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**JUDICIAL REFORM & GOVERNMENT
ACCOUNTABILITY PROJECT (JRGA)**

JUDICIAL REFORM AND GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY PROJECT

Annual Report – Year 1

May 3 2011 – June 30 2012



This publication was produced for review by the United States Agency for International



On the cover: Serbia Minister of Justice, Snezana Malovic, U.S. Ambassador to Serbia, Mary Warlick, Laurence T. Vetter, JRGA Chief of Party, and Deputy President of the Supreme Court of Cassation, Zvezdana Lutovac, at the inauguration of the intake and information area fitted in the Arandjelovac Misdemeanor Court, April 25 2012.

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(JRGA)**

Annual Report
Year 1

TABLE OF ACRONYMS

AC	Administrative Court
ACA	Anti-Corruption Agency
ACS	Anti-Corruption Strategy
AMJ	Association of Misdemeanor Judges
Cfi	Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection
CGAG	Code of Good Administrative Governance
CIP	Court Improvement Plan
COI	Conflict of Interest
COP	Chief of Party
DCOP	Deputy Chief of Party
GOS	Government of Serbia
HCC	High Court Council
HMC	Higher Misdemeanor Court
IAs	independent Agencies
IAD	Income and Asset Disclosure
IT	Information Technology
JA	Judicial Academy
JRGA	Judicial Reform and Government Accountability [Project]
LOE	Level of Effort
LOM	Law on Misdemeanors
MC	Misdemeanor Court
MCCMS	Misdemeanor Court Case Management System
MOJ	Ministry of Justice
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PC	Partner Court
PMP	Performance Monitoring Plan
RFA	Request for Applications
RFP	Request for Proposals
RFQ	Request for Qualifications
SAI	State Audit Institution
STTA	Short-Term Technical Assistance
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
Y1	Year 1
WP	Work Plan

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Judicial Reform and Government Accountability project (JRGA) invested efforts during Year 1 in initiating and securing the continuity and sustainability of assistance mechanism geared at meeting the Project's **overall objectives**:

- Strengthen the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary, and the administration of justice in Serbia;
- Increase public awareness of reforms in the judicial sector;
- Strengthen the ability of the Serbian government, independent agencies, and civil society to detect and prevent corruption.

The implementation of activities outlined in the JRGA Year 1 Work Plan was aimed at achieving incremental progress towards expected results. Activities were logically sequenced and combined both process-oriented and result-oriented interventions.

JRGA support provided under **Component 1** consisted of technical assistance, training, and material support focused on implementing both national-level system-wide policy and operational reforms and strengthening leadership and management functions within the administrative and misdemeanor court systems so that court personnel are able to sustain results achieved. Systemic-level interventions were focused on drafting amendments to the Misdemeanor Law, preparing the ground for court automation and developing and implementing a targeted training program.

Court Improvement Plans (CIPs) for selected Partner Courts (PCs) provided the framework for defining best practices related to improvements in case processing times, service of process, enforcement and collection, as well as development of information and public outreach actions and materials. Courthouse facility review and upgrades to select Partner Courts that contribute to improved court accessibility and transparency, court automation were carried out in close cooperation with the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) in order to leverage project assets with those of the Ministry.

Under **Component 2**, JRGA provided technical assistance and training intended to strengthen independent agencies and their capacity to interact with courts, enforcement bodies, and administrative agencies. Assistance to the Anti-Corruption Agency dealt with the ACA systems for political finance oversight, income and asset disclosure, prevention of conflict of interest, handling of complaints, and preparation of the new Anti-Corruption Strategy (ACS). Other programming promoted institutional coordination), and encouraged enforcement of and compliance with independent agency recommendations.

The Project initiated a successful cross-cutting coordination mechanism strengthening **inter-agency cooperation** between Component 1 and Component 2 counterparts. A series of roundtables involving Higher Misdemeanor/Misdemeanor Court (HMC/MC) judges and representatives of different independent agencies (IAs) promoted dialogue that will lead in time to more effective filing and processing of IA cases before the courts.

JRGA initiated and maintained a functional **project coordination mechanism** involving representatives of the High Court Council (HCC), MOJ, and HMC, as well as IAs, in order to ensure consensus for implementing reforms, monitoring of the project progress and resolving policy-level issues that arose during the implementation (*see* Annex D for the full list of project counterparts). JRGA also regularly provided relevant information to the Serbian European Integration Office in furtherance of USAID's Assistance Agreement with the Government of Serbia.

During Year 1, JRGA identified several **new counterparts**, cooperation with whom would contribute to achieving project objectives. Under Component 1, JRGA recognized that increased engagement of the Association of Misdemeanor Judges (AMJ) will facilitate participation of misdemeanor judges in project activities and create an additional vehicle for regulatory reform and best practice exchange. Under Component 2, cooperation with the National Assembly was established to improve coordination with and response to IA recommendations. Collaboration with the Commissioner for Protection of Equality will reinforce gender mainstreaming and support the development of improved mechanisms for oversight and application of good governance principles with respect to vulnerable groups.

Gender Mainstreaming

JRGA program activities were planned and implemented so as to promote gender equity and women's empowerment. JRGA established collaboration with the sub-office of the Gender Equality Directorate, which measures the advancement of gender equality and oversees drafting of related laws and regulations, and will continue to provide information on programmatic progress and impact on women and gender equity, as relevant. In addition, JRGA consulted with the Gender Equality Council to ensure program activities support the goals of the Council. The Project established initial cooperation with the Commissioner for Protection of Equality in order to work more intensively on gender discrimination issues. JRGA also worked with the JA to assist its efforts to develop gender equity programming and ensure that women are well represented both as faculty and as trainees. Gender breakdown of judicial and other government officials that were trained by JRGA during Year 1 is presented in the report on the Performance Monitoring Plan (*see* Annex B).

Grants Program

As provided under Section C.6 of the contract, the total amount of grants to be awarded to Serbian CSOs during the first 24 months must not be less than \$100,000 and not more than \$500,000. During Year 1, JRGA designed and started the implementation of the Project grants program. Concrete themes for the Project's first round of grants were developed in the second quarter. USAID approved the project's grants manual on 22 November 2011.

The first Request for Applications (RFA) was published on 24 November 2011, with a deadline of 23 December 2011. The RFA advertised grants in the range of \$10,000-\$50,000. The Project received 24 applications. JRGA conducted the initial evaluation of submissions, and vetted applicants using the Special Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons list. In order to conduct objective and transparent evaluations of the Grant Applications received, a Grant Evaluation Committee was formed for each component. Six applicants were selected.

After USAID approved the proposed grantees, JRGA announced the awards and signed agreements with grantees at the beginning of March. Out of six finalists, three grants were awarded under Component 1 and three under Component 2, for the total amount of \$185,615.

Year 1 Annual Report

This annual report outlines the current status of affairs, key achievements to date, and progress with regard to activities envisaged under the Year 1 Work Plan. It also provides data and relevant annexes for JRGA activities carried out in Quarter 4. Furthermore, the Annual Report is complemented by a report on the Performance Monitoring Plan presented as Annex B which provides information on achievements against the previously set targets, and presents new targets for Year 2. Budget execution for Year 1, as well as a forecast of expenditures for the remainder of the Project, are presented in Annex A. Administration and project management are described under a separate section of the Report, while the project staffing list is presented as Appendix x.

JRGA YEAR 1 - HIGHLIGHTS

Partner Court Program:

- Holistic support to courts in achieving systemic changes and improving the administration of justice provided to six MCs, the HMC, and the AC.
- Best practices defined and adopted by Partner Courts. Best practices are easily implementable practical solutions for improving court operations and services in areas of project focus.

Legislative Reform:

- MOJ-sponsored expert Working Group on the Law on Misdemeanor established and technical assistance provided to eliminate shortcomings hindering the effective and timely processing of cases, enforcement of decisions, and collection of costs and fines.

Facility Upgrades and Renovations:

- Facility upgrades completed in Arandjelovac, Kikinda, and Valjevo MC, and at the HMC branch in Kragujevac to improve operational efficiencies, public access, and safe and efficient open hearings.
- USAID and MOJ resources leveraged to maximize the impact of efforts to improve the openness, transparency, and accessibility of Serbian courts and court services.

Court Automation:

- AC Case Law Database developed to provide judges effective access to case law, promote uniformity in legal practice, and enhance transparency by allowing public access to redacted information.
- Mapping and planning for optimizing and automating court procedures conducted. MC Case Management System functional specifications developed.
- Large-scale basic computer skills training program initiated to build the capacity of judges and staff to use the upcoming MCCMS.

Misdemeanor Judges Training 2012:

- Core topics for training of MC and AC judges identified.
- Courses developed by teams of practitioners and subject-matter experts for training of MC judges on taxes, customs, ethics, court administration, and cooperation with independent agencies in Year 2.

Conflict of Interest / Income and Asset Disclosure:

- Thorough review of the ACA Income & Asset Disclosure and Conflict of Interest systems conducted. Recommendations to strengthen these systems provided in advance of 2012 elections. Guide for New Officials (on how to complete required forms) produced.

Political Finance and 2012 Elections:

- Political Finance Monitor Network supported. A total of 235 monitors, their central coordinators, and editors and journalists trained. Clear instructions and documents provided on how to carry out political campaign monitoring and produce reliable reports and appropriate media coverage of the process.

Coordination between the Independent Agencies and the Courts:

- Efficient coordination mechanisms established between the MCs and the SAI and between the MCs and the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection. The mechanisms promote dialogue through joint roundtables, allowing consultations and agreements on effective filing and processing of cases before the Courts.

Grants Program:

- Grants manual approved. First round of grants issued in March 2012. Three grants were awarded under each component representing a cumulative total of \$185,615.

