



Terms of Reference

Final Evaluation of the Support for Ukrainian Media Survival (SUMS) Project

Commissioned by: [Internews Europe](#)

Funded by: [The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency \(Sida\)](#)

Introduction

These Terms of Reference (ToR) outline the requirements for the final evaluation of the Support for Ukrainian Media Survival (SUMS) project, a 42-month initiative implemented by Internews Europe from 1 December 2022 to 31 May 2026 and funded by Sweden.

Internews Europe works to empower local media, civil society, and communities worldwide by providing trusted, quality information that enables people to make informed decisions, participate in dialogue, and hold institutions accountable. With over three decades of experience in media development, Internews has established itself as a key stakeholder in supporting independent media and promoting access to information globally.

This final evaluation will assess the overall performance, achievements, challenges, and lessons learned from the SUMS project, which aims to ensure Ukrainian citizens have the reliable information they need to play an active role in the reconstruction and modernisation of their communities. The evaluation will cover the entire project implementation period, with the evaluation to be conducted between December 2025 and April 2026.

Background Information

Ukraine's media sector faces unprecedented challenges following Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022. Up to 50% of Ukrainian media outlets risk ceasing operations, with advertising revenues dropping to just 5-7% of pre-war levels. The deteriorating situation threatens citizens' access to vital information needed for decision-making and community engagement during wartime and reconstruction.

In response to these challenges, the SUMS project aims to ensure Ukrainian citizens have the reliable information they need to play an active role in the reconstruction and modernisation of their communities.

The project has three main objectives:

- Ensure the financial survival and mid-term sustainability of national, local and hyperlocal media
- Build local media capacity in gender-sensitive reporting and core journalist skills

The project is designed based on the following theory of change: IF national, regional and hyper-local media in Ukraine have the financial and logistical support to sustain their outlets through the current crisis **AND IF** media improves their capacities in gender-balanced and inclusive reporting and in making use of open-source intelligence to better monitor and report on government transparency and accountability in major area, including war reconstructions **AND IF** journalists have access to respite care and psychological counselling to prevent or heal war-related trauma and burnout **THEN** independent media will be able to continue consistently and truthfully inform and engage Ukrainian women and men on important development of their communities **AND THEN** Ukrainian citizens will be able to play an equal and active role in ensuring accountability of national and decentralised governments at all levels.

Purpose/Objective/Rationale

The primary purpose of this evaluation is to assess how effectively SUMS has supported Ukrainian media's survival and continued functioning during wartime conditions. It will focus particularly on how different types of support enabled media outlets to maintain essential operations and adapt to crisis circumstances.

The specific objectives of this evaluation are:

1. Assess how effectively the project's support mechanisms (grants, stipends, mentoring) helped different types of media outlets (national, local, hyperlocal) maintain operations and adapt to wartime conditions
2. Assess how the project helped independent media inform and engage communities
3. Evaluate the effectiveness of crisis adaptation strategies developed by supported media outlets, including revenue generation approaches and operational adjustments
4. Analyse how capacity building in gender-sensitive reporting and OSINT methods has contributed to the media's ability to serve their communities during wartime
5. Identify which combinations of support proved most effective in helping media outlets continue serving their audiences despite war-related challenges

The evaluation findings will serve multiple stakeholder groups. For Internews management, the evaluation will inform strategies for supporting media survival in active conflict zones and guide future emergency support programme design. Programme teams will use the findings to improve crisis response approaches and methods for maintaining professional standards during conflict. Donor organisations will use the evaluation to assess the effectiveness of emergency media support mechanisms and inform future funding strategies. Ukrainian media partners will apply findings to strengthen their crisis adaptation strategies and maintain critical operations while supporting staff wellbeing.

Evaluation Criteria and Questions

This evaluation will conform to OECD/DAC Quality Standards for Development Evaluation and employ [the Sida OECD/DAC Glossary of Key Terms](#). Taking a utilisation-focused approach, the evaluation criteria and questions are designed to serve the needs of key intended users. In particular, it will employ the following five OECD/DAC criteria: relevance, effectiveness, coherence, early impact and indications for sustainability.

Based on these criteria, the evaluation will address the following key questions:

Relevance

1. To what extent did the design and theory of change of the SUMS project adequately address the crisis in Ukrainian media sector and align with the needs and priorities of both media outlets and Ukrainian citizens?

Coherence

2. How coherent was the project's internal design in combining financial support and capacity-building interventions to achieve media survival objectives?
3. How well did the project's strategic positioning and implementation approach align with the broader media development context, donor coordination efforts, and evolving wartime conditions in Ukraine (including its ability to adapt to emerging needs)?

