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# MACEDONIA SUPPORT INITIATIVE (MSI) FINAL REPORT



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# MACEDONIA SUPPORT INITIATIVE (MSI)

## **FINAL REPORT**

**Submitted to:**

USAID Office of Transition Initiatives

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AECOM International Development

**Cover Photo:**

Morning show "I Love Macedonia" by TV Sitel for USAID

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# ACRONYMS

<b>AECOM</b>	AECOM International Development	<b>OSCE</b>	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
<b>SRS</b>	Strategic Review Session	<b>OTI</b>	Office of Transition Initiatives
<b>RA</b>	Rolling Assessment	<b>SDSM</b>	Social Democratic Union of Macedonia
<b>RPO</b>	Regional Program Option	<b>SEC</b>	State Election Commission
<b>BPA</b>	Blanket Purchase Agreement	<b>STTA</b>	Short Term Technical Assistance
<b>TO</b>	Task Order	<b>IRI</b>	International Republican Institute
<b>USG</b>	United States Government	<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organization	<b>VMRO – DPMNE</b>	Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization–Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity
<b>GOM</b>	Government of Macedonia		
<b>DDGS</b>	Direct Distribution of Goods and Services		
<b>DUI</b>	Democratic Union for Integration		
<b>EU</b>	European Union		
<b>EC</b>	European Commission		
<b>IFES</b>	International Foundation for Electoral Systems		
<b>MOF</b>	Ministry of Finance		
<b>MFA</b>	Ministry of Foreign Affairs		
<b>MIA</b>	Macedonian Information Agency		
<b>MISA</b>	Ministry of Information Society and Administration		
<b>MLSG</b>	Ministry of Local Self-Government		
<b>MRT</b>	Macedonian Radio and Television		
<b>MSI</b>	Macedonia Support Initiative		
<b>MYF</b>	Move Your Finger		
<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organization		
<b>NCCVECT</b>	National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Counterterrorism		

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## **The Macedonia Support Initiative (MSI)**

has effectively responded to emergent civil society, media, and governance priorities driven by an extremely challenging, rapidly changing, and highly charged political landscape. Since January 2016, this United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) program implemented a total of 103 activities, furthering a professionalized media, active civic participation, and good governance. MSI collaboratively supported more than 50 local partners to implement small, quick-impact, short-term activities aligned with these programmatic clusters.

MSI not only maintained relevancy within, but actively contributed to, the evolution of a dynamic socio-political context, ultimately revealing the adaptability and efficacy of the program. The program's objectives themselves, as well as their ability to shift relatively rapidly, and the model—providing catalytic assistance to local partners—has proven a successful means to drive media product and industry evolution, increased and meaningful citizen engagement, and political reform in Macedonia. MSI's mode of working hand-in-hand with partners through a progression of activities, cultivating synergies among partners and activities throughout implementation, has been instrumental in this success and building a foundation for the potential sustainability of the initiative.

MSI began on the heels of national scandal and ended on the precipice of national reform, initiating program activities under an a government increasingly turning away from the European Union and NATO and concluding them in partnership with a new government that has pivoted towards greater integration with these two entities. MSI was made up of a dedicated team of professionals that grew and adapted to the changing needs of the program and worked tirelessly to craft activities that responded to an expansive governance arc: delayed elections, domestic protests, stalemate election results, uneasy transfer of power, and high-visibility reforms. MSI was able to shift its programmatic focus, staffing profile, portfolio of partners/grantees/

beneficiaries, method of engagement, and objectives and cluster outcomes in step with the dynamic context, creating a corresponding programmatic trajectory. While “proof of concept” and individual activity successes are part of the program's achievements, MSI leaves behind a legacy in the form of local partners, including government entities, with increased capacity to contribute to and thrive within this new context, as well as a follow-on program well-positioned to build on the successes of its predecessor.

This report highlights the most successful activities from each of the aforementioned programmatic clusters, as typologies of mechanisms to achieve a particular outcome. In the media cluster, “Yesterday's News” is discussed, revealing how humor and satire, paired with high production value, can create television that can be used to engage citizens on issue of importance. “On the Same Side,” another television production, uses fact-based and sensitive reporting to celebrate the diversity of Macedonia, providing an example of a way to combat the spread of misinformation used to polarize communities. In the governance cluster, technical assistance efforts to government entities is discussed, particularly on strategic planning and communications support, as a way to create increased connections with citizens, increase transparency, and provide timely information on the progress towards reform. In the civic cluster, the progression from leveraging arts platforms to bottom-up civic action is detailed, as a method to gain visibility and entry into communities and empower local organizations. With 23 new activities alone in the last quarter of programming, including 45 civic “capstone” events; critical technical support to urgent reforms, highlighting to the State Election Committee; and holding the Media Innovation Forum, an event to address the changing state of the media industry, MSI's final activities represent a culmination of the nuanced programming developed over three years of successful implementation in close coordination with dedicated local partners.



Autocue





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## PROGRAM BACKGROUND

AECOM International Development (AECOM) was awarded the USAID/OTI Task Order (TO) in December 2015 to assist the Government of Macedonia (GOM) to implement the critical democratic reforms outlined in the internationally mediated Przino Agreement. The MSI program reinforced the U.S. Government's (USG) foreign policy goal of strengthening Macedonia's democratic reform processes leading to greater Euro-Atlantic integration. In May 2017, MSI received a contract modification that extended the period of performance to December 17, 2018 with a contract ceiling of \$16.2 million over three years.





MEMBERS OF GOVERNMENT OF MACEDONIA MEET WITH THE MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

## COUNTRY CONTEXT

After the disintegration of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Macedonia was left relatively unscarred by the war and with the latitude to move towards Euro-Atlantic integration. However, in 2001, the conflict in neighboring Kosovo spilled over, resulting in a nine-month armed conflict that ended with the Ohrid Framework Agreement<sup>1</sup> between the GOM and ethnic Albanian representatives. Then, in 2014, Macedonia signed the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union (EU) and submitted its application for Candidate Status. Macedonia expected an official invitation from the North Atlantic Treaty

<sup>1</sup><https://www.osce.org/skopje/1100622?download=true>

Organization (NATO) to start the accession process, but Greece's veto on the use of the name "Macedonia" thwarted the country's hopes at the 20th NATO Bucharest Summit in 2008, beginning a period of significant democratic backsliding.

Since 2008, nationalist rhetoric started building, while democratic standards were continually deteriorating, further undermined by the sitting government's suppression of independent media and judiciary functions. By November 2015, the European Commission (EC) progress report on Macedonia described the conditions in Macedonia as "state capture."



“Since May [2015], the opposition organized several demonstrations to protest against the lack of transparency and level of state capture by the government. There have also been an increased number of demonstrations protesting at the lack of consultation in government policy-making on laws which have been repealed or suspended.”

– **EUROPEAN COMMISSION,  
2015 PROGRESS REPORT**

1 [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/key\\_documents/2015/20151110\\_report\\_the\\_former\\_yugoslav\\_republic\\_of\\_macedonia.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/key_documents/2015/20151110_report_the_former_yugoslav_republic_of_macedonia.pdf)

**The increasingly fragile political environment eventually led to a political crisis in 2015,**

culminating with a wiretapping scandal that involved more than 20,000 people, including prominent Macedonians and members of the international community. The EU, with significant support from the USG, stepped in to address the political crisis by bringing together the leaders of the four main political parties to negotiate the Przino Agreement<sup>2</sup> in July 2015.

The formation of an interim government was a key component of the EU-mediated Przino Agreement, which was reached between the four main political parties in July 2015, with the aim of bringing to an end the political crisis that began at the start of 2015. The agreement called for the Prime Minister to resign 100 days before the projected election date of April 24, 2016. The political crisis centered on claims by the opposition Social Democratic Alliance of Macedonia (SDSM) that the VMRO-DPMNE had engaged in extensive fraud in the April 2014 parliamentary election. The Agreement also recommended establishing the Special Prosecutor's Office (SPO), with a mandate to investigate the allegations of high-level crime that arose from the illegal wiretaps. The Office was formed in 2015 as part of an internationally sponsored political agreement necessitated by the illegal wiretaps revealed that year by the then-opposition Social Democrats.

The transfer of power continued unabated until the pardon by the Macedonian President at the time (from VMRO-DPMNE) of 56 politicians under investigation for alleged crimes revealed in the wiretapping. The decision triggered

2 [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/news\\_corner/news/news-files/20150619\\_agreement.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/news_corner/news/news-files/20150619_agreement.pdf)



a nationwide wave of public protests in April 2016, dubbed the “Colorful Revolution,” as participants threw paint at public buildings and monuments, symbolic of their rejection of the current regime’s alleged fraud, waste, and abuse of public funds and attempts to construct a narrow conception of national identity. Following these demonstrations, national elections were postponed to December 2016, since the opposition and international community determined that the conditions for holding credible elections had not been met.

