

Terms of Reference

Mid-term Evaluation of Sida Core Support to the Center for Investigative Reporting (CIN), Bosnia and Herzegovina

1. Introduction

The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), represented by the Embassy of Sweden in Sarajevo, provides institutional core support to the Center for Investigative Reporting (CIN), a non-profit investigative media organisation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. CIN works to provide independently verified public-interest reporting, particularly on corruption and the use of public resources. The evaluation will take account of the political, legal, economic and media environment in which independent investigative journalism operates, including risks to editorial independence, access to information and organisational resilience.

2. Evaluation object: intervention to be evaluated

The evaluation object is Sida's core support to CIN for implementation of CIN Strategic Plan 2024–2027 under the grant agreement, Sida Contribution No. 16503 (case reference 22/002146). The activity period is January 2024–December 2027 and the maximum Sida contribution is SEK 10,000,000, subject to appropriations. The evaluation assesses institutional core activities rather than treating the grant as a stand-alone project.

The grant agreement defines two outcomes: (I) Citizens have access to verified information about corruption in the public sector; and (II) Public officials are ready to improve the legal and institutional framework in the fight against corruption. Results framework, indicators, theory of change, work plans and budgets, as well as reporting documentation are available in Annexes B and C of this document.

The 2024–2027 strategy sets a target of 35 investigative stories annually by 2027, increased circulation through CIN-owned channels, and a 20% increase in stories initiated from citizens' submissions. Its second outcome prioritises engagement with civil society, independent institutions and public authorities to encourage institutional responses and improvements to legal and administrative frameworks. The evaluation should assess interim progress rather than treating end-2027 targets as already due.

The strategy also prioritises audience analysis and platform-specific distribution, investigative databases, in-house production and fact-checking, staff skills, financial diversification, crowdfunding and fundraising planning, while protecting editorial independence and free public access. The evaluation should consider the tension between monetisation and public-interest reach, and assess the strategy's results framework and monitoring practices.

The evaluation should examine editorial and investigative production, distribution and reach, evidence of use and uptake, engagement with relevant institutions and stakeholders, organisational management, staff capabilities, risk management, financial resilience, and the distinctive

contribution of flexible core funding. It must recognise CIN's editorial autonomy and the difference between investigative reporting outputs and decisions by public authorities outside CIN's control.

3. Evaluation purpose: intended use

The evaluation has three complementary purposes: (1) assess whether and to what extent the programme, institutional-development and strategic objectives have been achieved or are on track; (2) identify internal and external factors explaining achievements, shortfalls and deviations; and (3) assess whether strategic goals, activities, indicators and implementation arrangements remain relevant or warrant evidence-based adaptation. The assessment should support learning and practical management decisions for the remainder of 2024–2027, while providing Sida with an independent account of progress. The evaluation should not substitute its own objectives for those approved in CIN's strategy.

4. Evaluation users

Primary users are Sida/the Embassy of Sweden in Sarajevo and CIN management and governing bodies. Other intended users may include CIN editorial and operational teams and, where appropriate, relevant partners and stakeholders. Sida and CIN should agree during inception on participation in interviews, validation and dissemination, without compromising evaluator independence.

5. Evaluation purpose: timing

The evaluation is a mid-term progress assessment of the 2024–2027 core-support period. Final report should be finalized by December 10, 2026.

6. Evaluation scope

- Geographical focus: Bosnia and Herzegovina, with consideration of regional or international dissemination where relevant.
- Temporal coverage: January 2024 to December 2025, based on submitted annual reports to Sida, with additional update of result framework until June 30, 2026.
- Results: progress against both contractual outcomes and the approved Strategic Plan, including quality and accessibility of investigative journalism, distribution, audience engagement and evidence of institutional uptake.
- Institutional performance: editorial independence, staffing and skills, governance, internal systems, learning, adaptation, safeguarding and risk management.
- Core funding model: flexibility, additionality, complementarity with restricted grants and other resources, and prospects for financial and organisational sustainability.