Effectiveness

4. To what extent did the project achieve financial survival and sustainability outcomes for supported media outlets across national, local, and hyperlocal levels?
5. To what extent did capacity-building interventions (including gender-sensitive reporting, investigative journalism, and OSINT methods) enhance the professional capabilities of supported media outlets?
6. To what extent did the integration of financial and capacity-building components reinforce each other in achieving overall project objectives?

Efficiency

7. To what extent did the project achieve its outcomes in a cost-effective and timely manner, given the wartime operating constraints?
8. To what extent were the project's management, coordination, and monitoring mechanisms efficient in optimising resources and minimising duplication of efforts?

Early Impact

9. What changes occurred in information flows, content quality, and community access to reliable information in areas where supported media operate, including any unintended outcomes?
10. To what extent did participating media outlets institutionalise project-supported practices into their standard operational procedures?

Sustainability

11. What factors supported or hindered the continuation of project-initiated practices among participating media outlets, and what implications does this have for future media support initiatives?

Additionally, the evaluation will assess to what extent the design and implementation of the SUMS project took into account relevant recommendations from previous evaluations of Internews' Sida-funded projects. The evaluation will explicitly examine both successful interventions and implementation challenges, including activities that did not achieve intended results, approaches that required significant adaptation, and strategies that proved less effective than anticipated. This emphasis on capturing what did not work as planned is essential for generating actionable lessons learned and informing future media support programming in conflict contexts. The evaluation will analyse factors contributing to both positive and negative outcomes, providing a balanced assessment that supports organisational learning and adaptive management.

These evaluation questions are tentative and will be refined during the inception phase. The selected evaluation team will work with Internews to finalise the evaluation questions with detailed sub-questions and appropriate data collection methods that account for the local context.

Evaluation Approach and Methodology

The evaluator is encouraged to propose evaluation approaches that could effectively capture both intended and unintended changes in media survival, content quality, and institutional resilience during wartime conditions. Use of both primary and secondary sources in the evaluation methodology and data collection is encouraged. Document review will be an important component, with access provided to programme materials including project reports, monitoring data, media content samples, training materials, and financial records. External sources may also provide valuable context about Ukrainian media operations during wartime.

The evaluation team should propose primary data collection methods based on their assessment of what will be most effective for gathering insights from programme staff, supported media outlets, participating journalists, and other relevant stakeholders. The team should consider the wartime context when proposing data collection approaches and ensure methods account for participant safety and confidentiality.

At a minimum, the evaluation should include the following approaches:

- **Desk review** of project documents, including M&E reports, narrative reports, partner reports, and subgrant agreements.
- **Review of partner outputs**, with sampling methodology to be determined.
- **Individual interviews** with project team members.
- **Individual and/or group interviews** with recipients of project support and donor organisation staff.

The detailed methodology, including sampling strategy and data collection tools, will be refined during the inception phase through collaboration between the evaluation team and Internews. This collaborative approach will ensure the methodology effectively addresses evaluation questions while being adaptable to security considerations and practical limitations of working in conflict-affected areas.

Deliverables, Timeline and Budget

The evaluation will be conducted over a period of approximately 97 working days between December 2025 and April 2026.

Deliverables

The selected evaluator is required to produce the following deliverables:

- An inception report with detailed methodology and data collection tools, as well as an Evaluation Matrix.
- A draft evaluation report (to be shared with Internews team before internal learning session)
- A final evaluation report of around 40 pages + a summary of key findings and recommendations + annexes, with a management response matrix.
- A PowerPoint presentation (or similar) that summarises the findings and recommendations from the evaluation report.
- Two learning dissemination sessions, in particular, delivery of a minimum of one internal (Internews staff) and one external (funder and other relevant stakeholders, to be determined), with presentation of key findings and recommendations.
- Raw data provided in easily digestible formats.

All deliverables must be submitted in English and follow Internews templates where provided. The evaluation team should pay particular attention to utilisation-focused approaches and ensure findings can effectively inform future programming decisions.

Suggested Timeline and Payment Structure

The evaluation will be conducted over a period of approximately 97 working days between December 2025 and April 2026. The phases, tasks, and deadlines are outlined below. Prospective evaluators are expected to make their own determinations related to the level of effort required. Moreover, there is flexibility related to the deadlines included in the table, although the evaluation will have to be concluded in its entirety by 15 April 2026.