COMPONENT 1 – JUDICIAL REFORM



Records management and court work flow training



Judicial Ethics Training, Judge D. Brooks Smith



Press conference on the occasion of the Misdemeanor System Day

During Year 1, JRGA streamlined its technical assistance under Component 1 by implementing a combination of national-level interventions and a local-level Court Assistance Program. National-level interventions focused on policy and regulatory reform as well as capacity building and training to enhance the competency and reputation of the misdemeanor and administrative court systems. The local-level Court Assistance Program facilitated incremental practical and procedural change in selected PCs. This enabled the Project to provide holistic support to Misdemeanor Courts (MCs), the Higher Misdemeanor Court (HMC), and the Administrative Court (AC) in achieving systemic changes and improving the administration of justice.

National-level interventions:
 Policy and regulatory reform
 Capacity building and training
Grassroots-level interventions:
 Court Assistance Program (practical and procedural changes in select Partner Courts)
 Facility upgrades

JRGA developed a productive collaboration with all relevant counterparts (see Annex D for the full list of Project beneficiaries/counterparts). The High Court Council (HCC) appointed a liaison to the project with whom JRGA maintained continuous contact for updates on project progress. Close cooperation with the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) resulted in the creation of an MOJ Working Group to revise the Law on Misdemeanors (LOM), coordination on initial planning for the Misdemeanor Court Case Management System (MCCMS), and cooperation to maximize resources for court facility improvement. Effective collaborative relationships were established with the HMC and AC for implementation of project tasks. The Association of Misdemeanor Judges (AMJ), a professional association representing the judges of the misdemeanor court system, expressed interest in increased participation in the project and assistance with their strategic planning efforts. JRGA also worked closely with the JA to develop training courses for misdemeanor and administrative judges, and prepare for the delivery of training in Year 2.

Y1 Partner courts
 Arandjelovac
 Valjevo
 Kikinda
 Leskovac
 Sjenica
 Zrenjanin

At the grassroots-level, JRGA launched and implemented a successful Court Assistance Program through support to Partner Courts (PCs) and the establishment of a flexible structure for reform dialogue and problem-solving at the court-level. The first six PCs were selected in October 2011 and adopted a framework for activities: the Court Improvement Plan (CIP). JRGA organized regular quarterly meetings at which PC leadership identified problems, discussed solutions, exchanged best practices, and recommended reforms. The quarterly meetings were informed by analysis and recommendations from three topical working groups: service of process and enforcement, case management, and access to courts and transparency. These meetings proved to be useful mechanisms for court-to-court dialogue, best practice transfer, problem-solving and innovation.

The first facility upgrades and renovations were successfully implemented in Misdemeanor Courts in Valjevo, Arandjelovac and Kikinda to facilitate public access to court services and promote open hearings. JRGA was able to partner with the courts at an opportune moment that enabled the Project to leverage its assets with those of the MOJ for maximum impact. Procurement of works and services for the renovation of the Partner Court in Zrenjanin was completed in Year 1 and has substantially improved the facilities and the organization of space so that the Court will be able to function more efficiently and provide better service to its users.

Regulatory, procedural, and practical reform recommendations were debated and initiated in furtherance of project objectives under Component 1 Tasks. With the courts, JRGA

developed functional standards and technical requirements for the MCCMS and took the initial steps for hardware procurement and software development.

JGRA also awarded its first series of grants during Year 1 with a view to ensuring more non-governmental support for the improvements in the rule of law and the judicial sector. Three Component 1 grant contracts, totaling \$95,500, were signed in March. Recipients included the Association of Misdemeanor Judges, Association of Public Prosecutors and the Serbian Judges Association. The grants provided funds for interventions in the areas of the implementation of alternative sanctions in the misdemeanor procedure, protection of victims of domestic/family violence and treatment of illegal migrants.

Task 1.1 Establish baselines for indicators in the Performance Monitoring Plan

During Year 1, JRGA developed a Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP) to document project performance and monitor impact using indicators, baselines and targets to measure results achievement. The PMP was approved by USAID on December 21, 2011. During the Year, the Project continuously collected data, monitored progress and updated results in line with the PMP.

Reporting against PMP indicators, as well as targets for Year 2, are presented in Annex B to this Report.

Task 1.2 Assist the High Court Council, the judiciary and any other relevant bodies or actors to make open hearings of all Administrative, Misdemeanor and High Misdemeanor Courts routine, dignified, accessible, safe, efficient, and promote fairness for all parties

MC facilities are inconvenient for both staff and the public, and inadequate to accommodate routine, dignified, accessible, safe, and efficient open hearings. During Year 1, JRGA worked with the MOJ and the HMC to organize visits to MCs throughout Serbia, initiating a full review of court facilities. On the basis of the information gathered through these visits, JRGA selected six Year 1 PCs. JRGA cooperated closely with the MOJ on facility upgrades in several PCs in order to maximize the return on use of project funds and leverage planned MOJ investments in the PCs and other MCs. In addition, through the Court Assistance Program, JRGA worked with PCs to identify best practices to promote open hearings and fairness.

In addition to JRGA personnel, the Project also used STTA expertise in architectural design in implementing this task.

Review of Courthouse Facilities

During Year 1, JRGA visited in total the premises of 37 out of 45 MCs in Serbia (only 20 were originally envisaged in the Y1 WP), as well as the AC and the HMC and its chambers. These visits helped inform decisions on which courts would participate as JRGA Year 1 Partner Courts.

The Project used the visits as an opportunity to establish relationships with a wide range of judges and court staff from all regions of the country. The team was able to familiarize court personnel with the Project while gaining valuable insights into the courts' operations and understanding of many of the problems and issues faced by the MCs. Correspondingly, the judges and staff were able to highlight the challenges they face.

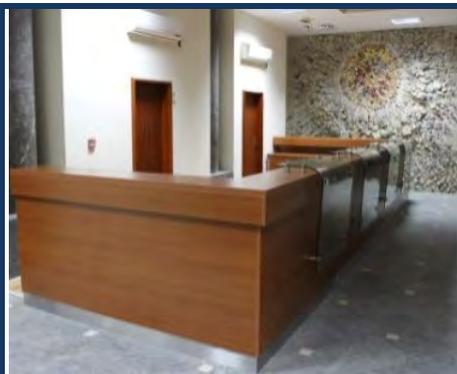
The Project compiled and analyzed information gathered in each of the MCs and incorporated it into a comprehensive assessment report that was submitted to USAID in

September 2011. The report provided the basis and rationale for selecting the first round of PCs, as well as valuable baseline data, systemic issues, and training needs. USAID approved the Y1 Partner Court selection in October 2011.

This initial review of courthouse facilities serves as a starting point for a full facility inventory that JRGA will continue in Year 2. Once completed, this inventory will provide the MOJ with a clear picture of the facilities, their ownership status and their maintenance, upgrade and renovations needs. Facility upgrades will continue to be carried out in order to ensure open hearings, adequate public access to services, and safety for staff, litigants, witnesses, and victims.

Court Improvement Plan (CIP)

JRGA developed a Court Improvement Plan (CIP) using information gathered from visits to courthouses. The CIP provides a framework for practical and procedural reform at the court level against which progress can be measured and monitored. The CIP calls for improving court facilities and equipment to ensure efficient court operations. During Year 1, JRGA helped select Partner Courts needing physical upgrades to courtrooms or public spaces, and equip them with furniture to accommodate the public at open hearings. Physical upgrades were implemented in the following MCs:



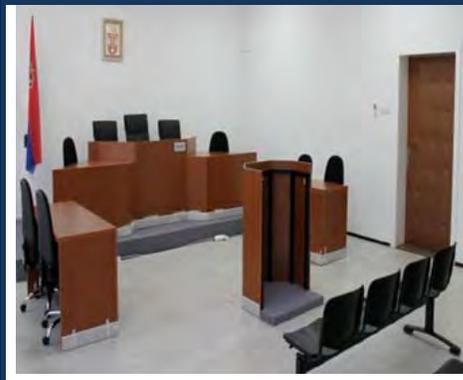
Valjevo ‘one-stop-shop’: prime example of successful leveraging of assets with the MOJ:

JRGA delivered a “one stop shop” intake and information office for the court in Valjevo in support of a larger initiative undertaken by MOJ, through which the Misdemeanor Court and the Prosecutor’s Office have been relocated into a newly renovated building.



Arandjelovac intake and information area: maximum impact with modest resources

The MC in **Arandjelovac** was also fitted with a “one stop shop” intake and information area, as well as furniture and equipment upgrades in the courtroom, one office and the archive. The repurposing of space in the court lobby contributes to reducing crowding and allows visitors to locate court services more quickly, enabling better public service. In addition, by reducing the number of persons approaching staff offices safety is increased.



Kikinda courtroom: the MC previously without a courtroom obtained adequate working conditions

The **Kikinda** MC did not have access to any courtrooms and all hearings were conducted in the offices of the court's judges.

JRGA upgraded one courtroom in the facility and created another, thus greatly improving the court efficiency and work flow.

The Project also initiated re-engineering of physical space in Partner Courts in Leskovac and Zrenjanin. Despite initial arrangements, activities have been put on hold in Leskovac due to the unresolved property ownership issues. Preparatory activities for the renovation of the Zrenjanin court were finalized in Year 1. JRGA prepared an environmental review and assessment report which was approved by USAID in April. JRGA also finalized the design documentation and contracted for work to be carried out in the summer holiday season to minimize disruption to the work of the court. Once finalized, the Zrenjanin MC will obtain one to one ratio of courtrooms to judges and optimal set u of space to serve all court functions, thus making this MC a model court.

During the last quarter of Year 1, JRGA worked with the MOJ on their plans to consolidate the operations of the Belgrade MC. This court is the largest MC in Serbia, with 280,000 pending cases, and currently operates out of 15 facilities. JRGA provided technical assistance to ensure the architectural design for the new facility provides for open courtrooms and maximizes public access (see Annex I, Architectural Design for GENEX building, future seat of Belgrade MC).

