Program Information & Communications Strategy

USAID
SERBIA & MONTENEGRO

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Background

In recent years, USAID’s information dissemination capacity has grown due to the advent of the Internet, which has ushered a revolution in communications. The Internet and mission connectivity has enabled USAID to disseminate an ever increasing amount of information.

Today, the Internet and the world-wide-web of “sites” have become an essential component of USAID’s communication system, providing a vital intranet and internet link for research and communication. These communication tools facilitate USAID’s ability to share information about our objectives, operations, results, successes and lessons learned and to coordinate these with the valuable work of other organizations.

Public support for USAID activities, and the success of its overall information dissemination capacity, depends on the capacity of USAID missions to document results and lessons learned, and to produce and disseminate clear, concise information about their operations, results and successes. Likewise, a mission’s success depends on its capacity to communicate and share information with the host-country public and counterparts as well as with the U.S. public and decision-makers. As public support for the USG’s development assistance programs and USAID activities is dependent on the availability of timely, consistent and accurate information exchange and dissemination, the implementation of a communications strategy must be an integral part of every activity.

In addition to doing good work, USAID needs to ensure that others understand our goals and achievement, and why we do, what we do. To this end, the USAID/Serbia & Montenegro Mission developed the following Program Information and Communications Strategy.

The Goal

The Strategy is intended to increase public understanding of, and support for, US foreign assistance goals in Serbia & Montenegro to better articulate USAID/ Serbia & Montenegro’s goals and objectives.

The Objectives

• To identify a set of communication tools to better promote the USAID program and to effectively deliver USAID’s message to both internal and external audiences;
• To facilitate information access and dissemination, and strengthen the mission’s reporting to AID/W, SEED, the U.S. Congress and U.S. public;
• To ensure that USAID program objectives are concisely, clearly and accurately communicated to target audiences as the mission develops new communications tools and materials;
• To generate a positive image and support for USAID activities among the host-country public and counterparts.
• To raise the visibility of the organization among the target audiences and to translate this visibility into increase public and political support for USAID activities.
• To ensure that this strategy becomes an integral part of the USAID/ Serbia & Montenegro program.

USAID/Serbia & Montenegro Mission Statement = The Message

USAID Programs in Serbia and Montenegro seek to further Serbia’s goal to be Democratic, Prosperous and Moving toward Europe.

The Target Audience

The target audience for the USAID/ Serbia & Montenegro’s communications activities is:

1) In host country:
   a. Host country government, opinion-makers, partner organizations, media and the general public.
   b. US Embassy staff and Public Diplomacy Office.
   c. Multilateral and bi-lateral donors.
   d. Other Missions in the region.
2) In the United States:
   a. E&E Bureau, LPA, Administrator’s Office in AID/W.
   b. SEED Coordinator’s Office
   c. U.S. Congress
   d. Bureau for Public Affairs

The Tools

The following communications tools will be developed in order to achieve the goals and objectives of this strategy, and are the basic elements of the communications strategy. This strategy is intended to be a “living” document, flexible and responsive to new needs and technology developments; it should be updated accordingly and as needed.

1. Website Application Design, Maintenance, Hosting, Promotion, Accessibility and Linkage;
3. Media Relations & Kits;
4. Success Stories;
5. Events & Site Visits;
6. G2G Meetings;
7. Partners Meeting;
8. Integration of Strategy into Program & Projects;

1. WWW.USAID.ORG.YU

Accessing, creating and managing the Mission’s website is an important way of sharing information, networking, and of promoting public understanding of USAID-funded programs. A well-managed site will save resources and manpower while providing information. The development of the USAID/ Serbia & Montenegro website is a vital component of our strategy as it will facilitate the exchange of information among and between our target groups. The site aims to improve the Mission’s performance by improving overall U.S. government to citizen, U.S. government to business, and U.S. government to government communication.

The Mission designed, developed and maintains a web site with the domain name: www.usaid.org.yu. The site will be in Serbian in 2003. The site contains a success story data base, program info, info about Serbia & Montenegro, strategies, photo tours of our projects, PDF versions of our quarterly bulletin, info on implementing partners, links to other sites, job announcement, news, media documents, including press releases, USAID in the news and downloadable fact sheets about each office.

Design, Maintenance & Hosting

The site is designed as a web application that allows mission staff to upload documents directly. However, to be efficient, a person from each office is named as the web contact person, responsible for working with the Program Information Officer to ensure accurate and current information is prepared for upload to the website regularly. Once uploaded the documents will be electronically sent to the Program Information Officer for final clearance before posted. The Program Information Officer will ensure that information is clear, concise and consistent with message and goals.

All public information will be accessible electronically from the web application site, enabling staff to print materials for dissemination directly from the website.

Promotion, Accessibility & Linkage

In order to establish a frequently visited website, we must:
• Register the site with all major search engines (Google, Megacrawler, Excite, Yahoo, InfoSeek, etc.)
• Establish links to USAID home, to US Embassy site, to all project websites, partners’ websites, to other donor site, etc.
• Place website address on all business cards, brochures, bulletins, letterhead and publications.