On December 11, 2016, national elections took place. As per the Macedonian Constitution, the political party that wins the most parliamentary seats may form a government; if that party fails to form a government, the mandate is extended to the party with the second highest votes. VMRO-DPMNE won the most seats by a thin margin with 51 to SDSM’s 49; therefore, VMRO-DPMNE was granted the mandate to form a government within the constitutionally allotted 20-day period. The attempts to form a coalition government failed and in response, SDSM began discussions with ethnic Albanian parties, including the Albanian Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), previously aligned with VMRO-DPMNE. In early January 2017, the major ethnic Albanian parties met in Tirana to agree on conditions for entering into a coalition government. The resulting “Albanian Platform” defined seven key points intended to improve conditions for ethnic Albanians living in Macedonia, including the Law on Language, recognizing Albanian as the second official language in Macedonia<sup>3</sup>. In April 2017, SDSM agreed to the terms of this platform and DUI accepted formation of the coalition government. Moments after the decision, about 200 supporters of the civic initiative “For a United Macedonia” stormed the Parliament in a violent protest leaving over 100 people injured, including the soon-to-be Prime Minister and Speaker of the Parliament from DUI. Despite this violence, which was condemned by the international community, a coalition government composed of SDSM and DUI was formed in May 2017.

In an effort to instill public confidence, the newly formed government released the “3-6-9 Plan”<sup>4</sup> in July 2017 that outlined the process and urgent reform priorities identified in the Przino Agreement to improve governance and reorient the country’s trajectory towards Euro-Atlantic integration. The plan integrated recommendations from the Przino

Agreement, Priebe Report<sup>5</sup>, and the “Urgent Reform Priorities”<sup>6</sup> to put forth a reform agenda intended to be implemented over nine months. The plan lay out specific reforms in the areas of elections, parliamentary procedures, presidential cooperation, civil society, the Ohrid Framework Agreement, public administration, judicial system, intelligence and security services, corruption, migration, and media.

The change of government and the reform plan improved citizens’ perceptions of the country’s outlook, building momentum for a sweep in local elections. A public opinion poll conducted by the International Republican Institute (IRI) in August 2017 revealed an uptick in “optimism,” with 44 percent of citizens reporting the country was “peaceful and stable.” Ahead of municipal elections that took place on October 15, 2017, 74 percent of citizens believed conditions were in place for elections to be free and fair. Voter turnout was 59.51 percent in the first round and 51.92 in the second round. Eight SDSM-supported candidates won in 57 municipalities, up from four in the 2013; DUI in ten, down from 14; and VMRO-DPMNE in five, down from 56. Newly-formed Albanian parties, the Besa Movement and the Alliance for Albanians (AA), won in one and three municipalities, respectively. International observers did not find any major election irregularities and determined media coverage of the candidates to be balanced.

The new government has prioritized improving relationships with its neighbors, including the good neighbor agreement with Bulgaria and resolving the name dispute between Macedonia and Greece in an effort to restart the EU and NATO accession process. After months of diplomatic overtures from both the Macedonian and Greek sides, the two governments signed the Prespa Agreement on June 12, 2018. Among other stipulations, the agreement includes provisions that the official name of the country shall become “The Republic of North Macedonia,” the nationality of citizens shall be “Macedonian,” and the language spoken by majority in the country will be recognized as the “Macedonian” language.

On June 30, 2018, the Macedonian Parliament voted in favor of holding a consultative referendum on September 30, 2018, to give voters a voice on the name agreement and Euro-Atlantic integration. Based on Macedonian legislation, the referendum

<sup>3</sup> Macedonian Parliament adopted the Law on Albanian Language in January 2018.  
<sup>4</sup> <http://vladamk/sites/default/files/programa/2017-2020/Plan%203-6-9%20ENG.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/2017.09.14\\_seg\\_report\\_on\\_systemic\\_rol\\_issues\\_for\\_publication.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/2017.09.14_seg_report_on_systemic_rol_issues_for_publication.pdf)  
<sup>6</sup> [https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/former-yugoslav-republic-macedonia/17011/urgent-reform-priorities\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/former-yugoslav-republic-macedonia/17011/urgent-reform-priorities_en)

was announced as nonbinding. The referendum question was “Are you in favor of NATO and EU membership and accepting the name agreement between the Republic of Macedonia and Greece?” The three months leading up to the referendum fully consumed domestic and international entities engaged with public education and the support to the State Election Commission to administer the referendum. For the referendum to have passed, 50 percent turnout was required; however, only 36 percent of the Macedonian electorate voted in the referendum of which 91 percent supported the name change. Due to the low turnout, the State Election Commission determined the Referendum to be unsuccessful. As a result, a final decision was to be made by the Parliament. The Macedonian Parliament voted on October 19, 2018 in favor of opening a procedure to change the Constitution and incorporate the key provisions of the Prespa Agreement<sup>7</sup>. The Macedonian Parliament has since followed the procedure to debate on four proposed amendments. The process of constitutional change is expected to be completed in January 2019 will then have to be ratified and approved by Greek Parliament (anticipated Spring 2019).

In addition to tangible progress towards resolving the name dispute, Macedonia’s reform achievements, guided by the Przino Agreement and the 3-6-9 Plan, were praised by the EC in its 2018 Enlargement Package. In addition, the specific report on Macedonia as an EU candidate<sup>8</sup> recommended re-opening the process. On October 18, 2018, NATO officially invited Macedonia to begin negotiations leading to the accession. The formal talks cover the specific aspects of membership, including political, military, and legal considerations; once all constitutional changes regarding the new name are complete, the accession protocol can be signed.

“Since May 2017, the new reform oriented government has taken steps to address state capture by gradually restoring checks and balances, strengthening democracy, and rule of law. The country is undergoing fundamental changes in a more inclusive and open political atmosphere.”

**– EUROPEAN COMMISSION,  
2018 ENLARGEMENT PACKAGE**

<sup>7</sup> <https://macedonia.com/politics/macedonia-greece-agreement.html>

<sup>8</sup> European Commission. Commission Staff Working Document: The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia 2018 Report. <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/nea/files/20180417-the-former-yugoslav-republic-of-macedonia-report.pdf>



## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION AND STRATEGY

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Since the start of program implementation in early 2016, MSI successfully implemented a total of 103 activities. In line with the evolving socio-political situation, the MSI program strategy was refined utilizing near real-time adaptations and ongoing learning. Over the three-year life of the program, MSI focused on three primary areas: media, civic engagement, and good governance.

MSI's initial program objectives were to:

- **Assist with the implementation of key elements of the Przino Agreement,**
- **Extend space for independent media and pluralist narratives, and**
- **Address emergent threats to stability.**

In January 2016, because a national reform agenda was not yet in place, MSI's initial activities worked primarily with media entities to embrace a plurality of perspective and voices, as well as fostering public dialogue on issues of importance. Specifically, this programming focused on the objective of creating a more moderate media landscape through diversification of types of media as well as media formats offering balanced news and engaging citizens in discourse on political and social issues of importance to their communities. The space for civic participation in Macedonia was increasingly narrowing during this time. Therefore, MSI focused on the development of civic engagement activities, using arts and culture to expose citizens to diverse means of civic participation. These two types of programming established early synergies amongst activities and grantees, mutually reinforcing these objectives.





The necessary conditions to implement activities under the first objective were also not present in early 2016. In response, MSI pivoted to increase its work with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and partners in the media sector, working with them to create and maintain spaces for free expression in a narrowing and increasingly polarized and partisan political environment. With the country context evolving, the program goal continued to respond in tandem to support Macedonia's democratization efforts:

- **2015: Strengthen democratic processes by promoting accountability, transparency, and inclusive political participation in Macedonia.**
- **2016: Create and maintain spaces in a narrowing political environment.**
- **Early 2017: Leverage spaces for diverse civic engagement in a narrowing political environment.**
- **Mid-2017: Engage citizens of Macedonia in democratic reforms.**

Between November 2017 and December 2018, MSI built on its achievements with continued support to the GOM, media, and CSOs in strengthening democratic processes and the implementation of urgent reforms under the guiding objective: Key democratic institutions make tangible and timely contributions to the national reform agenda. The program considered how to support these three pillars to continue their trajectory towards a transparent and accountable government respectful of the values of the free media and civic engagement. To this end, during the final year of implementation, MSI identified three overarching cluster outcomes to guide programming:

- **Media outlets increasingly embrace professional editorial and management practices consistent with a balanced, audience-driven media sector that is independent from political party or government control.**
- **Citizens actively participate in substantive public discourse.**
- **Government and public institutions design and communicate critical reforms consistent with EU standards.**

## MEDIA CLUSTER

The media environment experienced significant evolution throughout the three years of MSI programming. When the program was launched, Freedom House rated Macedonia's media as the least free in Europe, staunchly divided along party and ethnic lines, and under immense political pressure to report in a manner favorable to the ruling party.<sup>1</sup> The wiretapping scandal offered a view into a "large-scale and illegal government wiretapping of journalists, corrupt ties between officials and media owners, and an increase in threats and attacks on media workers."<sup>2</sup> The majority of Macedonia's mainstream television networks and online news portals were politically or economically linked with the government until 2017 when the media landscape started changing gradually and opening up to diverse voices. The previous political pressure created a hyper-polarized landscape that discouraged diverse narratives, suppressed critical reporting, and established a media culture pilfered by self-censorship. Freedom House cited the government's "liberal use of promotional advertising" for "[increasing] the media's financial dependence and [favoring] pro-government outlets."<sup>3</sup> In 2017, Freedom House categorized Macedonia's media environment as "not free."