Partner Court Best Practices

One of the three topical Partner Court working groups established during Year 1 – the working group on transparency and access to courts – dealt in part with issues related to open hearings. During the working group meetings, representatives of Partner Courts formulated recommendations for best practices concerning public spaces and customer service in MCs. JRGA delivered PR and communication training to the members of this working group in February 2012. The goal of this training was to impart key communication and outreach skills necessary for successful internal and external relations. Training participants received important guidelines regarding the use of information counters, visible signage, easily accessible information on scheduled hearings, and other measures to encourage public attendance at open hearings.

Conclusions from the working group meetings and the training sessions were formulated as best practices that were presented and adopted by the Partner Courts in the 2nd Quarterly Meeting held in Arandjelovac on February 29 – March 1, 2012.

Training

JRGA developed training modules on Administrative and Operational Procedures in the MCs and on Ethics and Administration of Courtroom and Proceedings in Year 1 incorporating the experience gained through the successful implementation of the Court Assistance Program. Both modules include methodologies for ensuring open, fair, safe, and accessible hearings. The modules will be used in training delivered in collaboration with the JA during Year 2.

Impact: Information counters, improved court layouts, and signage will directly improve public access to relevant information and staff, while ensuring that judges and other court staff are able to focus on their tasks. Posted and publicly available information about hearings will encourage public attendance.

Task 1.3 Assist the High Court Council, the judiciary and any other relevant bodies or actors to reduce backlogs and improve case processing times and procedures in the Administrative, Misdemeanor and High Misdemeanor Courts

Shortcomings in the legal and regulatory framework, combined with practical inefficiencies in case management, hinder the effective and timely processing of cases. During Year 1, JRGA worked in parallel to propose systemic and regulatory solutions to the MOJ through amendments to the LOM, and to identify best PC practices to reduce backlog and improve case management and case processing.

JRGA relied in part on STTA expertise in areas of service of process and enforcement, records and case management, court administration, and court automation.

Amendments to the Law on Misdemeanors

With JRGA support, MOJ established an expert working group for drafting amendments to the LOM. JRGA provided technical and material support to the working group, including proposed amendments prepared by project experts as well as those generated by the PCs. Discussions of more than half the provisions of the law were finalized during Year 1 through regular working sessions. The most important amendments agreed on were:

1. Introduction of a Misdemeanor Order and corresponding procedures shifting the burden to the defendant to object against the misdemeanor fine;
2. Introduction of a unique register of misdemeanor debtors to record non-compliance with misdemeanor judgments and facilitate action against driving licenses, vehicle registration, tender participation, and the like;
3. Extension of the statute of limitations for case processing and enforcement.

Proposed changes would also bring about improvements in the service of process, new forms for collection of fees and fines, a simpler procedure for appeals, and improvements in procedural discipline of all involved parties.

JRGA highlighted the need to align misdemeanor proceedings with those under the Criminal Procedure Code and emphasized the importance of improved case processing effectiveness and increased collection for the credibility of the Misdemeanor Court system and the judges. JRGA also ensured that all recommendations of the Partner Courts were fully taken into consideration by the national level authority in formulating the new legal framework (*see* Annex H for the status overview of work on amendments to the LOM).

Partner Court Best Practices

During the Partner Court working groups' meetings in Year 1, recommendations for improving the service of process and enforcement as well as case management were identified. These recommendations were formulated as best practices and adopted by partner courts in the second Quarterly Meeting held in Arandjelovac on February 29 – March 1, 2012.

The main recommendations related to case processing times concern improving the service of process and the enforcement of court decisions, primarily through enhancing coordination among courts and different local counterparts – the police, local authorities and other segments of the judiciary (basic courts and public prosecutors). Two JRGA Year 1 PCs, Zrenjanin and Kikinda already apply successful coordination mechanisms on the local level. This experience was identified as best practice and shared with other courts.

Regarding backlog, JRGA formulated guidelines for the preparation of the Annual Backlog Reduction Plans, which helped PCs to standardize their plans so as to include necessary information, such as appropriate identification of backlog volume, introduction of special marking of backlog cases, concrete goals and actions for backlog reduction, and the nomination of backlog reduction teams in all PCs. Partner Courts started implementing the proposed measures after the Backlog Reduction Plans were adopted at the end of January 2012.

Records Management Training

Case flow management is key to achieving the central purpose of any court – to fairly, promptly, and economically adjudicate cases. This is further supported by an efficient records system that increases workflow productivity and the security and reliability of information. Principles of efficient case and records management are at the core of the CIP and work done with the MCs through the Partner Court program.

As part of the Court Assistance Program, JRGA evaluated records management practices in each Year 1 PC. In April 2012, JRGA's Records and Case Management STTA expert delivered a training session on efficient case flow and records management in courts for members of the PC case management working group. Participants received presentations on basic qualities of a well-organized and managed court, and modern court manual filing and archiving systems. The STTA explained that the main benefits of a good manual filing system relate to increased court productivity, information security and reliability, enhanced accessibility and facilitated retention of important records, and disposal of redundant records (see Annex O for training presentations).

Misdemeanor Court Case Management System (MCCMS)

In coordination with the MOJ, JRGA reviewed existing automated systems in the misdemeanor courts and the broader justice system. The MCs do not have a universally applicable system. JRGA drafted an information technology strategy which was approved by USAID (under ADS 548) on February 20, 2012, allowing JRGA to organize the procurement of IT hardware and software services. This has enabled a full-scale roll-out of preparatory activities for the development of the future court automation software (MCCMS).

JRGA mapped the misdemeanor process and identified all key actors and steps. This provided essential data for development of the future MCCMS. The mapping process was carried out by the MCCMS Design Team, consisting of Project Component 1 staff and STTA experts on court administration and automation.

It was also envisaged in Year 1 WP that JRGA would carry out a case management analysis, including weighted caseload models where appropriate. However, JRGA was informed that another USAID initiative, the Separation of Powers Program (SPP), is conducting a similar system-wide analysis. This obviated the need for a similar effort focused only on the misdemeanor court system, and avoided unnecessary duplication of efforts.

In cooperation with the MOJ, JRGA's MCCMS Design Team met with external agencies such as the police, the post office, and the National Bank of Serbia in order to identify

possibilities for data exchange between the future MCCMS and counterpart systems. JRGA also initiated an advisory group consisting of relevant counterparts from MCs in order to ensure their feedback throughout the process of software development. The role of the group is to scrutinize overall case flow and determine ways to optimize and improve the process before its automation. The advisory group met two times, and provided input to functional requirements that were incorporated into the MCCMS Request for Proposals (RFP) package (*see* Annex K for meeting minutes).

JRGA staff, assisted by an STTA court automation expert, prepared functional standards and technical specifications for the MCCMS. A Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for software development was released in May. Nine bidders were deemed eligible to participate in the next phase of the procurement procedure. The Request for Proposals (RFP) package was prepared and issued at the end of Year 1 (*see* Annex J).

In addition, to build the capacity of judges and staff to use the upcoming MCCMS, JRGA initiated a large-scale basic computer skills training program. The program has been delivered to HMC judges and staff. It has proven successful in building necessary IT skills among judges and staff with low levels of knowledge and comfort with IT systems. The training program was delivered to the HMC in Year 1 and will continue to be delivered in the MCs in Year 2.

Impact: More efficient service of process will considerably simplify the activities of case participants and court staff, and save court resources. Reduction of backlogs is a direct goal of the project and will lead to faster case processing, and thus higher satisfaction with the courts. Optimization of courts' case flow through an automated case management system will also lead to faster case processing and backlog reduction.

Task 1.4 Assist relevant official bodies and actors to increase the percentage of assessed court costs and fines from the Misdemeanor and High Misdemeanor Courts which are collected

Collection levels for court costs and fines are reportedly low. Little reliable data on actual collection levels, disaggregated by case type and age, is available, due to the lack of effective tracking of payments by either MCs or the Ministries of Justice or Finance. Tracking mechanisms that do exist in several PCs are limited to recording only cumulative amounts, without tying payments to specific misdemeanor violations. Furthermore, in the absence of instructions from the HMC, PCs have used different parameters in tracking cases, leading to inconsistent data on enforced fees and fines. Voluntary payment of court costs is low and enforcement mechanisms are ill-adapted to the task and too expensive to pursue. As a result, court costs go largely uncollected, representing significant amounts of lost state revenue in the aggregate.

The service of process that is required in multiple steps of the misdemeanor procedure is a particularly weak link regarding cases involving physical entities. The existing mechanism, in which the Serbian Post Office carries out the actual service of process, is not functioning in some towns and cities in Serbia due to a large debt of MOJ to the Post Office. For legal entities, collection is somewhat more efficient, as it involves the automatic blocking of the entity's assets by the National Bank of Serbia. However, the number of solvent companies decreased in the past year, thus bringing the collection rate down as well.

The regulatory framework for collection underwent changes during the last year, with the adoption of a new law on enforcement and security. Collection of court costs from MCs, previously under the responsibility of the Ministry of Finance, i.e. Tax Administration, was transferred to the Basic Courts for certain cases. In addition, the MOJ introduced the new function of bailiffs into the system for collection of court costs and fines as of the end of June 2012. Amendments to the new LOM that would contribute to more efficient enforcement and collection mechanism are still in the process of drafting.

Problematic service of process, changes in the regulatory framework, transfer of jurisdictions and the recent introduction of bailiffs all factored into a decrease in the collection rates noted with all JRGA Year 1 PCs, as shown in the PMP.

During Year 1, given all of the above, JRGA focused its efforts under this task on initiating regulatory and legislative change on the national level by proposing amendments to the LOM, and defining implementable solutions to be put into practice by PCs. In the implementation of activities under this task, apart from Project component 1 staff, JRGA also used STTA expertise for service of process and enforcement.