2. Bulletin, Brochure & Presentation

USAID/Serbia & Montenegro Program News Bulletin

USAID/ Serbia & Montenegro will produce a quarterly news bulletin to illustrate the social and economic changes brought about by USAID activities. The Bulletin will communicate the results or success of our program activities by highlighting significant policy or structural reform developments, success stories and major conferences or events to our target groups. The information and success stories included in the bulletin are an important component of our strategy, and of the mission’s monitoring and reporting efforts. Success stories are particularly important as they highlight the human element of our work within the context of our broader goals, and promote a real understanding of the development process.

The challenge of producing the Bulletin will be to ensure that the success stories effectively tell a USAID/ Serbia & Montenegro development story within the context of our strategic objective to ensure that the story is instructive, and help readers understand the complexity of a process, problem or development issue.

The Bulletin will include news briefs, success stories and photos. It is available electronically on the webpage in English and Serbian, sent to target audiences via Internet and a limited number are in print form for distribution as necessary. The first bulletin covered Q2 of 2002 and was issued on July 15, 2002.

USAID/Serbia & Montenegro Brochure

A brief, concise brochure summarizing USAID/ Serbia & Montenegro’s goals, objectives and program activities is a simple, effective, low cost, tool to communicate our mission, and a good supplement to the other communication tools in this strategy. The brochure is designed to introduce USAID/ Serbia & Montenegro’s program in a nutshell and is proposed for dissemination at first time meetings with target audience, conferences and through USAID/ Serbia & Montenegro’s local field offices. The brochure is also a way to promote the website and encourage target audiences to visit the website. It is important that the desk officer in AID/W also maintain copies of the brochure as a quick-response and reference to those seeking information. Brochure is in English and Serbian.
**Visual Presentation of USAID/Serbia & Montenegro**

Photos and other visuals are a powerful tool for communicating a message and/or depicting results. Thus, an up-to-date visual (power point) presentation of USAID/Serbia & Montenegro is available for senior staff to deliver at conferences and other public fora. The presentation will communicate our goal, objectives, programs and projects with a combination of photos, maps and brief text.

### 3. Media Relations and Media Kits

Media relations are a key element of our strategy because simply doing good work is not enough. This is particularly true for government agencies, like USAID, that are accountable to the U.S. tax-payer. The public, i.e. U.S tax-payer and host-country tax-payer, must understand and support our foreign assistance operations in order for them to succeed. Furthermore, the public's perception of our work can help us obtain credibility and gain political and financial support for our goals, objectives and activities. Engaging the media and public attention effectively will help USAID continue to reinforce a positive image and message.

It is extremely important for USAID/Serbia & Montenegro to successfully communicate the reform process and goals supported through the USAID activities and to gain the support of the citizens for the reform process, and explain how our activities promote better living conditions, strengthen democratic institutions that represent citizens’ interests and create more sustainable jobs and job security. It is important that USAID activities/results speak to the core value of the Serbian and Montenegrin people as well as to our own. We must illustrate that USAID activities are addressing Serbia and Montenegro’s social priorities and use concrete examples to illustrate how this is being done.

**Media Relations**

USAID/Serbia & Montenegro will engage media by working with their representatives to place articles and interviews that illustrate our message through individual stories; stories that direct attention to the values/principles underlined above, which in turn direct attention to USAID project outcomes.

**Supporting Messages**

USAID activities aim to:

- Create **jobs and job security**.
- Improve access to **justice** and,
• Improve better living conditions and the future for children,
• Minimize corruption and to increase accountability and transparency,
• Provide citizens with the information and resources to make informed decisions on issues affecting their lives. Demonstrate the value of citizens’ participation through community activities.
• Strengthen citizens’ advocacy efforts and their participation in decision-making.

Support for USAID activities will be highest when described as addressing the priorities of the Serbian and Montenegrin society, such as providing children and families with basic needs (water, electricity and education), providing assistance to victims of domestic violence and trafficking, protecting the civil rights of citizens, combating corrupt practices and, creating jobs for youth and others.

**Media Outreach Tools**

**Media Briefings**

Invite media to attend a press briefing organized around a newsworthy event. Identify the appropriate spokesperson to best deliver our message through an individual story, such as one of our beneficiaries. A media briefing may be organized around a newsworthy issue to ensure coverage or prior to a larger event to provide media with background information.

**Interviews**

Organize interview with broadcasts outlets (local TV and radio shows), and target publications to deliver specific messages. Before each interview, we will work to identify two or three key messages to continue to stress throughout the interview. Interview will be organized for USAID staff and USAID beneficiaries. Preferably interviews will include a beneficiary, or be complemented by a follow-up beneficiary interview.