By April 2018, however, the country's political transition began to have a positive impact on opening up space for a free and independent media. According to Freedom House's "Nations in Transit Ratings"<sup>4</sup> issued in April 2018, independent media in the country had improved with a score of 5.00, compared to 4.43 in 2017. The improved rating was earned "due to advances in overall media reporting in the country and the new regime's decision to end government advertising, which had been a mechanism enabling state capture." Furthermore, Freedom House stated that the "change of government [...] contributed to some positive developments in establishing credible media reporting [...]"

1 In 2016, Macedonia had the third-least free press in Europe, ahead of only Russia and Belarus according to Freedom House's Freedom of the Press global analysis. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/freedom-press-2016>  
 2 "Freedom of the Press Report-Macedonia." Freedom House, 2016. Web. 14 Oct. 2016. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2016/macedonia>  
 3 "Macedonia Freedom of the Press 2016." Freedom House, n.d. Web. <<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2016/macedonia>>  
 4 Bliznakovski, Jovan. "Macedonia." Nations In Transit Ratings. Freedom House, 2018. [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/NIT2018\\_Macedonia.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/NIT2018_Macedonia.pdf)



Adapting to the changing environment, MSI supported TV and online content production and provided essential technical assistance and on-the-job training – identifying effective media formats including debates, satirical shows, series, and drama through the use of data, analytics, and focus groups– to assist in opening up the media landscape. Building on this work, MSI partnered with public broadcasters in Macedonia to produce a diverse portfolio of media programming aimed at exposing the public to a wide range of non-partisan perspectives on important socio-political issues and provide better access to balanced and credible media. By leveraging humor, satire, drama, and innovative journalistic formats through multiple TV and online platforms, MSI worked to engage the public in the plurality of thought required to bring to life a healthy, vibrant democratic society. An internal USAID/OTI evaluation of the MSI



*"YESTERDAY'S NEWS" USES HUMOR AND SATIRE TO ENGAGE CITIZENS ON ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE*

media programming cluster found that "MSI has effectively seized opportunities presented by the changing political tides in Macedonia to create more space for democratic discourse in the country. While the program did not create the new political space itself, it effectively took advantage of the windows of opportunity it presented to diversify political opinions in mainstream media, push for accountability in government, and ratchet back the most polarizing hate speech."

MSI also provided multifaceted technical capacity building to key media outlets to increase the likelihood of the sustainability of the improvements within the media landscape. Through highly-skilled experts providing on and off-site mentoring and on-the-job training, MSI supported building professional standards in the media market, including increasing

content and production quality and establish professionalized editorial and management practices. To better assist media partners to effectively distribute on and offline content, MSI provided social media analytics services to track trends and evaluate the impact of specific programming, translating into recommendations to expand viewership and online engagement. Building professional standards in the media aimed at developing relevant sources of information was deemed critical to minimize the influence and the amount of information coming from uncorroborated sources and to strengthen public awareness and catalyze community-based debates on important issues.



## CIVIC ENGAGEMENT CLUSTER

At the inception of MSI, the level of civic engagement was arguably at the lowest since the country's founding. Activists were often driven underground or labeled as traitors by the media, deterring all forms of engagement from the majority of citizens. It was within this difficult environment – a culture of fear dissipating into apathy – that MSI embarked on the task of opening up the space for civic engagement in Macedonia, beginning with leveraging arts and cultural events to mobilize citizens and provide constructive opportunities for civic engagement. MSI used artistic platforms, such as summer festivals that catalyzed citizen engagement within public spaces, encouraged critical thinking, and promoted civic involvement. MSI also facilitated synergies between festivals and the program's media partners, increasing the public's exposure to their activities and inspiring citizens to engage on important issues beyond the festivals themselves.

This coordination eventually led to the umbrella civic campaign that was branded “Move Your Finger” (MYF)<sup>1</sup>, which built on the momentum created by this suite of activities. The program built partnerships with CSOs, local governments, and informal groups interested in organizing events in public spaces, such as parks and squares, to provide open opportunities for citizens to engage with one another and the public sphere through non-partisan social activism and on issues of importance to their communities. These activities raised the visibility and accessibility of civic engagement, outside of political parties, through direct actions addressing community issues and awareness-raising. In an internal evaluation of the civic programming cluster, USAID/OTI identified key phases of the MYF campaign, illustrative of how programming for the civic engagement evolved, with the first two phases seeking to piece together the fragmented efforts of Macedonian civil society through media, arts, and culture in order to engage citizens on civic priorities first within larger cities and then, during the second phase, providing greater outreach to the more underserved rural and urban areas.

The third and final phase of the MYF campaign sought to culminate the multiple successes of people who came together under the MYF campaign in the previous two years through a series of interconnected and high-profile capstone events throughout Macedonia. These capstone events showcased the networking successes and localized advocacy work, gathered together all key actors under the MYF campaign, and highlighted MSI's accomplishments and contributions towards strengthening civic engagement and opening up Macedonia's civic society.

<sup>1</sup> This title is taken from the Macedonia idiom that means “do something.”



“MOVE YOUR FINGER” IMPLEMENTED A SERIES OF COMMUNITY INITIATIVES INTENDED TO ENGAGE CITIZENS ON CIVIC PRIORITIES



STUDENTS INTERACT DURING A "FEED YOUR BRAIN" EVENT AT UNIVERSITY OF SKOPJE POWERED BY MOVE YOUR FINGER



## GOOD GOVERNANCE CLUSTER

Following the parliamentary elections in December 2016, a new government formed in May 2017 with a platform that prioritized reorienting Macedonia towards Euro-Atlantic integration. The new GOM pledged reforms consistent with both the Przino Agreement and Priebe Report and laid out an action plan solidified as the “3-6-9 Plan.” As a response to this redirection in the political environment, MSI pivoted to work on supporting government reforms.

In consultation and close coordination with its government counterparts, MSI identified the needs of ten government ministries and agencies. MSI mobilized quickly to respond to the GOM's priorities and requests for technical assistance supporting the GOM to achieve key reform agenda items. MSI deployed international experts to provide on-the-job training and mentoring on essential government responsibilities and development of critical inter-ministerial communications strategies. Aimed at supporting the accomplishment of key EU recommendations, MSI supported reforms to Macedonia's justice sector by engaging rule of law experts in the lead up to the Ministry of Justice drafting

the National Strategy for Judicial Reform by advising working groups that resulted in harmonization of legislation on judicial and criminal bodies, including the public prosecution, the council of public prosecutors and the SPO.

Additionally MSI worked with strategic partners, such as the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), to respond to the GOM's critical needs during the run-up to local elections and a historical national referendum. Prior to the October 2017 local elections, MSI's partnership with IFES resulted in a successfully integrated voter management system to manage voter registry data and other tools that improved confidence in the transparency of the electoral process. Through MSI's support, the GOM made significant progress towards adoption of key strategic components of the accession process, such as a “roadmap” to a national ICT Strategy. MSI worked towards increasing public trust in the GOM by demonstrating to citizens that the GOM was committed to delivering on reform priorities.





The activities in the area of good governance were linked to the program-level objective of supporting the urgent reform priorities to strengthen democratic institutions. This was also expressed as:





- 1) Supporting the government and public institutions to design and communicate critical reforms consistent with EU standards;**
- 2) Raising awareness and providing support for the Przino Agreement; and**
- 3) Helping the GOM and public institutions to make informed decisions, which contribute to the accession of the country to the EU.**

# OVERALL PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

## USD AMOUNTS SPENT PER OBJECTIVE

PROGRAM OBJECTIVE	ACTIVITY COUNT	TOTAL ACTIVITY AWARD
To increase consumption of balanced media programming on key political issues.	8	\$426,871
To create and maintain spaces in a narrowing political environment for pluralistic civic engagement.	56	\$5,555,104
Key democratic institutions make tangible and timely contributions to the national reform agenda.	34	\$2,632,144
Enable citizens from across the political divide to come together to engage and advocate around democratic reforms and other issues of local and national importance.	6	\$184,213
<b>GRAND TOTALS</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>\$8,798,334</b>