KEY TASKS	DUE DATE
Kick-off meeting to set goals and priorities	1 December 2025
Inception phase: • Conduct desk review of existing project information (documents, materials, reports, research, M&E data etc.) and potential secondary sources. Could include 2-3 initial interviews with Internews staff. • Finalisation of the inception report that includes the detailed methodology with data collection tools and Evaluation Matrix	19 December 2025
Data collection phase: • Conduct primary data collection, including interviews with key stakeholders, collection of social media metrics etc. • Prepare data for analysis (transcription, cleaning etc.).	28 February 2026
Analysis and report writing phase: • Draft evaluation report (to be shared with Internews team before internal learning session) • Final evaluation report	15 March 2026 (Draft) 31 March 2026 (Final)
Dissemination and learning phase: • PowerPoint presentation (or similar) highlighting key findings and recommendations. • Two presentations/learning dissemination sessions	15 April 2025

Evaluator Qualifications

The evaluation will be conducted by an individual evaluator or a team that demonstrates the following essential and desired qualifications:

Required Qualifications:

- Advanced degree in evaluation, research or related field. Experience in media studies, journalism, and international development is desired.
- A minimum of seven years of experience evaluating development projects and media support programmes in Ukraine or a similar context is desirable.
- Knowledge of open-source intelligence (OSINT) methodologies and investigative journalism is desired.

- Strong knowledge of the Ukrainian media landscape and current challenges facing independent media.
- Excellent analytical and report-writing skills in English and native level knowledge of the Ukrainian language. The priority will be given to Ukrainian evaluators.
- Demonstrable experience with OECD/DAC evaluation criteria and standards.
- Ability to work independently and meet deadlines in challenging circumstances.
- Experience with gender-sensitive evaluation approaches is desired.
- Familiarity with Sida's evaluation requirements and standards is desired.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Project Director will serve as the primary point of contact for the evaluation. They will facilitate access to the project documentation, arrange stakeholder interviews with supported media outlets and implementing partners and provide contextual insights about the programme. The Project Director, with support from the project team, will also draft the management response to evaluation findings and recommendations, outlining how insights will be incorporated into future media support work.

At the same time, the Internews Global M&E Team will provide overall oversight of the evaluation process, offering technical guidance and quality assurance. They will review and approve key evaluation documents to ensure alignment with Internews evaluation standards, Sida requirements, and methodological rigour.

The selected Evaluation Team will lead the technical aspects of the evaluation, working under Internews guidance while maintaining independence in analysis and reporting. Their responsibilities include developing detailed evaluation design and methodology, conducting data collection and analysis, preparing evaluation deliverables following Internews templates, presenting findings to key stakeholders, and maintaining ethical standards throughout the process.

Management and coordination of the evaluation process will be led by the Project Director, who will serve as the primary liaison between the evaluation team and Internews stakeholders. Final approval of evaluation products will rest with the Global M&E Team.

Procedures and proposal submission guidelines

Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis with preference for submissions received by 7 November 2025. All applications should be sent to aivanov@internews.org with "SUMS Final Evaluation" in the subject line.

Required Application Documents:

- **Technical Proposal (up to 10 pages)** including: statement of interest demonstrating understanding of Ukrainian media context and evaluation requirements, proposed methodological approach considering wartime operational environment, how the applicant's qualifications match the requirements, proposed timeline and work plan for the December 2025 - April 2026 evaluation period, and team composition (if applying as a team).
- **Supporting Documentation:** Cost proposal in the attached template with a detailed budget breakdown (separate from the technical proposal), CV(s) for all team members highlighting relevant media evaluation experience, sample evaluation reports or links to previous relevant work (preferably from media development or conflict-zone evaluations). In addition, references from two previous evaluation clients (to be provided if selected for further consideration)

All documents should be submitted in English and in PDF format.

For any questions regarding these Terms of Reference, please contact aivanov@internews.org by 30 October 2025.

Only shortlisted candidates will be contacted for interviews.

Evaluation Principles and Values

The evaluation of the Support for Ukrainian Media Survival (SUMS) project will be guided by fundamental principles that ensure both ethical conduct and quality results. The evaluation team will uphold transparency throughout the process, maintaining open communication with all stakeholders while recognising the sensitive nature of media operations in the local context.

Given the context in Ukraine and the programme's focus on supporting media survival across different levels (national to hyperlocal), the evaluation must demonstrate strong contextual understanding and conflict sensitivity. This includes ensuring appropriate safety measures for participants, using secure data collection methods, and analysing findings with attention to how wartime conditions affect different types of media outlets and their communities differently.

The evaluation team will follow established ethical procedures for protecting media professionals and organisations operating in conflict zones. This includes obtaining informed consent from all participants, protecting the confidentiality of sources and sensitive information, ensuring secure data storage and transmission, following do-no-harm principles, special consideration for protecting the identity of journalists and media outlets that may face security risks, and attention to gender-sensitive approaches throughout the evaluation process

The evaluation team must remain independent while working collaboratively with project stakeholders to ensure that its findings are credible and useful for future programming decisions.