**Op-eds**

Write or assist in writing opinion pieces on topics of interest to our target audience at the time of placement. We will be alert for opportunities/news hooks (i.e. events, ceremonies, conferences, political development) on which to place an op-ed, deliver our message, and to highlight the value of our work.

**Press Tours**

Press tours will be organized for media representatives interested primarily in USAID activities outside of Belgrade, such as CRDA activities, Opportunity International, Freedom House’s civil society activities.
Press tours can also be organized as a complement to a major event taking place in Belgrade to give media first hand experience with issues discussed in Belgrade.

**Presentations**

Presentations will be organized for USAID staff with local NGOs, conferences, and workshops. We will explore the interest and possibility of USAID staff to lecture at the Belgrade University.

**Press Releases**

Press releases highlighting new awards, signings and achievements will be written, disseminated to the media via national newswire through the U.S Embassy’s Public Diplomacy Office and posted on the USAID website. USAID will work closely with the Public Diplomacy Office of the US Embassy on all press releases and public events involving USG officials.

Press kits for release at events organized by USAID or USAID implementers will be in English and Serbian, and can include:
- Fact Sheets on USAID Programs, such as Privatization and Restructuring, Support of Independent Media, Local Government Reform, Community Development, etc.
- Press Releases on current issues.
- Success Stories
- Brochures and contact information.

**Coordination with Partners**

As most of our projects have their own public education component, a focus of our media relations will be to coordinate and work with our implementers, many of whom already have established media relations to promote their beneficiaries directly. Implementers typically have a list of targeted reporters and editors at both the local- and national-level media with whom they regularly work, which we will also target. We suggest sharing calendar of events to improve coordination and information sharing on public events, press releases, interviews and placements. Regular communication with implementers is crucial.

**International Media Relations**

The primary focus of our activity will be to place articles and Op-Eds that expand on news-breaking events in Serbia & Montenegro while highlighting positive USG and USAID policies and activities. To place an article, USAID will develop several “news
hooks” before the news breaks and work with LPA to use these opportunities to “hang” or discuss policy issues or analyses vis-à-vis USG assistance program.

4. Success Stories

Success stories are especially important to our strategy as they highlight the human element of our work to policy and decision-makers, and the public. They also promote a better understanding of a development process.

Success stories give the mission an opportunity to tell a development story within the context of our strategic objectives and to impart development knowledge and lessons learned. Success stories are intended to communicate the positive results of a specific USAID activity, e.g. a training program, an international visitor’s program, a technical assistance program, to our target audiences.

Success stories will be included in USAID/ Serbia & Montenegro’s quarterly program news bulletin, on the web page, submitted to the USAID Success Story Database in AID/W and included in the mission’s Annual Report, as needed.

5. Events & Site Visits

Project site visits are a powerful and effective means of illustrating project developments and results. Site visits allow our target audience to interact with the direct beneficiaries of our projects and to obtain first-hand information about the impact of our projects, about the challenges faced by individuals and promote a better understanding of the issues in the development process.

In addition, site visits are important for mission staff as well as media representatives to understand the development issues at hand and to clearly articulate how USAID is working to improve these issues by using concrete examples.

We will continue to encourage our contractors and grantees to involve high-level USG representatives in all public events related to USG assistance. However, this will entail additional leg work and implementers need to send calendar of events with enough advance notice (minimum 10 working days) before the proposed event date.

6. G2G Briefings

“Brown Bag” lunches are generally used in US organizations as an informal forum for sharing information about an issue, policy or activity of interest to several parties. “Brown Bags” are a useful tool to communicate valuable info to a small interest group in
an informal setting and will be a good venue for USAID/ Serbia & Montenegro to share information and potentially coordinate activities with a select target audience. The Program Information Manager will organize a series of lunch-in briefings throughout the year, around a specific topic of interest to government counterparts, US Embassy, other USG agencies and USAID Staff, such as Parliamentary Reform Assistance.

7. **Partners Meeting**

The success of USAID’s communications strategy is in part dependent on the ability of our contractors and grantees to articulate how their activities integrate into USAID’s overall goals and activities. Thus, USAID will organize Partners Meeting inviting the key staff of USAID contractors and grantees to share information about their activities. The forum will give USAID contractors and grantees an opportunity to learn about one another’s projects and activities and potentially identify areas of cooperation, to better understand how project activities support USAID’s country strategy and overall USG development assistance goals.

8. **Integration of Strategy into Program & Projects**

The most effective way to integrate the main elements of our communications strategy into our programs and projects is to disseminate this strategy to all staff and partners and to encourage implementers and grantees to participate in its implementation. USAID partners can assist in the implementation of this strategy by developing similar communication tools that will enable them disseminate information about their USAID-funded projects and better prepare for site visits.

We encourage RFAs and RFPs for major programs to incorporate a public education component that obligates bidders/contractors to have a well-defined and specific public outreach plan as part of their scope of activities.


It is important that USAID/ Serbia & Montenegro include success stories in its Annual Report and SEED Annual Report for the reasons already mentioned.