7. Evaluation questions

The evaluation shall address the following five overarching questions. The evaluator should operationalise them in an evaluation matrix and use the strategic Results Assessment Framework as

the primary reference for indicators and baselines. The questions incorporate the relevance, effectiveness and outcome emphasis of CIN's earlier mid-term evaluation ToR, alongside institutional learning and sustainability. Sub-questions may be refined during inception with Sida approval.

1. Effectiveness

To what extent has CIN implemented its strategic priorities and generated credible investigative stories, databases and multimedia outputs supporting Outcome I, including progress toward the 35-stories-per-year and citizen-tip targets for 2027? What explains variations in progress?

2. Relevance and reach

How relevant and accessible are CIN's reporting and information products to intended audiences, and what evidence exists of their use by citizens, media, civil society and other stakeholders?

3. Outcome progress / contribution

What credible evidence exists that CIN's work has informed public debate or institutional engagement related to Outcome II, and how plausible is CIN's contribution relative to other influences? Avoid attributing policy changes without adequate causal evidence.

4. Efficiency and adaptive management

How effectively has CIN used flexible core support to maintain editorial and operational capacity, manage risks, respond to changing conditions and complement other funding?

5. Sustainability

To what extent has CIN implemented its planned measures for staff capacity, audience relationships, fundraising, crowdfunding and revenue diversification while protecting free access and editorial independence, and what priorities should guide 2027?

8. Evaluation quality and methodology

A participatory but independent mixed-method evaluation is expected, drawing on CIN's earlier mid-term evaluation practice. The consultant is responsible for the evaluation design, collection and analysis of evidence, facilitation of structured reflection, and preparation of a final report. CIN and Sida will provide access and feedback but must not determine findings. The design shall satisfy Sida's requirements for usefulness, reliability, transparency, methodological scrutiny, independent quality assurance and do-no-harm safeguards. Recommended tasks and formats include:

- Desk review of the agreement, approved strategic plan and application, annual plans and reports, performance monitoring data, audited statements and management responses, organisational policies and a purposive sample of published investigations and digital products.
- Semi-structured interviews with CIN editorial and management staff, governing representatives, Sida staff, selected journalists, civil society representatives, experts and public institutions, subject to informed consent and risk assessment.
- Analysis of output quality, reach and engagement, with attention to data limitations, measurement definitions and the difference between exposure and meaningful use.

- Contribution-oriented assessment of selected cases of institutional response or public debate; triangulate claims using independently available documents and interviews.
- Review of budget and staffing trends, diversification measures and institutional risks; clearly distinguish evidence about CIN's whole organisation from Sida-financed contribution.
- Evaluation matrix specifying each question, indicators/judgement criteria, sources, methods, triangulation, limitations and confidence in findings.

Evaluators shall disclose potential conflicts of interest, use secure data practices, minimise personally identifiable information, obtain consent for attribution, and provide an independent quality review. The report must distinguish findings, conclusions and recommendations and explicitly state evidentiary limitations. Any assessment of causal contribution must explain its inference, not merely repeat stakeholder perceptions.

Participatory evaluation process

1. Review strategic and operational documents, monitoring evidence, annual reporting, previous evaluation findings, and contextual changes (consultant; desk review).
2. Agree the evaluation matrix, fieldwork plan and interview/focus-group questions with the commissioning unit; consult CIN management on practical access without compromising independence (consultant, Sida, CIN management; inception meeting).
3. Collect and independently analyse evidence from CIN editorial and operational teams, web and platform analytics, publication records, citizen submissions and external stakeholders (consultant; interviews, questionnaires and data review).
4. Facilitate an all-staff reflection workshop or appropriately structured focus groups on achieved results, changes in context, obstacles, editorial practices and the continued relevance of objectives and indicators (consultant; workshop/focus groups).
5. Present preliminary findings to Sida and CIN for factual validation, distinguishing corrections of fact from independent evaluative judgements (consultant; validation meeting).
6. Prepare the draft and final evaluation reports and a prioritised, feasible recommendation matrix for strategic and operational adaptation (consultant).
7. Following the evaluation, CIN management and staff may conduct a separate planning workshop to consider revisions to the annual action plan, responsibilities and M&E arrangements; adoption of revisions is a CIN governance decision, not an evaluator deliverable.