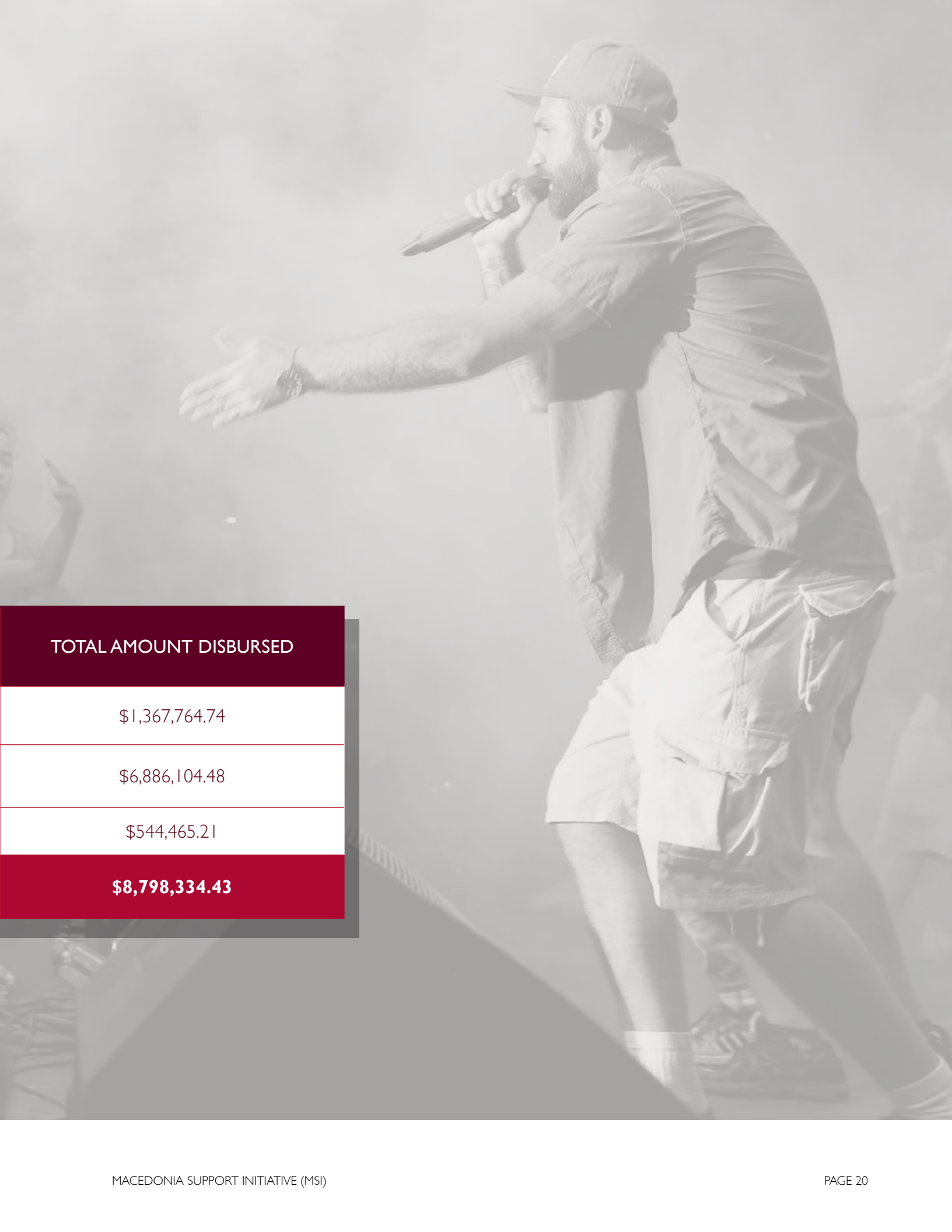
## USD AMOUNTS SPENT PER FUND SOURCE

 <b>FUND SOURCE</b>	 <b>ACTIVITY COUNT</b>	 <b>TOTAL ACTIVITY AWARD</b>	 <b>TOTAL AMOUNT DISBURSED</b>
TI-X16-OCO	<b>50</b>	<b>\$4,174,938</b>	<b>\$4,174,938</b>
TI-X17-OCO	<b>18</b>	<b>\$1,893,364</b>	<b>\$1,893,364</b>
TI-X17	<b>24</b>	<b>\$1,805,371</b>	<b>\$1,805,371</b>
EC-OCO 16/17 - MEDIA	<b>3</b>	<b>\$393,552</b>	<b>\$393,552</b>
EC-OCO 16/17 - GOVERNANCE	<b>1</b>	<b>\$99,896</b>	<b>\$99,896</b>
EC-OCO-S	<b>7</b>	<b>\$431,209</b>	<b>\$431,209</b>

## TOTAL AMOUNTS DISBURSED IN TAP AND NON-TAP

ACTIVITY TYPE	ACTIVITY COUNT	TOTAL ACTIVITY AWARD
DDGS	25	\$1,367,764.74
Grants Under Contract	69	\$6,886,104.48
STTA	9	\$544,465.21
<b>Grand Totals:</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>\$8,798,334.43</b>





**TOTAL AMOUNT DISBURSED**

\$1,367,764.74

\$6,886,104.48

\$544,465.21

**\$8,798,334.43**

NUMBER OF GRANTS AND USD SPENT  
PER CLUSTER PER YEAR

<b>TOTAL DISBURSED BY CLUSTER</b>			
<b>Cluster</b>	<b>Activities in Cluster</b>	<b>Total Amount Disbursed</b>	<b>Total Amount Undisbursed</b>
No Value	<b>8</b>	<b>\$554,780.58</b>	<b>\$554,780.58</b>
(RETIRED) Strategic Cluster 1: Raise awareness of and support institutions implementing key reforms detailed in the Prizno Agreement	<b>11</b>	<b>\$749,181.36</b>	<b>\$749,181.36</b>
(RETIRED) Strategic Cluster 3: Leveraging arts and culture as a catalyst for broad-based civic participation	<b>2</b>	<b>\$115,754.77</b>	<b>\$115,754.77</b>
(RETIRED) Strategic Cluster 4: Increase the plurality of perspectives and diversity of content in Macedonia's media landscape.	<b>6</b>	<b>\$354,758.14</b>	<b>\$354,758.14</b>
(RETIRED): Improved issue advocacy	<b>1</b>	<b>\$2,812.33</b>	<b>\$2,812.33</b>
Citizens actively participate in substantive public discourse.	<b>31</b>	<b>\$1,620,433.00</b>	<b>\$1,620,433.00</b>
Government and public institutions design and communicate critical reforms consistent with EU standards.	<b>15</b>	<b>\$1,687,961.82</b>	<b>\$1,687,961.82</b>
Media outlets embrace professional editorial and management practices	<b>44</b>	<b>\$4,815,705.17</b>	<b>\$4,815,705.17</b>

## NUMBER OF GRANTS AND USD SPENT PER SECTOR PER YEAR

<b>TOTAL DISBURSED BY SECTOR</b>				
<b>Sector</b>	<b>Activity Count</b>	<b>Total Award Activity</b>	<b>Total Amount Disbursed</b>	<b>Total Amount</b>
Civic Engagement	8	\$554,780.58	\$554,780.58	\$0.00
Communication Platforms	11	\$749,181.36	\$749,181.36	\$0.00
Elections	2	\$115,754.77	\$115,754.77	\$0.00
Governance	6	\$354,758.14	\$354,758.14	\$0.00
Media and Information	1	\$2,812.33	\$2,812.33	\$0.00
Other	31	\$1,620,433.00	\$1,620,433.00	\$0.00
Research & Evaluation	15	\$1,687,961.82	\$1,687,961.82	\$0.00



## SUPPORTING PLURALISTIC MEDIA CONTENT

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When MSI was launched, the majority of Macedonia's mainstream television networks and online news portals were under political or economic pressure from the government. This pressure created a polarized landscape divided across political and ethnic lines that discouraged diverse narratives and suppressed critical reporting. As a result, investigative journalism and fact-based news programming was extremely limited. The few independent media actors were harassed and plagued by a lack of financing. This resulted in self-censorship, folding to the political or financial pressure to report favorably on the ruling coalition, and a steep decline in the quality and professionalism of journalism in Macedonia.

The program first focused on working with content creators to develop diverse media programming formats – including debates, comedies, and dramas – aimed at fostering a plurality of perspectives as well as constructive and inclusive dialogue on political and social issues. The purpose of this initial focus (six activities under this specific strategic cluster) was to open the media space to a plurality of voices able to discuss relevant issues through a non-partisan lens. MSI followed these activities with embedded technical training support, allowing media partners to increasingly embrace professional editorial and management practices consistent with a balanced, audience-driven, and independent media sector. To provide this wide range of technical support to professionalizing media outlets, MSI contracted specialized international and local technical experts with skills sets specific to the needs of media partners as well as social media analytics to inform their content development, formats, scheduling, and outreach strategies. This data and analysis enhanced the understanding of audience receptivity and adequacy of approach, which in turn helped media partners respond and adapt to demographics and trends, thereby expanding the reach of their content.



## YESTERDAY'S NEWS

In a media environment subsumed by self-censorship due to political interference, MSI supported production and broadcast of four seasons of a political satire, “Yesterday’s News.” “Yesterday’s News” leveraged comedic devices in order to discuss sensitive political topics, such as the absurdities and hypocrisies of politicians and the media industry’s coverage—or lack thereof—of current events, through an alternative, non-partisan perspective. “Yesterday’s News” became a critically acclaimed satirical show, establishing space for humor to address important issues in Macedonia’s closed environment.

