1. Background

The Internet Society Foundation (ISOC Foundation) is undertaking an external evaluation of its Strengthening Communities/Improving Lives and Livelihoods (SCILLS) program to comprehensively assess its impact, pathways to impact, alignment with strategic goals, and opportunities for further enhancement. This evaluation is aimed at providing actionable insights to gauge the effectiveness and influence of the program, thereby guiding future strategic directions.

The SCILLS program, launched in 2020, has disbursed $8,680,882 across 42 projects in six target countries: Bangladesh, Brazil, Colombia, Ghana, Indonesia, and Senegal. The program focuses primarily on underserved and digitally excluded communities in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The overarching objectives of the program are to contribute to economic growth and increase educational opportunities by empowering individuals and communities to proficiently utilize the Internet for learning and work.

Examples of past projects and initiatives have included supporting teachers to leverage the Internet to maximize educational opportunities for their students, helping girls and families experience the benefits of the Internet to access education even during interruptions to in-person learning, building Internet skills among early-stage entrepreneurs, helping women develop confidence and ability to use the Internet for their small business activities, and developing innovative applications of the Internet to unlock economic opportunity in rural communities and training communities and individuals in advanced Internet applications to secure better jobs as software engineers.

Through this evaluation, the ISOC Foundation aims to understand the tangible impacts of the SCILLS program on economic growth, educational outcomes, and community development. It will also explore how well the program aligns with strategic organizational goals and identify areas where enhancements can be made to maximize its effectiveness.

Overall, the SCILLS program exemplifies ISOC Foundation's commitment to harnessing the Internet as a tool for socio-economic empowerment, particularly in regions where digital access and skills are limited. The findings from the evaluation will inform future strategic decisions, ensuring that the program continues to evolve and effectively meet the needs of its target communities.

2. Objectives

The evaluation will focus on the following key objectives:

Assess Impact:

- Evaluate the overall impact of the SCILLS program on participants and communities, including both intended and unintended outcomes.
- Identify changes observed at individual, community, and societal levels as a result of program participation.

Understand Pathways:

- Analyze the pathways through which the SCILLS program achieves its impact.
- Identify key activities, outputs, and intermediate outcomes that contribute to desired changes in participants and communities.

Inform Strategy:

- Assess and compare the strategic benefits and opportunities costs as well as advantages and potential drawbacks of expanding the SCILLS program globally versus maintaining the focus on initially targeted countries.
- Provide insights and recommendations to guide the strategic direction of the SCILLS program.

Enhance Effectiveness:

- Identify strengths and areas for improvement in the design, implementation, and effectiveness of the SCILLS program.
- Recommend strategies to optimize program delivery and increase impact based on evaluation findings.

Align with ISOC Foundation Goals:

- Assess the alignment of the SCILLS program with the mission and strategic priorities of the ISOC Foundation, including the ISOC 2030 roadmap.
- Identify synergies and areas where the program can better support the Foundation's overarching goals and objectives.

3. Key Questions

- What changes have been observed in the target population's skills, behaviors, and socio-economic status?
- How have community or societal structures been influenced by the program?
- How has participation in the SCILLS program influenced participants' skills development, knowledge acquisition, work and life? (grantees + Beneficiaries)
- Can specific success stories or case studies illustrate the program's impact?
- In what ways has the SCILLS program contributed to broader societal changes or community development?
- What are the key activities and outputs of the program that lead to desired outcomes?
- How can lessons learned from the SCILLS program inform the development of future initiatives and strategic directions within the ISOC Foundation?
- What are the main areas for improvement in the program's design, delivery, and operational processes?
- What are the primary challenges that the communities targeted by SCILLS are still facing?
- How could the program address these challenges, and what additional support or resources do communities need to face these challenges?
- Based on the evaluation findings, what are the immediate and long-term recommendations for program improvement?

- To what extent does the SCILLS program align with the mission and strategic priorities of the ISOC 2030 roadmap?