Amendments to the Law on Misdemeanors

During Year 1, JRGA supported the MOJ Working Group on the LOM in introducing amendments to increase the tools available to MCs to encourage and compel payment. JRGA advocated expanding the cases in which enforcement would proceed regardless of an appeal, granting the courts the ability to attempt enforcement through bank accounts and wages for all misdemeanor decisions. The Project also proposed strengthening precautionary measures including provisions for deposit of funds to secure payments of future or imposed misdemeanor fines. The working group also explored options for extending the statute of limitation for enforcement. All these proposed measures would streamline the process of enforcement and strengthen the role of the misdemeanor courts (*see* Annex H for the overview of the status of amendments to the LOM).

Partner Court Best Practices

Through the Court Assistance Program, JRGA worked with PCs to identify best practices to promote voluntary payment and to facilitate enforcement of court costs and fines. The working group on service of process and enforcement agreed on several practical solutions that do not require legal changes:

1. For a more efficient service of process, explore other options such as using qualified in-house couriers, engaging youth association members as couriers, and establishing better coordination with the local post office through an MOU and regular meetings,
2. Following the practice of the Zrenjanin MC, a standard form should be used for initiating enforcement proceedings against physical persons before the Basic Court. Court actions in these proceedings need to be standardized;
3. In accordance with the practice applied in the Kikinda MC, proceedings for forced collection of court costs should be initiated before the Basic Courts periodically – every two months – for all cases that have become enforceable in this period ;
4. Courts should initiate meetings with local government to establish a commission to decide on the distribution of the 30% of collected fines that are under the control of the local authorities, based on Article 18 of the Traffic safety Act. This should include the possibility of distribution of some funds to the police for equipment as an incentive to the police to expedite court processing of traffic cases.

The above practices were formally confirmed and adopted by the Partner Courts during the 2nd Quarterly Partner Court Meeting held in Arandjelovac on February 29 – March 1. However, the implementation of these solutions by PCs requires financial, human, and temporal resources that the Year 1 PCs largely lack. Faced with their short-term priority, which is the confirmation of judgeships by the end of the year, and the granting of life tenure, PCs mainly worked on reducing the backlog and meeting the required norms.

JRGA STTA also prepared a concept paper: *Initiative for enhanced collection in MCs*, which suggested an approach focused on both engaging the MCs in pursuing policies and communications that contribute to direct gains in credibility of the Misdemeanor Court system, and at the same time mobilizing Partner Courts to implement a set of concrete actions are outlined. A particular focus of proposed activities is on better outreach to court users, and promotion of voluntary payment. JRGA will continue to work on this initiative in Year 2 with the PCs, the HMC, and the AMJ.

Impact: Improved procedures and clearer rules will lead to increased collection of fees and fines. Increased efficiency in enforcement and collection will ultimately contribute to enhanced court credibility and respectability.

Task 1.5 Assist relevant official bodies and actors to increase the physical safety of victims of family and domestic violence cases in all the Misdemeanor and High Misdemeanor Courts, including persons appearing in court

The physical safety of victims of family and domestic violence is a concern for all MCs, but facility limitations make it impossible to create physical separation between parties in most MCs. During Year 1, JRGA initiated implementation of recommendations to improve physical safety for victims and witnesses in family and domestic violence cases within the limitations imposed by existing facilities. In addition, JRGA provided recommendations to the MOJ Working Group on the Law on Judicial Police that would contribute to improved security for victims and witnesses. In implementing these activities, JRGA relied on STTA expertise on family/domestic violence.

Recommendations for improving the physical safety of victims

In the previous quarter, Susan Keilitz, a JRGA STTA expert on family violence, identified issues related to the physical safety of victims and witnesses of family and domestic violence cases in the Misdemeanor Courts, and made recommendations for improvements. In line with these, the Project worked on strengthening court capacity to handle domestic violence cases by physical upgrading court facilities. Wherever possible, JRGA implemented changes to enable hearings in designated courtrooms positioned to improve safety of victims and proximity to court guards and the creation of the so-called ‘safety zones’.

Furthermore, JRGA supported the PC working group on access to courts and transparency in preparing a leaflet containing information related to institutions/organizations on the local level assigned with providing protection and legal advice to victims of family and domestic violence (*see* Annex R for the brochure). The leaflet was printed and made available in Partner Courts.

Training modules on Administrative and Operational Procedures in the MCs and on Ethics and Administration of Courtroom Proceedings, developed in Year 1, include methodologies for ensuring the safety of litigants and addressing special needs of domestic/family violence victims.

Law on Judicial Police

During Year 1, JRGA participated in the MOJ working group on Judicial Police to improve court safety and access to hearings. The working group discussed a proposal for a new law on Judicial Police and a rulebook for court guards. The members agreed that the Judicial Police will be responsible both for court security and for limited assistance to court staff performing duties outside the court. The Project also brought the attention of the working group members to specific issues encountered by the Misdemeanor Courts during the processing of these types of cases, especially the role of the court guards in public order and domestic violence hearings.

Impact: Reconfiguration of court spaces and the redefinition of court guard roles will directly contribute to the safety of all participants in family and domestic violence cases. Specialization of judges in family and domestic violence issues will ensure that judges are aware of the risks and special issues inherent in such cases.

Task 1.6 Assist relevant official bodies and actors to improve the coordination of cases involving related issues and/or parties, including those pertaining to family violence

During Year 1, JRGA supported best practice exchanges and joint roundtables to facilitate MC dialogue and coordination with external stakeholders. The legal/regulatory aspect of the joinder of issues and/or parties as between the MCs and basic courts was discussed and integrated in the work carried out on the revisions of the LOM.

Coordination of cases pertaining to family violence

Coordination of judicial protection responses in domestic and family violence cases was initiated through PC best practice transfer and through a grant to the Association of Public Prosecutors and Deputy Public Prosecutors of Serbia.

JRGA identified a good practice related to efficient local coordination regarding domestic and family violence cases applied in Zrenjanin and disseminated this to all Year 1 Partner Courts. The mechanism established in Zrenjanin involves a multidisciplinary team composed of the MC Judge who hears all domestic violence cases within the public order caseload, the Deputy Public Prosecutor, the Police department, the Social Services, hospital staff (physicians, psychologists/psychiatrists), and schools. This has proven to be an effective community response to these cases.

The Zrenjanin model was also highlighted through activities of the Association of Public Prosecutors of Serbia, which was awarded a grant in JRGA's first round of Requests for Applications. The Association, in partnership with a CSO, 'Counseling against family violence' is implementing a 12-month project entitled 'For better protection of domestic violence victims – response of judiciary'. They are conducting a range of activities intended to build capacities of the CSOs and judiciary, especially misdemeanor judges, for better protection of domestic violence victims.

Apart from the training program and the preparation of a methodology for sensitized approach of public prosecutors and misdemeanor judges towards domestic violence victims, the grant is also aimed at introducing the Zrenjanin model in several courts across Serbia. One of the selected courts for implementing the model is JRGA Year 1 Partner Court in Valjevo. JRGA worked closely with the Association on the follow up of these activities (*see* Annex AB for Grant Quarterly Reports).

Coordination with Independent Agencies

JRGA began a series of roundtable discussions between the MCs and the SAI and between the MCs and the Commissioner for Access to Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection. These bilateral roundtables proved to be a successful vehicle for increasing understanding between institutions and the identification of practical reform areas (*cf.* Task 2.5).

Coordination of cases with external counterparts

Through the Court Assistance Program, JRGA worked with PCs to identify best practices that promote coordination of cases. One of the Partner Courts' best-practice recommendations entails establishing a coordination mechanism with the police on the local level in order to avoid duplicate proceedings of family and domestic violence cases. Partner Courts agreed that police services need to be instructed to submit only one motion for initiating proceedings before either a Basic or a Misdemeanor Court. Similar coordination needs to be established with the finance inspection and tax authority regarding tax or finance cases.

Impact: Improved coordination between MCs and external stakeholders will contribute to the more efficient and fairer administration of justice, decreasing the workload of both Misdemeanor and Basic Courts and substantially easing the burden on case participants.

Task 1.7 Assist relevant official bodies and actors to increase the competency of judges in all the Misdemeanor and High Misdemeanor Courts

During Year 1, JRGA assessed judicial competency standards and determined priority areas for which training modules were developed. This was done utilizing a judicial training STTA expert.

JRGA delivered 19 training sessions on 10 different topics for 637 judges and court staff of the MCs and the HMC (*see* Annex B, report on PMP, for the full training statistics). These training sessions were carried out in close cooperation with the Judicial Academy.

Training Overview:

- 19 training events
- 10 different topics
- 637 MC/HMC judges and court staff trained

JRGA has effectively explored opportunities for supplemental training through the Court Assistance Program, using STTA experts and staff to deliver targeted training in response to needs of MC staff and judges in areas such as records management, ethics, or communications and outreach. JRGA also initiated a large-scale basic computer literacy program for judges during Year 1.

Determining training needs

JRGA carried out the initial assessment of judicial competency standards for the judges of the HMC and MCs utilizing the assistance of an international judicial training expert. This analysis informed the identification of actual training needs and resulted in the definition of five main topics to be covered through capacity building efforts:

Judicial training topics

1. Application of customs regulations
2. Application of tax regulations
3. Ethics and administration of courtroom/proceedings
4. Administrative and operational procedures in the MCs
5. Cases by regulatory bodies / Independent Agencies before MCs

- the first two training modules will address the new complex competencies of the MCs, such as **tax and customs**;
- training on **judicial ethics** will contribute to more open hearings, while **courtroom administration** topics will include methods for improving client service and facilitating transparency of justice;
- better knowledge of **administrative and operational procedures** will ensure that the court staff and judges are presented with best practices in relation to service of process, case management, registry office procedures, and enforcement of decisions, with special attention to collection of fines and court fees;
- training will further educate judges on the laws related to the **work and competencies of the IAs**, mechanisms for control and protection, as well as IA filing of misdemeanor cases.

Development of the training curriculum

In furtherance of the above mentioned STTA recommendations, the Project teamed with the Judicial Academy during the third quarter of Year 1 to create working groups, composed of both practitioners and subject-matter experts, to develop courses for misdemeanor judges in 2012. JRGA proposed an action plan for training and course development, detailing the scope of every syllabus, as well as lecturers nominated by the JA and the Higher Misdemeanor Court, and JRGA staff members responsible for the follow up of each course.