Since the program first aired in April 2016, it steadily increased in quality and popularity, with clips from the show – particularly parody music videos – going viral on social media numerous times. The program’s non-partisan, balanced, and humorous approach to issues of importance has generated a loyal audience, making it one of the best known and most popular shows on Macedonian television, reaching over 103,000 viewers per episode on TV alone. It has a market share of seven percent during primetime hours, making it regularly the second most-watched program during its timeslot. “Yesterday’s News” also has one of the most popular Macedonian fan pages on Facebook, with some videos reaching over 370,000 views and 19,000 likes, comments, and shares. The show is also popular on YouTube, with an average of 19,000 views per episode and a total view count of over 3.2 million. In the run-up to the December 2016 national elections, when social polarization was at a high point, “Yesterday’s News” lent humor to the situation and created a satirical

Undecided Voters Party to deliver a serious message to Macedonian voters at a critical juncture in their democracy. Once again, hundreds of thousands of Macedonians heard the message, with the Undecided Voters Party’s most popular video garnering over 350,000 views and 5,000 shares.

With MSI’s support, the “Yesterday’s News” production team was able to utilize digital media effectively and also diversified their revenue streams with the use of seven additional portals in order to expand their audiences. By the third season, “Yesterday’s News” became a fully established and recognized brand. During the third season, the second most-watched TV station in Macedonia, Kanal 5, approached the show’s producers to sign an agreement with them for broadcast of the fourth season. The change from Telma to Kanal 5 was another strategic move in the effort to achieve sustainability through increased ratings, viewership, and value of advertisements. The Nielsen Average Minute Rating<sup>1</sup>, indicating the number of viewers at a specific timeslot, confirmed that the premier episode of the fourth season on Kanal 5 held a 78 percent increase in viewership in comparison to the premier show of the third season on TV Telma, indicating a significant increase in popularity.

MSI’s support to the series ended on October 28, 2018; however, the British Embassy matched MSI’s funds in order to complete production allowing “Yesterday’s News” to finish broadcast of the fourth season. Due to continued partnership and technical support, this popular show may continue, championing news coverage using alternative perspectives during a critical period in Macedonia’s democratic growth.

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<sup>1</sup> This a rating generated by Neilson Media Research, calculating the average number of people that watched a TV broadcast during any 60-second portion of that broadcast.

## ON THE SAME SIDE

By 2016, Macedonia's press freedom ratings had been falling for a decade, scoring 125th out of 199 countries, as a result of the 2015 wiretapping scandal and continued intimidation against independent media (as referenced earlier in the discussion of the Freedom House report). This lack of independent media and balanced and reliable sources of information resulted in extremely limited access to objective and well-researched information, increasing the likelihood of citizens to be manipulated through hearsay and disinformation. Within this context, political actors were able to draw dividing lines along religious and cultural differences to stir support for their own political agendas, resulting in an even more polarized society. In response, MSI supported the production of the documentary series, "On the Same Side," exposing citizens to accurate and diverse perspectives on the country's multicultural heritage to combat the spread of this misinformation and begin to repair schisms amongst Macedonia's linguistic and religious communities.

In September 2016, MSI first partnered with a team of journalists and film professionals to produce and broadcast "On the Same Side" with the aim of presenting a tolerant and multicultural account of Macedonia's linguistic and religious communities. The show took an investigative journalism approach to present an accurate account of Macedonia's historic and current cultural diversity to appeal to Macedonians across the political spectrum. It featured prominent and diverse members of the religious community, sociologists, civil society leaders, academics, and everyday people from different cultural and religious backgrounds throughout the country to discuss the socio-cultural and political environment, diversity, related challenges, and other topics of relevance. "On the Same Side" became the first Macedonian media product that used positive, balanced, and informative representations of the nation's diverse cultural landscape.

The first episode of "On the Same Side" garnered over 65,000 views. A Facebook page for the show had 300 fans within the first 48 hours of going live, with one viewer commenting, "Finally a good TV show. Not just good, but needed and useful." According to Nielsen Average Minute Rating, "On the Same Side" was the most watched show during its original time slot on Saturday mornings. Season Two grew in audience, with Nielsen Data indicating that the total Average Minute Rating of the premier and reruns reached over 2.5 million viewers. In focus group discussions conducted with participants from Macedonian and Albanian communities, participants highlighted the show's successes, particularly in dismantling deeply rooted stereotypes against other culture groups and bolstering optimism in coexistence. "On the Same Side" successfully presented and educated viewers on the societal bonds formed amongst citizens of different cultural heritages and elaborated on these citizens finding common ground. The documentary captured an accurate snapshot of Macedonian society's diversity and fostered citizen dialogues on intercultural issues. Broadcasted on the national TV station Sitel, "On the Same Side" reached a broad base of Macedonian viewers and the innovative topics engaged viewers outside of Sitel's usual audience base. In October 2017, during local elections, the series "Only the Truth" was the most-watched daily political show. By the third season, the creative team of "On the Same Side" was able to apply MSI-provided technical assistance for a previous series – inclusive of on-the-job training on editorial and technical production skills – to "On the Same Side," resulting in the creative team being able to conduct deeper and more complex research related to the key messages of each story. By applying this approach, the team reassessed the bonding principles of each story and its segments, creating a structured narrative. Ultimately, the successes of the three seasons of "On the Same Side" served as a counter-weight to media that rarely promotes a multicultural national identity and seeks to polarize Macedonia's diverse communities through misinformation.





TECHNICAL PRODUCTION ASSISTANCE FOR THE DOCUMENTARY SERIES "ON THE SAME SIDE"





TRAINING ON TECHNICAL SETTINGS FOR LIGHTING AND CAMERA EQUIPMENT – PHOTO BY JAMIN SKENDERI FOR USAID

## PROFESSIONALIZATION OF THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE

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The final phase of the media cluster activities focused on establishing professional, industry-standard editorial and management practices across the media sector that encourage balanced, credible, and pluralistic programming. MSI's media programming sought to tackle the difficulties of sustainability within the media market by providing the technical expertise to strengthen media partners' organizational management structures, inclusive of a strategic business plan for growth; develop in-depth production cycles, inclusive of pre-production data analysis; and hone specific production skills, such as preparing questions tailored to scheduled guests. The most advanced media productions, "Yesterday's News" and "On the Same Side," were able to continue drafting scripts, producing episodes, and broadcasting until the end of their ongoing seasons.

During the period of April through October 2018, MSI supported the following productions:

- **"Vidi Vaka" - 78 videos, six were to use social media platforms to help people better understand the Prespa Agreement and key facts regarding voting**
- **"On the Same Side" - three videos and 11 scripts ready for future production and airing on Sitel television**
- **"Yesterday's News" - 16 episodes produced and aired on Kanal 5**
- **"Only The Truth" - 90 episodes produced and aired on Kanal 5**
- **"Click Plus" - 60 episodes in Albanian and Macedonian produced and aired on TV 21**



During the final six months of the program, MSI engaged 15 media experts through a flexible mechanism to respond to requests for expert advice and support. The advisory technical support to MSI's media partners was an important tool in helping media outlets embrace professional standards to make the media in Macedonia less susceptible to the strong influence of external narratives and propaganda. A team of seasoned international experts provided on-the-job training and/or seminars for traditional and digital media outlets, such as televisions Sitel and Kanal 5, in areas such as television leadership and strategic management, development of professional and balanced news programming, best practices for reporting, and news segment production.

## ONLY THE TRUTH

Through training and technical assistance, MSI helped establish professional production and editorial practices at Kanal 5, allowing the station to develop higher quality content to be delivered to Macedonian audiences. MSI and Kanal 5 collaborated on the highly successful political debate program, "Only the Truth." At the end of this collaborative period, Kanal 5 decided to continue producing and broadcasting "Only the Truth" after their partnership with MSI ended; at the time of the drafting of this report in December 2018, the show is still ongoing. MSI contributed to the production of 214 episodes, beginning in May 2017. The

decision to fund the show was based on findings from social media analysis recognizing that "Only the Truth" became a brand with broad reach and an ability to inspire discussions among viewers on social media.

Conceptualized as a non-partisan platform, the program initially struggled with hosting prominent political figures from different affiliations that engaged in constructive dialogue about critical issues facing Macedonian citizens. However, the program arrived at a turning point in May 2018 with the appearance of Minister of Foreign Affairs, then Prime Minister and a week later, the leader of opposition party VMRO-DPMNE, who also stated he was willing to have a live televised debate with the Prime Minister. This sequence captured the extent of the shift in attitudes among politicians and encouraged some previously unwilling to participate in televised debates. The episode featuring the leader of opposition party was the most watched, reaching 83,156 viewers with an audience share of nearly 12 percent.