4. Scope of Work

The external evaluation will include, but not be limited to, the following activities:

- Reviewing program documentation, including project plans, reports, and relevant literature.
- Conducting interviews and surveys with key stakeholders, including program staff, participants, grantees, and community representatives.
- Analyzing quantitative and qualitative data to assess program impact and effectiveness.
- Comparing program outcomes against stated objectives and benchmarks.
- Mapping the pathways through which the program achieves its outcomes, considering contextual factors and external influences.

5. Target Countries for Evaluation

The evaluation will specifically target and assess activities and their impacts in the following countries:

- Primary Countries: Colombia, Senegal, and Bangladesh.
- Secondary Countries: Additionally, evaluation efforts will extend to Brazil, Ghana, and Indonesia.

6. Deliverables

The evaluator(s) will deliver the following outputs:

- A comprehensive evaluation report detailing findings, conclusions, and recommendations based on the assessment criteria outlined.
- Executive summary highlighting key insights and actionable recommendations for program improvement and strategic alignment.
- Presentation of findings to key stakeholders, including the ISOC Foundation leadership team and relevant program partners.

7. Timeline and Budget

The evaluation is expected to be conducted over a period from September to December, 2024, with a budget of $55,000. The timeline should accommodate key milestones, including phases for data collection, analysis, and reporting.

8. Evaluation Partner(s) team Profile

We appreciate the interest of independent evaluators yet due to the scope of the project we highly encourage submissions from partnerships or collaborations between firms and/or individual consultants, especially those with deep experience working with the communities where SCILLS has a presence and/or with experience in topics relevant to SCILLS.

The following qualifications are key areas of consideration in the review and selection of an evaluation partner:

- Professional experience in program evaluation in philanthropy and/or grantmaking, ideally in the target countries where SCILLS has been implemented
- Interdisciplinary subject-area expertise in entrepreneurship, digital skills, and economic empowerment.
- Strong analytical skills to interpret complex data and draw meaningful insights.
- Ability to identify challenges and propose practical, evidence-based solutions.
- Capacity to critically assess the effectiveness of program strategies and make informed recommendations.
- Excellent writing skills to produce clear, concise, and comprehensive evaluation reports
- Commitment to ethical evaluation practices, including informed consent, confidentiality, and impartiality.
- Ability to work in diverse cultural contexts and demonstrate cultural sensitivity in data collection and stakeholder interactions.
- Familiarity with the socio-economic and educational contexts of the targeted countries.
- Ability to conduct evaluations remotely if required, including virtual interviews and online surveys.
- Fluency in English, French, and Spanish.

9. Proposal Submission

Interested parties are invited to submit a proposal outlining approach, methodology, timeline, and budget for conducting the evaluation by Friday, August 9, 2024 at 5:00 PM EST to Fatima Zahra Lbouhmadi, email: lbouhmadi@isocfoundation.org. The email subject should mention: "SCILLS EVALUATION+ NAME OF THE CONSULTANT and/or FIRM".

We request interested applicants to submit a proposal that does not exceed the 10-page limit (excluding annexes, examples of similar evaluations conducted, or supporting documents). The proposal should include:

- Description of the Evaluation Team: Provide details about the evaluation team, including their collaboration style, previous relevant experience, and the expected roles and responsibilities for this evaluation.
- Summary of Evaluation Team's Principles: Briefly outline the principles guiding your evaluation approach and how these principles have been applied in recent evaluations.
- Approach for SCILLS Evaluation: Describe the proposed approach for evaluating the SCILLS program, including the rationale behind the methodological choices. Discuss the formats for presenting results, potential risks, limitations of the evaluation, and strategies to mitigate these challenges. Provide a detailed budget and timeline for the evaluation.
- One-Page Letter of Interest (LOI): Include a concise letter expressing your interest in conducting the evaluation, highlighting your team's qualifications, relevant experience, and motivation for undertaking this project.