Working groups met regularly throughout the third and fourth quarter. They discussed the structure and scope of training sessions, division of responsibilities among lecturers for preparing parts of presentations and tentative training schedules, and agreed that training sessions under all five topics will be composed of introductory lectures outlining general principles of relevant regulatory/operational areas. These will be complemented by specific case studies and examples from court practice in order to provide structured guidance and advice to judges and court staff on how to handle everyday situations in their courts.

Training materials for the application of customs regulations and administrative and operational proceedings in the MCs were fully finalized in the fourth quarter of Year 1, and initial training sessions held (*see Annexes M and N for training materials*). Work on materials for the application of tax regulations and ethics and administration of courtroom proceedings was in its final stages by the end of Year 1. These training materials will be finalized during the summer, along with the syllabus for the training on IAs. Full-scale roll out of training activities on all five priority areas is expected in the second half of 2012, in close collaboration with the JA.

In accordance with the Year 1 Work Plan, JRGA began collecting inputs for the development of a Misdemeanor Judge bench-book. The bench-book will combine general information about MCs and MC procedures with annotated references to substantive and procedural law and court practice. It will also include practical guidance on issues of evidence, drafting of decisions, enforcement, and appeals. This activity will continue in Year 2.

Training delivery

During Year 1, JRGA partnered with the JA, the HMC and the PCs to deliver both substantive and supplemental training, and to initiate a large-scale computer literacy training program.

In June 2012, JRGA held initial sessions under two **substantive training** modules (application of customs regulations and administrative and operational proceedings in the MCs). Both training sessions included participants from the Belgrade MC (20 judges and 18 court staff), and were organized in JRGA premises in collaboration with the JA.

JRGA delivered **supplemental training sessions** on the topics of communication and outreach, efficient records management, and judicial ethics.

In February 2012, JRGA organized a Public Relations & Communication training session for the members of the PC working group on access to courts and transparency. The goal of this training was to identify key communication, PR and outreach skills necessary to successfully communicate both internally and externally. Training participants received important guidelines regarding improving public spaces and customer service in courts (*cf.* Task [1.2](#)), as well as preparing and disseminating user-friendly information materials (*cf.* Task [1.8](#)).

On April 10, JRGA STTA, Norman Meyer, Clerk of Court, United States Bankruptcy Court for the District of New Mexico, in the capacity of records and case management expert, held a training session on efficient case flow and records management in courts for members of the PC case management working group. Participants received presentations on basic qualities of a well-organized and managed court, and modern court manual filing and archiving systems. The STTA also held a training session for the lecturers working on the preparation of the course on administrative and operational procedures in the MCs (*see* Annex O for training presentations).

Three training sessions on the topic of judicial ethics took place in the week of May 21-25 in Belgrade and Nis for 82 misdemeanor and higher misdemeanor court judges, as well as judicial candidates training in the Judicial Academy. The objective of these seminars was to improve the integrity of both courts and judges through the establishment of best practices in the conduct of misdemeanor judges and in the better organization and conduct of hearings.

JRGA STTA Judge D. Brooks Smith, Federal Judge at United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit, delivered a presentation on fundamental principles of judicial ethics and an overview of the rules of judicial conduct in the United States during all three training sessions. Speakers at the seminar also included Snežana Živković, Judge of the Supreme Court of Cassation, and Zoran Pašalić, acting President of the Higher Misdemeanor Court, who outlined the basic ethical principles contained in the Serbian Code of Ethics (*see* Annex P for training materials).

During Year 1, JRGA held four **roundtables** for representatives of MCs/HMC and the State Audit Institution (SAI) as well as the Commissioner for Access to Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection. These were held as part of efforts to establish and maintain coordination between the MCs and independent agencies and improve procedural issues governing IA filings before the MCs (*cf.* Task [2.5](#)) (also, *see* Annexes X and Y for roundtable minutes). Conclusions and recommendations formulated during discussions held will feed both into the currently ongoing work on preparing amendments to the Misdemeanor Law, as well as into the development of a training curriculum on audit for misdemeanor judges, in cooperation with the JA.

JRGA also initiated large-scale **basic computer literacy program** during Year 1. The program has been delivered to HMC judges and staff through project interns, a high-impact cost-effective training delivery mechanism. The program has proven successful in building necessary IT skills among judges and staff with low levels of knowledge and comfort with IT systems (*see* Annex Q for training materials). The training program was delivered to the HMC in Year 1 and will continue to be delivered in the MCs in Year 2.



114 HMC judges and judges' assistants received basic computer literacy training during May and June 2012

AMJ Annual Conference

In late October, the Project sponsored the annual conference of the Association of Misdemeanor Court Judges. Held in Kladovo, the conference was attended by more than 300 judges. JRGA used this excellent opportunity to reach out to a wide audience of MC judges, present the Project goals and achieve understanding and counterpart buy-in of the assistance to be provided. Three of the Project's STTA experts provided direct training to judges on: the CIPs; service of process and enforcement; and judicial training. Several judges presented papers on various aspects of case processing in the MCs.

Third-country training

JRGA sponsored the participation of two delegations of selected Serbian judges and staff in third-country training opportunities.

In cooperation with the Open World program, JRGA nominated one representative from each PC for a study tour to Albuquerque, New Mexico as part of Project activities focused on improving case management and records management procedures (cf. Task 1.3). The study tour participants visited as many as seven courts with different jurisdictions in the District of New Mexico. During the tour, PC representatives participated in educational sessions on general court administration and the role of the court manager/administrator, the use of technology in the U.S. courts, and human resources management.



Participants of the Open World program at the Bankruptcy Court for the District of New Mexico

Participants of the Annual IACA conference in the Hague

JRGA also sponsored the participation of five high-ranking judiciary officials in the 5th Annual Conference of the International Association for Court Administration (IACA) in The Hague in June. The conference 'The Challenge of Developing and Maintaining Strong and Just Courts in an Era of Uncertainty' enabled the Serbian delegation to gain insight into current best practices related to: a) building and sustaining confidence in courts and tribunals, b) an international framework for court excellence, c) building and sustaining a framework for court services, d) protection of high-profile witnesses, e) automated court information

systems, f) the roles of social media in interactions between courts and the public, g) the relevance of lay judges and juries in promoting public confidence in the courts, and h) the challenges of maintaining strong and just courts in states affected by civil strife.

Third-country training participants were selected due to their leadership positions within the judicial system, and their contribution to continued reform in support of openness, efficiency, and responsiveness of court operations. Trainees are expected to use the knowledge, skills, and attitude learned through participation in the training in their leadership of the misdemeanor and administrative court systems.

Administrative Court training

JRGA agreed with the AC and the JA to develop five training courses for AC judges on the following topics: a) monopoly, b) competition, c) public procurement, d) access to information, and e) restitution. It was agreed that courses concerning issues related to public procurement and access to information of public importance would be implemented in close coordination with the Public Procurement Office and the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection, in line with JRGA efforts to encourage closer cooperation between the courts and independent agencies (*cf.* Task [2.5](#)).

Training modules for the AC

- Monopoly
- Competition
- Public procurement
- Access to information
- Restitution

During Year 1, JRGA also worked with the AC on improving the unification of court practice among the AC judges. JRGA provided technical assistance to the AC in developing software that would allow creating an internal database of the AC case law. This electronic register is a specialized database application that will enable AC employees to easily search and filter all case law data, using key words determined when each decision is entered into the system.

JRGA developed the software, stress-tested the application, procured necessary server hardware, and installed the two servers in the AC. The Project also prepared and shared with the AC a User Manual with detailed step-by-step instructions for using the database (*see* Annex L). JRGA will also support data entry.

Impact: Training directly contributes to the task of increasing judicial competency, efficiency of the courts and enforcement of Independent Agency decisions. Wide participation in a range of capacity building opportunities offered by JRGA will have a multiplier effect on knowledge and experience sharing among all levels of the judiciary.

Task 1.8 Assist relevant official bodies and actors to develop practical and user-friendly information for court users about the operations of all the Administrative, Misdemeanor, and High Misdemeanor Courts and to inform the public about the availability of the information

During Year 1, JRGA increased the availability of user-friendly print and electronic information on court operation, services, and procedures. The Project drafted informational brochures that are now available in PCs. Through the Court Assistance Program, JRGA assisted PCs in initiating the development of public information, communications, and outreach strategies and delivered training to provide judges and staff with critical customer service and outreach skills. In addition, JRGA responded to a request of the AMJ for assistance in developing a communications and outreach strategy to increase public understanding of the misdemeanor system and improve the image of MC judges.

Information brochures

In Year 1, through the work of the PC transparency and access to courts working group it was agreed that JRGA will support the development of several brochures containing the information most important for MC court users. Seven brochures were prepared in total:

- ***Get to know your court*** – brochure containing basic information on the organization of the court, working hours, court taxes, and territorial jurisdiction;
- ***How to prepare for court*** – explaining to court users how to submit filings, how to prepare for hearings, what are the consequences of not appearing, and how to handle the appeal procedure;
- ***How to obtain information on your case*** – how to submit a request for gaining information about your case and what are the corresponding costs of submitting requests;
- ***Why not to avoid the summons*** – outlining arguments for timely receiving and answering the court summons, and advantages of paying the fine;
- ***Enforcement procedure*** – information on different ways of enforcing misdemeanor rulings and collecting court fees and fines;
- ***Court fees*** – information on the fees for different court services;
- ***Preventing family violence*** – basic information on family and domestic violence cases as treated under the misdemeanor procedure, rights of victims, and contact information of courts, police, social centers and safe houses for victims.

The brochures provides brief, informative, and clear answers to the questions which are currently addressed by enforcement officers, registry officers, judicial assistants and even judges. This will help streamline the courts' work flow and save time for court personnel. The brochures were distributed to PCs and are available electronically on the JRGA website (*see* Annex R for brochures).