## CLICK PLUS

In order to address the lack of diverse information and plurality of perspectives in Macedonia's media environment, beginning in 2016 MSI partnered with TV21 to strengthen and support the popular "Click Plus" bilingual debate program (also broadcast on Facebook). Through weekly broadcasts, "Click Plus" presented a plurality of perspectives on issues relevant to the daily lives of Macedonian citizens, broadcasting four episodes each week — two in Albanian and two in Macedonian. The show quickly became popular due to its innovative format. MSI-provided technical training on lighting, camera angles, and show introduction served to strengthen technical quality with little to no additional costs for the broadcaster. Additionally, the production's format, which featured audience members directly engaging with a high-profile guest, set a new standard for debate shows. As a reputable and politically independent show characterized by a balanced selection of guests, "Click Plus" has continually been the most watched program on TV21 by Macedonian and Albanian speakers alike.



## MEDIA FORUM INNOVATION

The first ever Media Innovation Forum (MIF)<sup>1</sup> in Macedonia sought to provide trainings and hold discussions – focusing on monetization, global industry practices, and media trends – and present Macedonia’s media platforms and services through a “Buyer’s Salon” where a select group of partners presented their portfolios to a small group of regional marketing buyers from media companies. Additional events at the MIF included a business planning workshop and a presentation of key media business features and global industry standards.

The event encouraged MSI media partners to embrace professional practices consistent with a competitive audience-driven media market and meet prospective regional and international clients to explore potentials for cooperation. The presentations at the “Buyer’s Salon” resulted in a head of a regional station expressing clear interest in one of the presenter’s programs, an offer to broker conversations with Zagreb-based news firms as potential clients, and offers to provide assistance with developing agency photos.

## AWARD-WINNING MSI PARTNERS AND PRODUCTIONS

Local and regional recognition for MSI-supported media productions and media agencies was celebrated as a positive, though unintended, program outcome. The awards supported the concept that small media productions engaging in socio-political topics promoting diversity can make a difference and entities cultivating and embracing professional standards stand out in the media market. The experience from the “Buyer’s Salon” during MIF and the efforts of MSI to build business planning capacity and marketing skills may result in greater potential for sustainability for at least some MSI’s media partners.

- **Eden na Eden, a marketing agency, won two awards in the biggest media festival in the South Eastern Europe Weekend Media Festival in September 2017 and 2018. The Best Digital Mix Award in 2017 was for the MSI-supported media campaign for “Yesterday’s News.”**

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mediainnovationforum.com/>



MEDIA INNOVATION FORUM – PHOTOS BY EDEN NA EDEN FOR USAID

- **“Vidi Vaka,” an independent media production group, was awarded a third prize by the Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia (CMEM) in the category of Best Story Promoting the Rights of Socially Vulnerable and Marginalized Groups for their documentary “The Collectors” in October 2018.**
- **“Yesterday’s News” received two prestigious national “Golden Ladybug Award” for best satirical show in Macedonia in 2016 and 2017.**
- **IWM, a marketing agency, won one of three awards in the Best Social category for their USAID/OTI funded marketing campaign for the series “In Treatment” in the Weekend Media Festival in September 2018.**







GOOD MOOD MEDIA FOR USAID

**MSI partner, Good Mood Media,**

received the prestigious Zlatna Bubamara (Golden Ladybug Award) for the critically acclaimed, "Yesterday's News," winning the award for the best satirical show of 2017. The award demonstrates the consistent successes of "Yesterday's News" to leverage humor and satire to engage to engage a diverse audience across the political spectrum on current political affairs.



## RESPONDING TO THE NEED FOR CRITICAL REFORMS

The highest priority for the newly formed government was to re-orient towards Euro-Atlantic integration and to adopt urgent reforms laid out in the Przino Agreement and the Priebe Report. In response, MSI provided assistance to “support the government and public institutions to have the capacity to design and communicate the critical reforms.”<sup>1</sup> MSI implemented 21 activities under the Good Governance Cluster, with 18 implemented in the final six months of the program.

Following the change in government, many ministries and government institutions were sorely lacking in basic equipment and resources. Within months, MSI provided direct procurement assistance to the Prime Minister’s Sector for Communications as well as five ministries and three government agencies so that they were able to perform basic office functions within their work space. In coordination with government partners, MSI then identified key areas to boost government capacity to implement urgent reforms and prioritize, plan, and effectively communicate with the public. As these needs were identified, MSI contracted an array of expert, short-term consultants to provide hands-on advising and training to government officials to build on their abilities to clearly communicate to their constituencies the progress the GOM has made towards critical reform priorities.

## GOVERNMENT STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

Many ministries of the newly formed government were diminished by limited staff, with varying capacities, and institutional structures and were further crippled by the absence of a holistic strategy that allowed each ministry to communicate efficiently to citizens; rather, ministries communicated on an ad hoc and reactive basis. Taking into account the urgency of the national reform mandate, MSI supported multiple government partners, including the Prime Minister’s Sector for Communications Office and Public Relations, Ministry of Local Self Government (MLSG), and Ministry of

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<sup>1</sup> In the rolling assessment on November 2017, MSI staff developed this objective which guided the good governance programming until the end of the program.

Finance (MOF). MSI worked with these ministries to structure their operational and administrative capacity and to develop and adopt communications strategies to disseminate information on key government activities and establish interactive communications channels to citizens.

MSI built a particularly strong partnership with the MOF to improve public outreach functions in the context of the overall government reform mandate as prescribed by the “3-6-9 Plan.” This support came at a critical period prior to the historic name change referendum, a possible snap Parliamentary election, major tax reform initiatives, and the continued move towards NATO membership. MSI embedded highly skilled communications experts in the MOF Communications Office to provide hands-on training, even accompanying the Minister to media events in and out of Skopje to ensure guidance was immediate and explicitly tailored to the need. This assistance resulted in refined communications tools, including a media plan for official engagements and interviews to ensure the Minister is properly equipped with all necessary information before a public event. The experts worked with senior staff to design and begin to institutionalize a set of standard internal processes guiding the office to communicate proactively rather than reactively, inclusive of crisis communications. Ultimately, the daily, on-the-job training strengthened the MOF’s routine communications efforts; key to this was the duration of this support, spanning across months, which was important to the continuity and sustainability of the technical assistance.

MSI also worked closely with the Prime Minister’s office to communicate consistently and transparently with the public on the government’s policy objectives, critical to making tangible progress towards the “3-6-9 Plan.” MSI procured strategic communications experts to act as professional mentors regarding improving relations with the media and the public, teaching them how to more effectively organize press conferences, hold on-camera briefings, conduct interviews, and manage relationships with journalists. Communications experts worked with the office to draft a strategic communications plan, set up a unit to analyze public media consumption habits, and track quantitative media metrics to improve coordination of external communications. These experts held workshops with 30 public relations staff from 15 ministries to guide them through development



STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING WORKSHOP FOR MLSG, BEST WESTERN HOTEL, SKOPJE—MIKA FOR USAID

of the key elements of campaign plans in areas such as economy or government services. Technical guidance helped with the design of messaging to the public during critical months of pollution in Skopje, for example, resulting in a special task force established to inform the public on measures to prevent the increase of air pollution.

## DECENTRALIZATION AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE EMPOWERMENT

The MLSG, with the mandate to decentralize and empower local governance and provide balanced regional development and cross-border cooperation, is a key government institution in advancing the reform agenda. However, the MLSG had limited institutional resources to lead effectively and transparently and had been hindered by bureaucracy. MSI provided critical equipment and technical support to the MLSG, with three local advisers directly engaging with the MLSG's leadership and staff in the needs assessment to build their institutional capacity and help them operationalize decentralization reforms.

MSI's initial assessment revealed that the MLSG's systems, organizational structure, and regulatory framework were inadequate to support the new role of the Ministry. MSI provided training on strategic communications planning and the first strategic planning workshop held with all MLSG departments.

This capstone workshop, which was requested by the Minister for 35 staff, allowed ministry officials to provide more clarity to the functions performed by departments and assess the resources available in the Ministry to perform these functions. The workshop findings led to creating an urgent reform fund to assist the MLSG to conduct a functional analysis workshop with the Ministry and its two integrated bodies, the Inspectorate of Local Self-Government and the Bureau for Regional Development. From these workshops, the MLSG was able to develop the new Strategic Plan for the period of 2019-2021. Additionally, MSI provided the MLSG with advisors help them streamline regional development, cross-border cooperation, and fiscal decentralization policies.

“The technical support from MSI bolstered MLSG staff. A staff member felt that, 'It gave us new energy and it served as a wake-up call for the Ministry. It was a reality check for us, and the first step in the right direction towards creating space for improvement.’”

The effect of this assistance was twofold: improving the MLSG's operations and also transforming its institutional culture, increasing enthusiasm and resulting in strong cooperation with advisers and the development of a three-year strategy and action plan for local and regional development. Additionally, the approach utilized by the technical experts served to rebuild trust among MLSG staff. The experts supported MLSG staff members to develop a sense of responsibility at the technical level, rather than expecting higher-level political resolutions for everyday miscommunications. This further allowed the Ministry leadership to understand the level of human capacity of the MLSG in order to begin instituting reforms. Initially struggling with multiple operational and technical challenges, the Ministry's efforts received recognition from GOM when a section of the MLSG's regional development strategy was added to the list of government objectives for the year 2018.

## NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND COUNTERTERRORISM (NCCVECT)

The Priebe Report underlined the need to restructure security services and separate the National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Counterterrorism (NCCVECT) from the Ministry of Interior. Following this recommendation, the Cabinet of Ministers reached a decision in July 2017 that the NCCVECT would serve as an entity within the General Secretariat to provide national-level coordination and to monitor and analyze the prevention of violent extremism and the fight against terrorism. In October 2017, MSI assisted the NCCVECT to provide targeted subject matter trainings and on-the-job coaching and mentoring followed by technical assistance to draft internal organizational management procedures, rules of procedures, a detailed organizational structure, systematization, and the job descriptions necessary to establish the NCCVECT as a permanent government body.

With these accomplishments, MSI continued its support to the NCCVECT, with the drafting of a National Countering Violent Extremism Strategy

and Action Plan and a revision of its National Counterterrorism Strategy and Action Plan. MSI convened intensive drafting sessions for the 22 members of the Committee's Working Groups, providing subject matter technical assistance and organizing a workshop for the wider membership of the Committee. Using the whole-of-government approach, the NCCVECT finalized the strategy and action plan documents by the end of February 2018 to meet an EU deadline. In first week of March 2018, the documents were formally signed by the GOM during an official government session. Shortly thereafter, the Prime Minister stated that they were critical starting points for the government's institutional response to violent extremism and terrorist activity. The enactment of these documents, an EU integration milestone for Macedonia, will guide the work of the NCCVECT over the course of the next five years.

In partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), MSI also conducted a workshop to further strengthen the NCCVECT's institutional capacities and foster networking and collaboration with key partners in the region. The event focused on utilizing a multi-institutional approach, including collaboration and coordination across a wide-spectrum of local, national, and international institutions. Experts from the Western Balkans and across Europe shared best practices with some 60 participants and discussed the challenges and opportunities they encountered in their work.

Furthermore, MSI provided assistance to the NCCVECT to develop and adopt a comprehensive, inter-ministerial communication plans and to enhance the NCCVECT's strategic communications skills and interview techniques. These were utilized by the Deputy National Coordinator during an August interview on the primetime TV24 news program. The Deputy National Coordinator accurately informed the audience about the program to re-socialize returned foreign fighters by making direct references to the relevant provisions in the National Strategies for Preventing Violent Extremism and Counterterrorism 2018-2022.



## KEY REFORM TECHNICAL SUPPORT

One critical activity, illustrative of the work done under this cluster, provided extended mentorship and capacity-building assistance to the State Election Commission (SEC), in partnership with IFES, to support the execution of the September 30, 2018 national referendum on the historic name change issue. Under this activity, the SEC received support in operational planning and execution of key pre-referendum requirements, including registration of diaspora voters and the creation of the voters' list, to ensure credible systems were in place to administer the referendum transparently and effectively. This activity built on the support provided earlier to the SEC prior to the local elections in October 2017, as well as the related activity with the Ministry of Information Society and Administration (MISA), which accelerated the development of a legislative framework to establish a Central Electronic Population Register with EuropeAid support. Through this activity, SEC commissioners were able to establish concrete inter-institutional cooperation for organizing the referendum. Public perception and trust in the SEC's work increased significantly, with pre-referendum public perception surveys indicating that only 27 percent of respondents expressing trust in the SEC's work. However, by the post-referendum period, this percentage had jumped to 64 percent of respondents having confidence in the SEC, indicating a 37 percent increase in public trust in the SEC.

MSI's holistic GOM support expanded beyond ministries, to public administrators. Through interconnected activities supporting the Macedonian Radio Television (MRT), MSI leveraged the MRT leadership's will to transform the institution from a government-directed broadcast outlet into a public service broadcaster striving toward EU standards. This shift further supports the GOM's efforts to accomplish reform goals under the 3-6-9 Plan that limits government advertising influence on broadcast outlets and strengthens and professionalizes the public broadcaster. Building on the MSI-supported comprehensive organizational review and financial audit of MRT, which served to better allow key stakeholders to understand MRT's needs for reform, MSI provided training through technical experts. These experts provided assistance in editorial management, news-gathering, and technical news production, as well as supporting the creation of a blueprint to bring the MRT closer to EU public service broadcasting standards. MSI's work with the MRT sought to improve the quality of MRT's core newscasts by providing technical experts able to provide trainings and recommendations on daily operations aimed at providing higher quality news to public audiences.

## EFFECTING CHANGE THROUGH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

MSI's work in Macedonia's civic space came at a very difficult period for Macedonian society. Due to the highly polarized political climate and fears of reprisal, citizens felt that engagement, even voicing their opinions, could not result in societal change. In this environment, MSI's support funded 51 activities, helping to identify, secure, maintain, and then expand opportunities for civic discourse and promote citizen participation across the nation.

As part of the overall civic engagement effort, MSI partnered with five organizations to host 14 festivals in 11 towns with the aim of creating and maintaining artistic platforms that encouraged critical thinking and promoted civic involvement. The 2016 festival season began with civic activism workshops, art exhibitions, documentary screenings, public installations and discussions, and street concerts at the Bitola Open City festival in June. Other festivals followed across the country, with concerts, art bazaars, and theatrical performances. MSI's partnership with local NGOs expanded the reach of the festival series through events held in more than ten locations. CIVIL's Freedom Caravan, a traveling multimedia road show of debates, made stops in the biggest towns in Macedonia to talk about importance and benefits of fostering democratic culture and leadership through music, art, and cultural spaces. Utilizing city squares for events that showcased a diverse mix of music styles and multicultural musicians exposed audiences as well as people passing by and sitting at surrounding cafés to the idea of participation in public affairs through non-political engagement.

On several occasions, the engagement of the community in these events prompted authorities to take direct action to address the issues raised. In Stip, the Transformers, a local arts group, organized an art installation to



"FEED 10,000" POWERED BY MYF, SEPTEMBER 2018

prompt discussion on local government responsibility to care for public spaces, using chronically out-of-order drinking fountains as an example of where service delivery was failing. Citing an influx of phone calls from citizens demanding accountability, the Public Utility Office fixed the fountains. This response was documented by a number of social media posts from citizens across the political spectrum.

MSI sought to develop a brand identity of social activism from the bottom up with powerful grassroots dimensions able to create more opportunities for inclusive civic engagement through a network of CSO organizations, resulting in the "Move Your Finger" (MYF) campaign. Under the MYF umbrella, the campaign executed over 100 activities, effectively mobilizing and energizing citizens to take action and build civic identity by weaving together civic actors previously isolated throughout the country. Through the MYF campaign, citizens began to grasp the value and tangible results of approaching local leaders, schools, public institutions, and other establishments to affect change at the local level.

## PODIUM FOR USAID

With contributions from citizens and private businesses, Feed 10,000 collected over 16,000 pounds of food and received impressive media coverage on national and local TV stations, with over 30 online portals talking about the nation-wide event. The food was distributed to recipients registered with the network of "All Fed" working closely with social services centers and the Macedonian Red Cross. The success of the campaign inspired "Go Macedonia" to continue the campaign using the MSI procured collection point stands and other campaign materials with the MYF logo. The initiative even inspired a bar in Skopje to organize an event for guests to donate winter clothes for children.



## CIVIC CAPSTONE EVENTS

The third phase of MYF celebrated the accomplishments of the previous two years of civic programming under the campaign, bringing together previous and new civic partners in 45 organized events, called “actions,” to engage a wide diversity of audiences throughout Macedonia. The MYF capstone events brought together CSOs, local and municipal governments, and informal groups to address the lack of civic participation amongst citizens by leveraging arts, music, culture, sports, and civic duty to build a sense of community. These interconnected capstone events promoted the key philosophy of the MYF campaign: individuals have the power to affect change in their communities and promote community activism and celebrate citizens’ constructive engagements and interactions on issues of importance. This series of events expanded on opportunities for civic discourse and promotion of citizen participation and culminated in the period of April-October 2018. MYF capstone event highlights include:

- In locations across eastern and central Macedonia, 477 citizens actively participated in nine community-based initiatives specifically focusing on Roma and other marginalized populations, with the aim of coming together to solve problems that affect their wider communities. This series of actions stimulated local government to take an active role and even, in some cases, providing partial financial support, serving to increase the reach and impact of each action. Mayors of several municipalities, including Makedonska Kamenica and Delcevo, supported the events through participation and promotion.
- MSI’s promotion and provision of technical assistance allowed for a popular line-up of DJs for the three-day outdoor festival “Kruševo Adventure Weekend” held in Kruševo in July. There were over 3,000 participants, in comparison to the planned estimate of 600 participants.
- An extremely successful Feed 10,000 campaign provided an avenue for citizens to donate food surplus at drop-off points,

then distributed to food insecure and socially vulnerable people throughout Macedonia. The Feed 10,000 campaign served to inspire, engage, and motivate local and national stakeholders to proactively seek opportunities to make positive contributions to their communities. The campaign initially planned for 12 locations to take part in the action; however, due to the high interest, a total of 18 organizations volunteered in the coordination of 33 locations within 10 cities across Macedonia, gathering 7.3 metric tons of food. The campaign, which sought to feed 10,000 vulnerable people, was able to provide food for double the number of people, totaling 22,158 portions of food. Using the material provided by MSI and leveraging the momentum of this action, CSO partners have agreed to engage their networks to continue the Feed 10,000 campaign every three months.

