, and in which situations; what enabling and limiting factors exist for maximizing impact).
2. To evaluate the reach of the research materials produced by the grantees in selected grantees: To what extent has the research produced been used for decision - makers in governments and companies/industries? Where and how are the research materials (in its various formats) used by the target and non - target audiences of each sector?



3. To generate insights and recommendations on what makes our current funding themes unique or not within the sector. How can we situate the Internet Research we support against the broader emerging technology/digitalization research landscape; provide substantiated advice on the possible changes to these themes, either by adding or removing topics.

## **Evaluation questions**

The key (guiding) questions and sub - questions to be answered by the evaluation are as follows:

1. To what extent has the funding approach, by thematic areas, has helped to reach the program's objectives?
2. What were the features of the funding strategy that made a difference to reach the value-add status?
3. How has the research produced through the four thematic areas advanced the programs' objectives, from the perspective of grantees and experts in each thematic field, Internet Society members and program staff?
4. How are the research materials produced by ISOC Foundation supported grantees utilized in and by the broader research and scientific community?
5. Which thematic area has the most uptake in terms of findings? How and why?
6. How have/do the different research materials, collaborations / partnerships and dissemination activities influence specific policy discussions and/or industry practices?

In addition to answering these questions we would also like to know:

- What recommendations can be made to improve the Research Program?
- What lessons can be learned from the program implementation, through the thematic areas approach?
- What best practices emerged from the program implementation, through the thematic areas approach?

## **Audience and Users**

The primary users of the evaluation will be ISOC Foundation's Research Program and Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEL) staff. This evaluation will be conducted under overall supervision and participation of the Monitoring Evaluation and Learning team, in close collaboration with the Research program team, as Learning Partners (LPs). We propose that LPs play an active role in the evaluation process, including the inception phase, (remote) data collection, and—when necessary—the analysis and synthesis phases.

The evaluation should start approximately by last week of November 2023 and finalize by March 2024, to incorporate the findings to the discussions of the Strategy meeting to be held in Q1. The Strategy Meeting is intended to be a key moment in the evaluation and program design process,



and therefore the lessons learned, and recommendations made from the evaluation can be factored into forward planning for 2025.

## **Timeline & Components**

A proposed timeline from mid November to March will be available for:

1. Evaluation preparation (including preparatory meetings with Foundation staff, finalizing the ToR, reviewing basic program documents, facilitating an online kick-off meeting, preparing sampling plan and data collection instruments, and submitting an inception report and evaluation plan).
2. Remote data collection (including performing a thorough desk review of selected grantee records [past research deliverables and outputs] as well as key program documents, conducting interviews with program staff and selected grantees (from the sample plan), key policymakers and experts from targeted institutions (for example, ISOC community).
3. Facilitated reflection and design discussions (including facilitating a findings/design workshop with core staff / LPs to consolidate lessons learned especially for proposed new, adapted, or expanded components of the program).
  - i. Facilitated reflection and design discussions (including facilitating a finding from research outputs' reach and use);
4. Analysis and synthesis (including data analysis, compiling a draft report detailing and incorporating feedback from Foundation staff into a final report).

## **Deliverables**

The anticipated key efforts and final outputs for this evaluation will include:

1. A kick-off meeting to meet the LPs, refine the ToR, and inception plan outline and evaluation plan.
2. An inception and evaluation plan detailing the refined evaluation questions and planned approach to responding to them, as well as outlining the final timeline with the aim for mid-December (and prior to any primary data collection)
3. At least 2 facilitated reflection sessions during the evaluation to discuss and share updates. Agendas will be shared ahead of these sessions, as well as decisions and discussions to be documented and recorded.
4. An additional interactive workshop to present findings, conclusions, and recommendations, and to apply these to informed program design utilizing the evaluation outcomes with the LPs; and
5. A final report including a proposed design strategy for the program that incorporates key lessons learned from the evaluation and relevant feedback from the Foundation and its grantee community.

## **Desired Expertise and Qualifications**



Given the scope of work and variety of expertise required, we strongly recommend that (international) teams of consultants apply for this opportunity, rather than individuals. The selected team must have experience in participatory evaluation and program design. Additional desired qualifications for the lead evaluator (s) are listed as follow:

- Bachelor's in social sciences, International Relations, Public Policy and/or Development Studies. Post graduate degree is preferred.
- Minimum of 10 years of demonstrated experience in evaluation, particularly experience in evaluation of relatively new programs with multi country reach.
- Expertise in the management of quantitative and qualitative research, as well as alternative participatory methods, and Change Laboratory methodology
- Excellent intercultural communication skills, gender and cultural sensitivity, and the ability to work constructively and build trust with people from a variety of different backgrounds.
- Strong facilitation, presentation, and communication skills; as well as the ability to communicate effectively in English, both verbally and in writing;
- The evaluation team should comprise members that have knowledge and experience in working with the internet and/or tech industries and research on international development, and ICTs.
- Familiarity with Technology, Digital rights, and Internet Research or similar technology concepts

### **Application Materials**

Interested applicants should provide current CVs and a max 3- page statement of interest and a proposal by Friday 3rd of November 2023. These materials should clearly outline the team's:

1. Key skills and experience that are relevant to this consultancy.
2. An outline (no more than one page) of core standards or principles that will inform the evaluation and design process.
3. A description of the team's proposed approach and likely data collection and analysis methods, as well as suggested changes to the proposed process or deliverables outlined in the ToR;
4. Potential data limitations and ethical considerations and ways to address them,
5. A Summary budget and cost justification; and
6. Names and contact details for two recent references for the team as a whole or the Lead Evaluator (s)

We will schedule interviews with selected candidates during the week of 6<sup>th</sup> of November 2023 and preference will be given to applicants who are available to undertake the work immediately thereafter.

### **Budget**



The total projected budget for this evaluation is approximately \$40.000 to \$55.000 (including taxes). This figure includes all costs relevant to the evaluation, including hourly rates, internet access and incidental expenses, communications, insurance, translation, contingencies, etc. [there is no fieldwork component required for this evaluation]. Note that cost will be among the assessment criteria when reviewing applications to this ToR, and final payments will not be made until all project deliverables have been received and verified as meeting ISOC Foundation's expectations.

**Contact information.**

Questions regarding application can be directed to MEL Specialist Sophia Rodriguez before the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November to [rodriguez@isocfoundation.org](mailto:rodriguez@isocfoundation.org).