Court public outreach

JRGA organized a PR & Communication training sessions for the members of the working group on court access and transparency (*cf.* Task [1.2](#)). The training outlined how to efficiently and effectively organize public events, press conferences and draft press releases and other information material in order to achieve best possible outreach to the court users, as well as how to manage internal communication tools and channels in order to improve the functioning of the court.

In response to the AMJ request to prepare a communication and outreach strategy for the Association, JRGA engaged a public outreach STTA expert who drafted both a six-month short-term action plan for the AMJ, outlining immediate communication and PR activities to be undertaken in order to raise awareness on the important role the MCs and judges play in improving the quality of life of the Serbian citizens, as well as a long-term three-year strategy presenting proposals for the establishment of a continuous mechanism of public outreach. Activities envisaged in the strategies are implemented and coordinated with activities under task 1.9.

AC visibility and transparency

JRGA provided technical assistance to the AC in translating the contents of the AC web presentation into English. This enabled greater accessibility to information relevant for the AC court users and expanded the reach of the AC visibility.

In addition, JRGA also prepared the ground for the public interface for the AC case law database, which is currently operational only for internal use by AC judges. The next step in the database development is to allow the general public access to selected, redacted decisions of precedential importance. Protected information, such as personal information and trade-secrets will be redacted from the text as required by law. This will contribute to greater transparency of the work of the AC.

Impact: Better information availability will reduce demands on court staff. User-friendly information will educate the public about their rights and court procedures. Increased availability of timely, accurate information will lead to increased trust in courts and the judiciary.

Task 1.9 Assist relevant official bodies and actors to improve the reputation of all the Misdemeanor and High Misdemeanor Courts among court users and the public

Until January 1, 2010, the MCs were executive branch agencies administered by the MOJ. In 2011, the MCs became part of Serbia's judiciary, under the High Court Council (HCC). Misdemeanor judges were appointed to three-year temporary judgeships under a reappointment process administered by the HCC in 2010. They must be confirmed in late 2012 and early 2013 to be granted life tenure.

Short-term priority for MC judges:
Confirmation of judgeships by late 2012 / beginning of 2013 and granting of life tenure

During Year 1, JRGA cooperated closely with the Association of Misdemeanor Judges (AMJ) - an umbrella organization gathering close to 600 (out of 708) misdemeanor judges in Serbia. JRGA recognized the added value of working with the AMJ to facilitate the participation of MC judges in project activities and create an additional vehicle for regulatory reform and best practice exchange.

The AMJ is, however, a fledgling association which lacks the organizational structure, processes, and capacity to operate as an advocate for the needs and promoter of the achievements of MC judges. JRGA therefore responded to a request of the AMJ for support in strengthening its capacity to improve the visibility and credibility of MCs and MC judges and assisted AMJ leadership in developing an initial organizational strategy and communications and outreach plan for implementation in Year 2. JRGA also supported strategic planning efforts for the AMJ in order to assist the Association to develop into an effective organization.

AMJ Communication and Public Outreach Strategy

JRGA used a public outreach STTA expert to respond to the request of the AMJ for a comprehensive communication and outreach strategy (*see Annex S for the strategy and Annex AA for the STTA trip report*). The strategy focuses on the following:

- a short-term, six-month action plan, providing a set of concrete activities directed to supporting the process of confirmation as the most relevant short-term priority for MC judges. The main aim is to raise awareness among the public and the judiciary itself on the MC judges' contribution to the overall quality of life of the citizens of Serbia.

- a long-term, three-year strategy, outlining the establishment of a continuous mechanism for wide reaching communication activities.

The first of the activities envisaged under the short-term plan – the marking of the Misdemeanor System Day on June 22 – was implemented by the AMJ in close cooperation with and with the support of JRGA. The AMJ emphasized the achievements of the misdemeanor courts and judges for the past two and a half years since they became the part of the judiciary. Representatives of several IAs acknowledged important work and fruitful cooperation established with the MCs on processing their filings, as well as JRGA efforts on bringing the courts and the IAs together in constructive dialogue on how to take their existing cooperation a step further (*see Annex AC for all press clipping materials*).

AMJ strategic planning

JRGA aided AMJ efforts to establish a proper strategic planning mechanism that would streamline its work and enable it to grow into a professional association representing interest of MC judges and court system. Several strategic planning workshops were organized at which JRGA explained the significance of strategic vision and outlined five main areas of action: a) internal strengthening, b) membership and professional development, c) cooperation, outreach, and communications, d) status of judges, and e) efficiency. A set of short-term actions aimed at mobilizing the AMJ membership and primarily the Management Board was defined and a draft annual work plan for 2013 shared with the AMJ. It is expected that a full-scale strategic planning exercise will be initiated at the AMJ annual conference in autumn 2012 (*see Annex T for draft 2013 Annual Work Plan and Annex AA for the STTA trip report*).

Impact: Strategic approach towards communicating with the public on the position of judges and the misdemeanor system within the judiciary shall help send out positive messages on their credibility and respectability thus improving their public image.

Task 1.10 Encourage reform of Serbia’s judicial system by assisting local organizations supporting and advocating for improvement in the rule of law, the judicial sector, and the culture of personal responsibility/respect for the law through the provision of Grants under Contract, comparative information on substantive issues, and technical assistance on the institutional development of the organization

During Year 1, JRGA established internal mechanisms for the administration of a grants program. USAID approved the project’s grants manual on 22 November 2011. The first Request for Applications (RFA) was published in Quarter 2, with grants awarded and contracts signed in Quarter 3, following a thorough evaluation process.

Grants under Component 1 cover the areas of accountability of Misdemeanor and Administrative Courts, and remedies to access and other challenges in family/domestic violence and public order cases. Three grants for the total amount of \$95,500 were awarded to the following grantees:

- **Association of Public Prosecutors and Deputy Public Prosecutors of Serbia** - a 12-month project to develop a sustainable and comprehensive judicial protection framework for victims of domestic violence. The project

Component 1
Three grants awarded under the first RFA

Total amount:
\$95,500

will be implemented in partnership with the NGO ‘Counseling against Family Violence’;

- **Judges’ Association of Serbia** - an 8-month project to enhance accountability and improve judicial administration in Misdemeanor Courts in cases of illegal migrations. The project will be implemented in partnership with the Judicial Academy and the Association of Misdemeanor Judges;
- **Association of Misdemeanor Judges** - a 6-month project to develop a framework for more effective use of alternative sanctions in misdemeanor proceedings.

JRGA completed the first tranche of payments to the grantees in March and grantees began activities. Grantees submitted regular progress reports and monthly activity calendars. JRGA staff continuously monitored the ongoing activities. The first quarterly reports were received on June 5 (*see* Appendix AB for reports).

Impact: Award of the first grants marks the Project’s concrete results in including civil society in judicial reform issues. The number of good quality applications received during this round bodes well for the interest in funds that will become available in subsequent rounds.

During Year 1, JRGA Component 2 focused on building relationships with and among counterparts – in particular between Independent Agencies and the Misdemeanor Courts. The Project also made a particular effort to work with the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA), including on issues related to the spring 2012 elections.

The Project established good relations with the State Audit Institution (SAI), Ombudsperson (OMB), and Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection (CfI). With JRGA assistance, the SAI and the Misdemeanor Courts (MCs) began a series of informal roundtable discussions that strengthened contacts and clarified key areas of procedure on both sides. Both sides have been very pleased with this continuing process, and the Project followed up by starting a similar series between the MCs and the CfI. The Project plans to expand the roundtable series in Year 2.

ACA support: conflict of interests, income and asset disclosure, political finance, complaints, anti-corruption strategy, public outreach

Ombudsman: public outreach, Code of Good Administrative Governance

Cross-cutting efforts: coordination mechanism between SAI/CfI and MC/HMC

The Project provided direct support to the Ombudsman on public outreach. Support to the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) included work on Conflict of Interests (COI), Income and Asset Disclosures (IAD), Political Finance (PF), complaints procedures, public outreach, anti-corruption strategy, and other matters.

JRGA worked hard to build a strong relationship with the ACA, but has found the Agency to be a challenging counterpart. The ACA leadership is not only extremely busy, but also mercurial and unpredictable. Other ACA staff are for the most part hard-working and well-intentioned, but have little delegated authority. As a result, JRGA encountered repeated difficulties in providing even specifically-requested logistical assistance, with frequent last-minute changes in objectives or scheduling. With some exceptions, providing meaningful assistance to the ACA has been extremely difficult.¹

During Year 1, JRGA has explored the possibilities for cooperation with other entities such as the Commissioner for Protection of Equality, the Public Procurement office and the National Assembly and its committees in order to expand the reach of inter-agency cooperation and reinforce mechanisms for the implementation of IA recommendations.

Working with civil society, the Project awarded grants to three civil society organizations, dealing with political finance oversight, and with implementation of IA recommendations. One of the grants completed successfully in Year 1, while the others will complete during Year 2.

Task 2.1 Establish baselines for indicators in the Performance Monitoring Plan

The Project defined and collected baseline data for all proposed indicators, completed Performance Indicator Reference Sheets (PIRS) for proposed indicators, and submitted a Performance Monitoring Plan. USAID approved the PMP on 21 December 2011. Annex B to this report shows the latest indicator data, as well as targets for Year 2.

¹ Other donors have faced similar issues.

- Task 2.2 Assist the Anti-Corruption Agency and its Board to:**
- a) enforce conflict of interest and property registration provisions in the Anti-Corruption Agency Act;**
 - b) detect violations of those provisions of the Act;**
 - c) initiate and conduct proceedings to establish if violations of the Act have occurred; and**
 - d) order measures under Article 51 of the Act as it read on January 2, 2010, when appropriate.**

The Project engaged STTA Eric Lockyear to review the ACA's systems for managing Conflict of Interest (CoI) and Income and Asset Disclosure (IAD), and to make recommendations for improvement. JRGA's main counterparts in this process were the ACA's Sector for Prevention, the Divisions of Registers and Oversight of Officials' Property, and the Conflict of Interest Service.