9. Time schedule

The evaluation shall be completed no later than 10 December 2026. The evaluator is expected to organize the assignment efficiently, combining desk review, stakeholder consultations, participatory workshops and analysis within the agreed timeframe. The final evaluation report shall incorporate relevant comments received from Sida and CIN and provide practical, prioritized recommendations for the remaining implementation period of CIN's Strategic Plan 2024–2027.

Activity / Deliverable	Responsible	Deadline
Desk review of strategic documents, annual reports, monitoring data and relevant materials	Evaluator	25–30 October
Data collection: interviews, audience analytics, document	Evaluator	01–10 November

analysis and stakeholder consultations		
Participatory workshop with CIN staff and management	Evaluator / CIN	11–13 November
Analysis of findings and assessment of progress against strategic objectives	Evaluator	14–20 November
Submission of draft evaluation report	Evaluator	23 November
Review and written comments on draft report	Sida and CIN	24–30 November
Validation meeting and discussion of recommendations	Evaluator, Sida and CIN	2 December
Finalization and submission of evaluation report	Evaluator	10 December 2026

10. Deliverables

10.1 Proposal

Technical and financial proposal setting out methodology, schedule, quality assurance and conflict-of-interest declarations, in line with Sida's procurement arrangements, should be sent to following email: damir@cin.ba, or to office address G.M.Lokatelli 11, Sarajevo. Offers should be submitted no later than October 19, 2026 by midnight.

10.2 During data collection

Regular brief progress updates and timely communication of significant methodological or safety issues; a confidential emerging-findings discussion with Sida and CIN as agreed.

10.3 Draft and final reports

Draft and final English-language reports, preferably no more than 35 pages excluding annexes, with a concise executive summary (suggested 5–8 pages), evidence-based findings, conclusions, prioritised recommendations, lessons and a management-oriented action matrix. Annexes should include the ToR, evaluation matrix, methods, sources consulted in privacy-safe form and limitations. Final presentation of findings to Sida and CIN.

11. Organisation of evaluation management

The evaluation is commissioned and financed by Sida/the Embassy of Sweden in Sarajevo, consistent with Article 8.2. Sida approves inception and final deliverables and ensures evaluator independence. CIN facilitates procurement, access to approved documents, staff and stakeholder contacts and provides factual comments. Evaluators retain sole responsibility for analysis, judgements and recommendations.

12. Financial and human resources

The evaluation budget ceiling and procurement guidelines are set by Sida. The evaluator/team should demonstrate experience in independent media, institutional core support, organisational sustainability, qualitative and mixed-method evaluation, Bosnia and Herzegovina context, and

ethical handling of sensitive journalistic information. Team composition and effort should be proportional to the agreed budget and questions.

13. Ethical safeguards and independence

The evaluation shall use do-no-harm procedures, informed consent, secure retention and transfer of data, appropriate anonymisation and clear disclosure of methodological limitations. Editorial decisions and protection of journalistic sources remain with CIN. Interviewees should be able to speak without managerial presence and without fear of retaliation. Potential conflicts of interest must be declared and managed.

14. Annexes

Annex A. Key documentation (to be provided to selected evaluator)

- Sida–CIN Grant Agreement, Specific Conditions, Contribution No. 16503
- Annex B: November 2023 Application and approved budget
- Annex C: CIN Strategic Plan 2024–2027 with Results Assessment Framework
- Annual work plans, narrative and financial reports, audits, management responses and relevant organisational policies

Annex B. Data sheet on evaluation object

Evaluation object	Sida core support to Center for Investigative Reporting (CIN)
Contribution number	16503
Archive/case number	22/002146
Activity period	January 2024 – December 2027
Maximum Sida grant	SEK 10,000,000
Implementing organisation	Center for Investigative Reporting (CIN), NGO/civil society, Bosnia and Herzegovina
Aid type	Core contributions / institutional support
Evaluation type	Mid-term / progress-focused
Commissioning organisation	Sida, represented by Embassy of Sweden in Sarajevo