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Review of the U.S. Agency for Global Media Response to Russia's 2022 Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine

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Summary of Review

OIG conducted a review of the United States Agency for Global Media's (USAGM), Voice of America's (VOA), Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's (RFE/RL), and the Open Technology Fund's (OTF) response to Russia's February 24, 2022, full-scale invasion of Ukraine. OIG's objectives for this review were to assess the extent to which USAGM and its broadcasting networks responded to program content and delivery, human resources, security, budget execution, and strategic planning challenges associated with Russia's 2022 invasion consistent with applicable guidelines.

On March 4, 2022, eight days after the invasion of Ukraine, Russia's government passed a law making distribution of "false information" about the armed forces—including calling Russia's war against Ukraine a war or an invasion—a crime punishable by up to 15 years imprisonment. Russia's authorities blocked VOA and RFE/RL websites and initiated bankruptcy proceedings against RFE/RL's limited liability corporation in Russia for failure to pay fines. VOA and RFE/RL, citing threats to staff, suspended operations within Russia the same month. However, to continue providing objective, factual news information to audiences in Russia and Ukraine, VOA and RFE/RL took steps to expand operations in countries neighboring Russia, establish new offices in Latvia and Lithuania, enhance Russian, Belarusian, and Ukrainian language programming, and expand content delivery methods.

OIG found that early and continuous planning by USAGM, VOA, and RFE/RL, with assistance from OTF, ensured content availability for audiences following the 2022 invasion. Broadcasting networks maintained, and in some cases expanded, content to Ukrainian- and Russian-speaking audiences in the wake of the invasion. For example, USAGM data indicated that about 10.6 percent of the Russian population received USAGM broadcasting content in July 2022, up from 8.9 percent in July 2021.

Additionally, OIG determined that VOA and RFE/RL adequately prepared for and executed the relocation of staff members to safer locations at the onset of the war. Furthermore, RFE/RL made progress toward opening offices in Latvia, Lithuania, and Ukraine and updating security processes to address threats to staff. However, networks grappled with hiring and vetting delays in setting up the new offices. OIG identified potential vulnerabilities related to the RFE/RL employee vetting process and found that two 2017 OIG recommendations,¹ both relevant to this review, had yet to be implemented by USAGM. OIG also found that personnel shortages and crisis operating conditions resulted in lapses of editorial policy adherence for VOA's Russian Language Service website.

OIG found that USAGM entities generally repurposed available funding to address Ukraine requirements, rather than using Ukraine Supplemental Appropriations Act funding, in part because USAGM did not clearly communicate the process for distributing supplemental funding to grantee organizations. Finally, OIG determined that USAGM and its entities

¹ OIG, *Inspection of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (ISP-IB-17-21, May 2017).

generally complied with strategic planning processes and incorporated performance metrics across networks to measure their progress against goals.

This report includes four recommendations to improve USAGM and network compliance with federal standards and regulations. In its comments on the draft report, USAGM concurred with all four recommendations. OIG considers all four recommendations resolved. USAGM's response to each recommendation and OIG's reply can be found in the Recommendations section of this report. USAGM's formal written response is reprinted in its entirety in Appendix E.

BACKGROUND

The United States Agency for Global Media, known prior to August 22, 2018, as the Broadcasting Board of Governors, is an independent federal agency authorized by Congress to direct and supervise U.S. government-funded civilian international broadcasting. USAGM oversees two federal broadcast entities: VOA and the Office of Cuba Broadcasting; three nonprofit broadcast entities: RFE/RL, Radio Free Asia, and the Middle East Broadcasting Networks; and OTF, an independent nonprofit organization. The four non-federal entities receive funding through grants issued and managed by USAGM.

USAGM's overall mission is to inform, engage, and connect people around the world in support of freedom and democracy. Within that broad mission, however, each entity has a distinct mandate. VOA's mission is to represent the United States, its people, and its policies, and to be a reliable and authoritative source of news. The missions of RFE/RL, the Office of Cuba Broadcasting, Radio Free Asia, and the Middle East Broadcasting Networks are to serve as surrogate news sources in their respective regions; provide an example of free press; and offer accurate, timely media reporting in countries where such sources of news are unavailable or at risk. OTF works to advance internet freedom in repressive environments by supporting the research, development, implementation, and sustainability of technologies that provide secure and uncensored access to the internet. OTF technologies enable censorship circumvention, secure communications, and enhanced user security and privacy for online audiences as well as solutions for USAGM and its broadcast entities' networks to protect online content and mitigate future attacks.

USAGM's combination of federal entities and non-federal grantee entities with differing legal authorities and organizational structures resulted from a series of Congressional and executive actions dating from 1942 (see Appendix B for an historical chronology). The U.S. International Broadcasting Act of 1994² consolidated all U.S. government nonmilitary, international broadcasting under the oversight of a single agency, the present-day USAGM. A 2017 amendment codified the agency's oversight responsibilities under a chief executive officer supported by the International Broadcasting Advisory Board.³

² Public Law No. 103-236.

³ National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017, Public Law No. 114-328.