The STTA prepared a report containing detailed recommendations for the ACA on how to improve the systems already in place. The implementation of some of the recommendations has already begun in Year 1.

Income and Asset Disclosure

Every official is obligated by law to file with the ACA a property disclosure report within 30 days of election, appointment or nomination. As of this year, reporting is carried out partly electronically. Since the Law on electronic signatures is not yet fully implemented, the officials are also obliged to submit a signed paper copy of the filing. All filings are stored in a database. Partly redacted versions are easily available to the public online.

The ACA tested the new system in January of this year, when officials with substantial changes in income and assets (roughly greater than EUR 3,500) were required to file reports. The Agency received about 2,000 submissions, and the system worked reasonably well. Newly elected, appointed, or departing officials are also required to file reports, and the Agency expects a significant increase in the number of filings after the elections, estimated at some 20,000 submissions.

However, as noted by the JRGA STTA, this large volume of important data is subject to no systematic analysis or risk assessment for use in identifying conflicts of interest, breaches of other filing requirements or the risk of corruption. For this reason, the main recommendations for improving the IAD procedures in place concern introducing an alert system for incomplete or missing filings and incorporating a triaging or risk assessment system into the electronic filing in order to identify those officials most at risk of dishonest behavior.

Such a system would be based on a set of indicators including both those external and those inherent to the nature of the primary function. Further closer cooperation between the responsible divisions of the ACA would also be necessary in order to enable effective follow up of the risk assessment results.

Conflicts of Interest

ACA is tasked with overseeing conflicts of interest. The Agency's primary focus is on the resolution of potential conflict of interest situations related to discharging a second public office, engaging in another job or activity, holding a position in a commercial company and involvement in public procurement procedures. The ACA's CoI service estimates that some 4,000 applications to allow a second office will be received this year in after the elections.

In order to relieve this anticipated workload, ACA had previously considered delegating to front-line agencies the lowest level of CoI review leading to approval of doubling-up on

official positions or holding an official position and outside employment. However, taking into account potential difficulties inherent in such course of action, including inconsistent application of standards and inappropriate application of the Law, the Agency abandoned the proposal.

Instead, JRGA recommended that ACA should develop a table of indicative cases containing categories of pairs of jobs or occupations that are either barred or granted exemption. This table could then be published on the ACA website as a useful reference document, accompanied by a detailed explanation that officials are still obliged to ensure that they comply with the law and that they should consult the ACA if in doubt. While the ACA feels bound by law to make individual determinations, such a table could ease the process for both officials and the Agency by limiting the number of requests submitted.

As part of its conflict of interest activities, the ACA also compiles an electronic register of gifts based on returns submitted by officials, as well as of information on shares ownership, managing rights, and participation in public procurement procedures. This information is public and placed on the ACA website. As with the income and asset declarations this information is not used for systematic analysis or risk assessment, and is not automatically shared with procurement bodies.

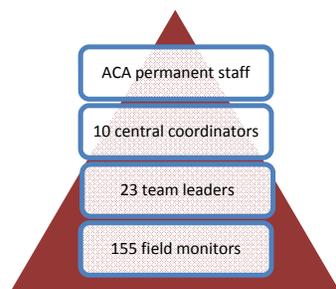
Guide for New Officials

During the review of the ACA's IAD and CoI systems, the STTA determined that even though officials' compliance with Agency requirements was generally increasing, there remained significant room for improvement. JRGA's STTA agreed with the ACA staff that a user-friendly guide to assist officials in complying with their obligations would be helpful.

JRGA drafted a 'Guide for New Officials' and worked with the Agency to finalize the text. In Quarter 4, the Project printed 10,000 copies of the Agency-approved text and layout, and mailed the Guide to institutions outside Belgrade. The ACA itself distributed the Guide to newly elected parliamentarians, and to institutions in Belgrade (*see* Annex U for the 'Guide'). Some copies of the Guide will also be distributed during a public awareness-building tour in the fall of Y2.



Task 2.3 Assist in developing and implementing investigative, monitoring and enforcement procedures governing the financing of political parties and election campaigns.



The May 2012 elections were the first opportunity for the ACA to implement the July 2011 law on oversight of political finance, and to judge the effectiveness of Agency efforts. In line with that law, the Agency created, trained, and officially deployed a network of 165 political finance monitors in time for the start of the election campaign on March 13th. The monitoring network, tasked with monitoring election campaign activities and spending, was composed of 10 central coordinators, 23 field coordinators, and 132 field monitors.

The Agency compared data from the network with the reports from political entities (due thirty days after the announcement of the final election results). This manner of campaign

monitoring has never before taken place in Serbia, or been done by a government agency elsewhere.²

Training for the network of political finance monitors

The Agency completed the selection of trainees for the network of political finance monitors in Quarter 2. Following this, JRGA facilitated the organization of eight 3-day training sessions that were held in Quarter 3 across Serbia.

Training sessions were thorough and interactive, introducing the trainees to the provisions of the Law on Financing of Political Activities, the accompanying rules, forms and methodology, as well as the main tasks they are expected to carry out during the election campaign. JRGA also held an additional training session for the network's central coordinators in Belgrade, presenting practical advice regarding the tools necessary for analyzing data obtained and communicating with the monitors in the field.

During the training campaign, JRGA provided venues, per diem, and transportation, as well as fees for some trainers. After the training was completed, the monitors were officially employed by the ACA on 13 March, the date of the announcement of the local and parliamentary elections.

Handbook for Political Finance Monitors

With a large network of coordinators and monitors trained and assigned, it was also necessary to provide them with unified and clear instructions for how to respond to a variety of situations they will face during campaign finance monitoring. For this reason, and with support from other donors, the ACA drafted an initial, working version of a practical guide to campaign monitoring that was further developed with JRGA assistance into a '*Handbook for Political Finance Monitors*'.

The revised document was structured as a quick reference tool in a user-friendly format suitable for application during field work. It outlined the basic information on the Law on Financing Political Activities, described potential illicit activities of political entities, and the main steps during the process of political finance monitoring, as well as monitors' duties and responsibilities, their code of conduct, and the methodology to be used.

JRGA translated the document into Serbian and provided it to the ACA for printing and distribution in the field.

Training seminars for editors and journalists

During Quarter 3, in close coordination with the ACA, JRGA complemented the training of the campaign finance monitors with two seminars for editors and journalists. During 2-day seminars held in Belgrade and Vrsac, media representatives were informed about the role, jurisdiction and concrete activities of the ACA in carrying out monitoring and oversight of political financing, and especially the functioning of the campaign finance monitoring network. JRGA STTA Jennifer Brunner, former Secretary of State of Ohio, contributed to the training by leading a session on standards in political subject financing and giving details on the American experience in establishing oversight and discovery of abuse.

These training sessions produced immediate impact through an increase in the media coverage of political finance monitoring and ACA efforts. In addition, several local media outlets asked for additional training to be provided to their teams in order to enable

² Similar activities in other parts of the world have generally been conducted by NGOs.

strengthening their professional ethics and integrity and allow them all to be in the position to adequately cover the ongoing election campaign and report on the subject. Apart from this, ACA immediately received documentation from a media outlet detailing a conflict of interest case and a case of the misuse of public funds for the purpose of political campaigning. The ACA will duly investigate the case.

Media interaction

JRGA's STTA recommended that ACA Service for Public Relations and Division for Oversight of Political Finance work together in framing information presented around two key issues:

- a) Has the monitoring program resulted in identifying unreported expenses by the political entities?
- b) Has the monitoring program engendered some degree of public participation, as evidence of a degree of public acceptance of measures intended to prevent corruption?

This advice was not entirely followed during the election campaign, and JRGA brought the STTA back to work with the Agency on media and other issues during Quarter 4.

STTA recommendations

JRGA's STTA worked with the Agency during two visits in Quarters 3 and 4, respectively. Recommendations from her initial report, formulated as both a set of internal operations and outreach activities to ensure public acceptance, concerned three main subject areas: a) implementing campaign finance monitoring and political finance oversight measures in the wake of the elections in May; b) the role of the media and the public in successful campaign finance oversight; and c) how rulemaking authority of the ACA may be used to further strengthen the 2011 Law on Financing Political Activities. Close cooperation between the ACA political finance and media services was also emphasized as paramount to the campaign finance monitoring efforts. The STTA's second visit focused on interaction with the media, and on interpretation of finance reports from political entities.

Task 2.4 Assist Independent Agencies to achieve more timely and stringent enforcement of their decisions and implementation of their recommendations by other government agencies, and to track the relevant processes

The ACA has limited capacity to receive and process citizen complaints alleging corruption in government. In Quarter 4, STTA Roger Vaughan in Quarter 4, reviewed the ACA's existing complaints process. The aim of the review was to provide support to ACA's Complaints Department in order to streamline the existing procedure and develop a functional and efficient process for receiving, tracking, and acting on public complaints. The STTA's report contained a model complaints process, best practice recommendations, and information on whistleblower incentive and protection models (see Annex Z for the assessment, and Annex AA for the STTA trip report).

As part of the JRGA grants program, the European Policy Centre (EPC) implemented a three-month project entitled '*Determining Conditions for Improvement of work of the State Audit Institution of Serbia*'. EPC carried out the assessment of the current state-of-affairs with implementation of the SAI's decisions. The assessment yielded important recommendations on strengthening the role of the National Assembly and the CSOs in creating a financially accountable Government and monitoring the implementation of SAI's recommendations and

measures. JRGA will follow up on these recommendations by improving the mechanisms of oversight and monitoring (*see* Annex AB for grant reports).