- A series of inspirational and motivational TEDTalk-style events both in and out of Skopje targeted students and university-aged youth to present home-grown success stories of successful role models. These events were met with high interest and participation, illustrated by the 1,920 participants, almost four times greater than the planned 500 participants. Particularly in smaller cities such as Prilep and Strumica, the diverse portfolio of motivational speakers and such motivational events was unprecedented.
- Mini-festival events were organized in Ohrid, Bitola, and Skopje, bringing together citizens from different age groups and social backgrounds and promoting cross-generational communications and value-sharing. These mini-festivals were met with high praise, with each event receiving nearly twice the initially planned and expected audience.
- The MYF capstone events culminated with the final event held on September 15 in Skopje: Move Your Finger – A Picnic for All, which celebrated the successes of key MYF partners. A Picnic for All attracted over 2,000 participants and exposed them to various forms of civic activism and provided a space for people to celebrate civic participation.



# SUMMARY OF RECENT ACTIVITIES

From April to October 2018, during the final six months of the program's implementation period, MSI focused on building progress towards the reform agenda, bringing together civic partners to develop and implement MYF campaign capstone events, and supporting the establishment of professional standards within the media sector. During a four-month period within this time, from April to August, the program undertook a final programmatic "surge," launching 23 activities (of the 103 total) in this period. In addition to these 23 complex activities, some of which had up to 15 sub-activities, there were 24 other activities being implemented and about 20 active short-term technical assistance contracts for advisors providing technical support to MSI and its government and media partners. Overall, the final phase of programming represented a culmination of the program, taking advantage of the momentum built over the previous two years at a critical moment in the country's history.

Most activities were concluded in late October 2018. The median activity size during this period was approximately \$67,000 and the largest was approximately \$220,000 (Figure 1 shows the distribution across objectives of these final activities).

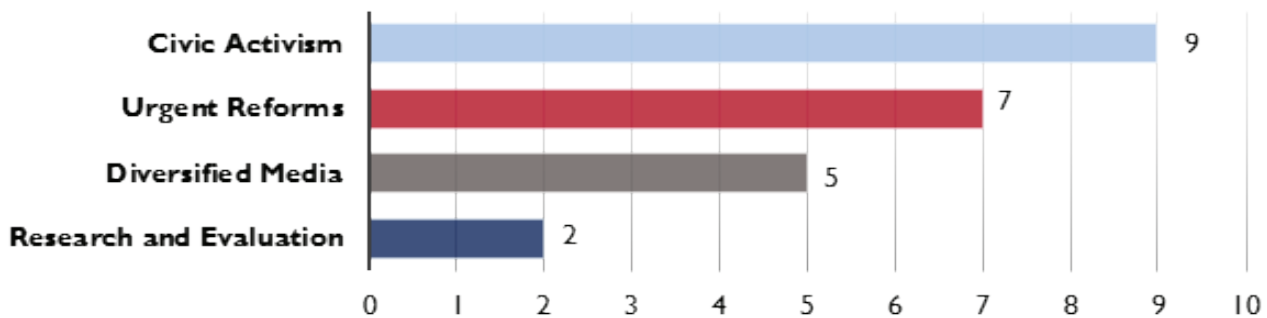
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Promoting the philosophy of the wider MYF campaign that individuals have the power to affect change in their communities, the TED Talk-style motivational speeches "Feed Your Brain" exposed both live and online audiences to Macedonian role models who have made positive contributions to their communities and country. Out of nine "Feed Your Brain" talks, six were held in the period of April-October 2018 in major Macedonian cities. Over 1,000 people participated in the nine talks targeting students and university-aged young people in Macedonia. Some participants commented that the key motive for them to attend these events were the stories of successful Macedonians and the radiant inspiration that elevated the participants. The final "Feed Your Brain" event was part of the A Picnic for All final MYF event and hosted volunteers from communities in remote areas.

*"FEED YOUR BRAIN" POWERED BY MYF AT THE LAW SCHOOL AT UNIVERSITY OF SKOPJE*



## CLEARED: 23 APRIL-OCTOBER 2018



**Figure 1: Distribution across objectives of MSI activities cleared and implemented in the period of April-August 2018.**

## PROGRAM PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND EVALUATION

Implemented under a small-grants, fast, and flexible mechanism partnering with a wide array of international and local organizations, the program utilized a multi-faceted approach to monitoring and evaluating impact against strategic objectives at the grant, cluster, and program-level. Across the program, with input from the wider OTI and AECOM team in the U.S. and Macedonia, MSI held a series of Rolling Assessments (RA) and a Strategic Review Session (SRS) aimed at assessing the current state of programming and refining strategic planning for the next phases of implementation in response to the changing political landscape.

To assess and plan program-level strategy, MSI held three RAs in June 2016, December 2016, and March 2018 during which the MSI team gathered to appraise progress toward the program's objectives, identify operational and programmatic challenges, discuss potential improvements, and analyze the depth of space required for programmatic shifts. After a year of programming, MSI held an SRS in February 2017, gathering the OTI and AECOM team based in the U.S. and Macedonia. The purpose of the SRS was to acknowledge and celebrate the program's achievements; solidify roles and responsibilities and systems and processes to formally integrate new team members; and refine the program's strategic direction, adapting to the changes within Macedonia's political environment. The SRS allowed the program to better define specific terms built into the program strategy to be better able to meet and measure outcomes; identify that the program required focus on leveraging current programming to strengthen partners across the program, following the Media Cluster's example of utilizing this tactic to influence the entire media landscape; and re-focus on the synergy approach, building on the opportunities to strengthen networks of collaborators initiated by the earlier actions





of the program. The final RA in March 2018 was held to prepare and strategize for the last surge of intensive programming and focused on telling the MSI story and building a detailed timeline of activities to be developed and implemented for the remaining life of the program. This allowed the program to “ground-truth” what still needed to be done by assigning tasks and deadlines for each aspect of each activity.

Activity and cluster-level monitoring and evaluation (M&E) was conducted on a rolling basis in order to integrate learning into activity implementation. The program team monitored daily progress of each activity and the M&E team conducted parallel impact analysis. The program sought to tailor each activity’s M&E plan to extract as much quantitative and qualitative data in order to inform learning and the degree of objective and output achievement. As many of MSI’s partners lacked the capacity or resources to conduct activity-level data collection and analysis, MSI executed a flexible contracting mechanism with Tim Institute, a local research organization excelling in quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. Tim Institute conducted much of the program’s M&E data collection, including focus groups and phone surveys, in order to inform programming based on data analysis. This data was shared with MSI partners to ensure sustainable knowledge transfer.

Throughout implementation, Tim Institute was able to conduct 110 focus group discussions with 880 participants, two telephone surveys with the representative nationwide sample of 1,000 respondents and 580 exit surveys. Qualitative research tested MSI’s video productions and public events to assess whether intended messages resonate with the audiences. The best example of how tangible qualitative research data had influenced decision making and programming was illustrated through Sitel, the most-watched national broadcaster, deciding to not only continue to air “On the Same Side,” but also give the show a more prominent timeslot due to the strong focus group results for the show. Based on this partnership, Sitel later considered hiring the same firm to conduct focus groups before going live with their new productions.



## LESSONS LEARNED

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- **Reach out and work with organizations connected with wider networks to build trust from as many angles as possible. Leverage alternative, smaller spaces to bolster engagement of a wide range of civic actors and stakeholders.**
- **Buy-in from local-level authority figures, such as mayors, can affect the most sustainable change in the shortest period of time, particularly in less urban areas.**
- **Focus on a strong review process for production of media content. Once data indicates that a new media format and content is able to capture and retain a diverse audience and deliver a strong key message, continue supporting that content until it builds up to a recognized brand.**
- **Support for content development must be parallel to building professionalization of the media landscape. This should include a realistic mapping of a sustainable business plan.**
- **M&E tools must be designed inclusively. To build capacity, partners should have the opportunity to interact with development of focus groups, questionnaires, etc. This also serves to improve buy-in into the value of M&E and ensures that the data collection, analysis, and feedback address their priorities.**





## BEST PRACTICES

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- **Seek partnerships with key institutions from across the political spectrum in order to retain true non-partisan programming.**
- **Employ flexible contracting mechanisms to allow the program to rapidly procure the required goods and services, from M&E services to printing to translating.**
- **Adjust to ongoing shifts in strategy, particularly for the first two years of programming, and pivot in the final year of implementation as a response to changes in the program's strategic priorities to address the changing environment.**
- **Manage activity development and implementation surge and program closeout priorities simultaneously. The program was closing mid-December 2018 and grants were cleared and amended until the end of August, while the bulk of implementation was on-going through October.**
- **Celebrate successes and analyze challenges to implement solutions.**

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