Task 2.5 Assist relevant official bodies and actors to develop and implement procedures to increase coordination between courts and relevant government agencies that reduce the processing times of selected administrative provisions and procedures

JRGA established a successful coordination mechanism between individual IAs and the Misdemeanor Courts (MCs). The project began with a Quarter 3 roundtable discussion between the SAI and the MCs, focused on filing procedures for misdemeanor cases, and on audit procedures. The roundtable proved very successful, and the Project followed up with two more in the 3rd and 4th Quarters.

Deemed a useful tool for coordination and capacity building by all participants, JRGA will continue facilitating the roundtables in Year 2. Court representatives suggested that this modality of cooperation should be established with other IAs as well. Furthermore, issues covered through the roundtables will serve as a basis for developing training courses for both the misdemeanor judges and the IAs.

State Audit Institution and Misdemeanor Courts

SAI cases make up only a small percentage of cases processed by misdemeanor courts. Due to numerous laws governing the area of public finance and administration, the cases are of highly complex nature, and the current number of completed cases is low. Due to limited experience of SAI staff, and court practices only recently established, all stages of case proceedings face procedural obstacles. Motions for initiation of misdemeanor proceedings filed by SAI are often too general and/or not supported by sufficient evidence. Treatment of the audit report as evidence supporting the SAI filing before the court is inconsistent among the SAI, the MCs, and the HMC.

These issues were at the core of discussions held during the roundtables. Participants from the misdemeanor courts from across Serbia and the Higher Misdemeanor Court received detailed presentations on the complex procedure of public finance audit and all steps carried out in the process, as well as the documents collected as evidence. On their part, misdemeanor judges explained what constitutes a good quality motion for the initiation of a misdemeanor procedure and provided practical advice to the auditors on what documents other than the audit report itself to submit in order to substantiate their filings (*see* Annex X for roundtable minutes). An immediate outcome of the roundtables was that the MOJ working group on amendment of the Misdemeanor Law plans to extend the statute of limitations related to SAI cases. Current status of limitations are very short, and often expire before the case can even reach the courts.

Commissioner for Information and Misdemeanor Courts

Once the SAI-MC roundtables had taken hold, the Project initiated a similar series between the CFI and the MCs. The first roundtable took place in Quarter 4, and more will follow in Year 2. The aim of the first roundtable was to identify key challenges that have been observed in dealing with requests for misdemeanor charges filed for violations of the Law on Free Access to Information and the Law on Personal Data Protection. Participants agreed that future roundtables will be organized so to specifically cover the subject of access to information and personal data protection. This coordination mechanism shall yield proposals

for measures to mitigate specific problems in mutual cooperation (*see* Annex Y for roundtable minutes).

Task 2.6 Assist with improving ability of Independent Agencies to work with each other to monitor and improve administrative practices and other government operations

With all counterparts, JRGA has repeatedly discussed opportunities for collaboration. Each of the four IAs noted that informal collaboration and cooperation are ongoing, and that the process is working well. The Ombudsperson, the Commissioner, and the President of the SAI meet frequently at events, and appear to have good communications in place. The ACA is a less frequent participant. The Project also worked with IA counterparts to develop public outreach skills and campaigns.

Public outreach

Anti-Corruption Day

The Project worked closely with the ACA in Quarter 2 to prepare for Anti-Corruption Day 2011. The AC Day event, organized by the ACA with JRGA support, was attended by National Assembly President Slavica Đukic-Dejanovic, US Deputy Chief of Mission Earle Litzenger, and other high level representatives. The event included two round tables featuring government officials and members of the ACA board discussing contemporary anti-corruption topics. Following this, the Agency presented the winners of the ACA's annual children's contest, with awards (sponsored by JRGA) for drawings, films, and slogans.

In addition, the ACA and JRGA marked the AC Day on December 8 with 160,000 flyers distributed across the country via the free daily newspaper "24 Hours," supplemented on December 9 with more flyers supported by the European Union. The JRGA flyers featured newly commissioned art by well-known political cartoonist Corax, as well as a quote from the Law on the Anti-Corruption Agency, and the ACA and USAID logos.



The dual aims of the conference and leaflet were to build public confidence by celebrating Serbian action against corruption, and to build public awareness of the Anticorruption Agency and its tasks.

Code of Good Administrative Governance

During 2011, the Ombudsperson adopted a Code of Good Administrative Governance (CGAG), based on a document of the EU Ombudsperson. The CGAG is intended as a model for government bodies and local governments. The Project assisted the Ombudsperson's office in developing a campaign for promotion of the Ombudsperson's model Code of Good Administrative Governance and in re-designing promotional posters for the Code. Four posters were designed with JRGA assistance and approved by the Ombudsperson's office in Quarter 3, with distribution planned for Quarter 4 or early in Year 2.



Code of Good Administrative Governance, promotional poster

In line with the proposal formulated by JRGA in the promotional campaign for the Code, the Ombudsperson’s office contacted the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities (SCTM) and achieved tangible results in enabling the promotion of the Code among the units of the local self-government. The Code was endorsed by the SCTM Committee on Local Self-Government System. After this, the Ombudsperson’s office will initiate the printing of the posters prepared, and distribute them for posting within the premises of local municipal administration premises. Furthermore, the Office and the SCTM began promoting the Code among local governments and advocating its adoption as a best practice.

Communication Strategy for the Ombudsperson’s Office

Starting in Quarter 3, JRGA STTA Aleksandar Djukic began work on developing a communication strategy for the Ombudsperson and his Office geared towards improving the level of awareness of the citizens of Serbia regarding the competence and scope of the Ombudsperson’s activities. The strategy and an accompanying one year action plan were adopted in Quarter 4 (see Annex V for the full Strategy). The strategy centers around three main goals:

1. Improving the citizens’ awareness of the activities undertaken by the Ombudsperson and his office;
2. Improving communication and cooperation with public bodies and institutions;
3. Promoting human rights in line with the scope of work of the Ombudsperson.

Task 2.7 Encourage improvements in governance and official integrity, and to reduce corruption, to monitor political party financing (including financing of local and national elections), and to promote compliance with EU norms, through the provision of: Grants under Contract; comparative information on substantive issues, and technical assistance on the institutional development of the organizations.

Technical Assistance and comparative information on substantive issues

Good governance policy

In 2011, the Government of Serbia submitted its Letter of Intent to join the Open Government Partnership (OGP), a multilateral initiative that aims to secure concrete commitments from governments to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance. In support of this process, JRGA and the Institute for Sustainable Communities worked together with the Digital Agenda Administration to initiate the process of public consultations that will inform the government's OGP commitments, and enable a multi-stakeholder forum for the preparation of the country action plan. The multi-stakeholder consultation forum took place on April 11 in the National Assembly of Serbia, with organizational and logistic support of JRGA. Over 60 representatives of the government institutions, independent regulatory bodies, civil society organizations and the donor community took part in discussions on how to make the government in Serbia a more open one and more responsive to the needs of its citizens.



The multi-stakeholder consultation forum took place on April 11 in the National Assembly of Serbia, with organizational and logistic support of JRGA. Over 60 representatives of the government institutions, independent regulatory bodies, civil society organizations and the donor community took part in discussions on how to make the government in Serbia a more open one and more responsive to the needs of its citizens.

Anti-corruption strategy

Serbia's current anti-corruption strategy (ACS) was adopted in 2005, and has largely been seen as unsuccessful. The country started developing a replacement strategy in 2011, through a working group under the nominal guidance of the Ministry of Justice, with technical support from the ACA. The working group produced a draft new strategy in Quarter 2 that was criticized by most international actors. The group produced an improved draft in Quarter 3, on which JRGA provided comment.

The Project followed up with further commentary during Quarter 4, and by organizing the first of a series of 1-day workshops to develop portions of the action plan. The first workshop focused on the media portion of the action plan, and drew enthusiastic participation by key media sector stakeholders. The workshop resulted in revisions to the strategy itself, and to a draft media portion of the action plan by the end of the 4th Quarter. The Project expects to continue the workshops during Year 2 (*see Annex W for workshop materials*).

Grants

During Year 1, JRGA established internal mechanisms for the administration of a grants program. USAID approved the project's grants manual on 22 November 2011. The first Request for Applications (RFA) was published in Quarter 2, with grants awarded and contracts signed in Quarter 3, following a thorough and impartial evaluation. Three grants were awarded under Component 2, to support political finance monitoring and the implementation of independent agency recommendations. The implementation of two of the grants will continue into Year 2. The project will also continue to provide comparative information, technical expertise, and institution building assistance to direct counterparts and other organizations.

Component 2
Three grants awarded
under the first RFA
Total amount:
\$90,115

Grants under Component 2 cover the areas of political activity financing with regard to effective usage of public funds allocated to this purpose, and the implementation of IA recommendations (*see Annex x for grant reports*). Three grants for the total amount of \$90,115 were awarded to the following grantees:

Bureau for Social Research—an 8-month project to monitor the potential misuse of public funds for political activities at the local level in Kragujevac, Niš, Požega, and Zrenjanin. The project will include the creation and maintenance of a web portal, www.cistapolitika.com (translation: real politics).

Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights—a 10-month project to formulate criteria to measure the effective implementation of recommendations made by the Ombudsperson. The project is implemented in partnership with the Belgrade Center for Human Rights.

European Project Center—a 3-month project to assess the level of enforcement of recommendations of the State Audit Institution. The project was implemented in partnership with the European Policy Center, and was completed in Quarter 4 (*see* Annex AB for grant quarterly reports).

ADMINISTRATION AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT

During Year 1, JRGA set up and maintained all administration and project management mechanisms related to financial management, human resources management, and procurement. The project staffing list is presented as Annex C. JRGA also established and maintained a comprehensive reporting mechanism, submitting weekly, bi-weekly, monthly and quarterly reports accompanied by appropriate annexes.

JRGA ensured compliance with all applicable branding and related requirements, guidance, and instructions of USAID in the implementation of all project activities. In line with the branding strategy outlined in the contract, JRGA set up a Project website (www.jrga.org) in order to describe JRGA and its current and planned activities and progress to date, including success stories, other noteworthy events and accomplishments, and lessons learned.