The five broadcasting networks deliver program content through a range of broadcast and digital platforms. Approximately 50 percent of the agency's broadcasting entities' weekly audiences access USAGM content through one or more of the agency's 4,300 global, television, radio, and digital affiliates and partners.⁴ USAGM distributes Russian and Ukrainian language content to audiences across a range of platforms, including affiliate distributors and broadcasters, satellite (television and audio channels), cross-border radio (medium wave), and digital platforms.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022,⁵ included \$25 million in funding for USAGM to respond to the invasion of Ukraine, including capacity enhancements for VOA, RFE/RL, OTF, and other USAGM entities.⁶ Additionally, RFE/RL planned to use approximately \$20 million from its existing budget to establish new bureaus and enhance programming in Eastern Europe and Eurasia. USAGM also received Department of State (Department) funding through interagency agreements for RFE/RL (\$235,000 to counter Russia's disinformation) and OTF (\$4.5 million for the Surge and Sustain Initiative for Critical Anti-Censorship Technologies⁷). See Appendix D for tables detailing USAGM's sources of funding and actual spending in response to Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

USAGM has had limited success in establishing affiliates based inside the Russian Federation; at the time of this review, there were none. Despite a lack of affiliates, nationally representative surveys conducted by the agency indicate that USAGM audiences in Russia reached approximately 11.7 million people as of July 2022. More than 50 television affiliate organizations inside Ukraine carried USAGM's Ukrainian language content, including the state broadcaster and other networks with nationwide coverage.

Expansion of Programming Following Russia's 2014 Occupation of Crimea

Following Russia's occupation of Crimea in March 2014,⁸ VOA and RFE/RL expanded Russian and Ukrainian language broadcasting efforts. VOA, which had been considering eliminating the Ukrainian language service, reversed course, hiring new staff and producing additional content

⁴ Affiliate networks are non-USAGM media outlets that broadcast and share USAGM content.

⁵ Public Law 117-103, Division K.

⁶ Public Law 117-103, Division N – Ukraine Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2022, Title VI. In this report, OIG refers to the portion of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022, that appropriated funding for USAGM to respond to the invasion of Ukraine as the Ukraine Supplemental Appropriations Act.

⁷ The goal of the Surge and Sustain Initiative for Critical Anti-Censorship Technologies is to enable operators of open-source anti-censorship platforms to continue operations during periods of surge usage on a rapid resource allocation timetable.

⁸ "The United States does not, and will never, recognize Russia's purported annexation of Crimea." *Crimea is Ukraine* – Press Statement, Antony J. Blinken, Secretary of State, February 25, 2021.

and live inserts for affiliate news broadcasters to complement existing programming.⁹ RFE/RL, facing difficulties with content distribution in the occupied territories, established new, hyper-local digital news programs called “.Realities” in Russian, Ukrainian, and Crimean Tatar.¹⁰ In February 2017, RFE/RL, in cooperation with VOA, launched a 24/7 Russian-language television and digital network called *Current Time*, with the goal of providing Russian speakers worldwide with an alternative to Kremlin-controlled media.¹¹

Russia Expanded Foreign Agent Registration

In December 2017, Russia expanded its foreign agent registration to include media organizations receiving funding from overseas sources.¹² VOA, with most of its reporting done from outside Russia, refused to comply with the new registration requirements and continued to engage some freelance journalists in Russia. RFE/RL, however, opened a local limited liability company in December 2017 to comply with the new requirements and maintain its Moscow bureau of more than 50 staff and several hundred freelance journalists throughout the country.

Beginning in December 2019, Moscow officials expanded the foreign agent regulation, threatening to designate individual journalists working with foreign media as foreign agents themselves¹³ and to close foreign agent websites that did not state they were registered as a foreign agent. In response, RFE/RL added a foreign agent disclaimer in Russian to the bottom of its websites, when viewed from within the Russian Federation.¹⁴

RFE/RL continued to comply with the foreign agent restrictions and requirements until October 2020, when Russia’s media regulatory body, Roskomnadzor, began enforcing a new regulation for content labeling requiring foreign agent media organizations to include overt disclaimers of

⁹ Chas-Time, launched in 2004, is VOA’s daily Ukrainian-language television broadcast, covering the top international and U.S. stories of the day and news and events of interest to Ukrainians.

¹⁰ The “.Realities” projects launched in March 2014 with Crimea.Realities in Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar and Donbas.Realities in Russian. RFE/RL subsequently established other Russian language “.Realities” projects, including Idel.Realities (launched in August 2016), Caucasus.Realities (September 2016), Siberia.Realities (November 2017), and North.Realities (September 2019).

¹¹ As of June 2022, the *Current Time* channel was carried by more than 150 affiliates (with a total reach on more than 550 channels or platforms) across 26 countries with significant Russian-speaking populations, including Ukraine.

¹² Russia originally passed its foreign agent law in 2012, which targeted nongovernmental organizations that received foreign funding and engaged in what Russia termed “political activity.” Under the 2017 revision, media organizations designated as foreign agents were required to include a mention of their foreign agent designation alongside any information published or broadcast to Russian audiences. Between 2017 and 2020, VOA, RFE/RL, and several sub-branded media outlets operated by RFE/RL were the only media organizations designated as “foreign agents.”

¹³ RFE/RL estimated that the government of Russia deemed as foreign agents 32 journalists affiliated with RFE/RL, including members of its Russian Service, the Tatar-Bashkir Service, and *Current Time*.

¹⁴ The disclaimer on the *Current Time* webpage appeared at the bottom left of the page footer, reading: “The Ministry of Justice of Russia added *Current Time* into the ‘register of foreign mass media performing the functions of a foreign agent.’ Our TV channel is not an ‘agent’ of any government and considers this decision unfair and legally controversial.”

their foreign agent status on each piece of broadcast and digital content.¹⁵ By December of the same year, Roskomnadzor began drawing up administrative protocols against RFE/RL for violating the content labeling regulation.¹⁶

Increasing Pressure and Security Concerns Led to Journalist Relocations

RFE/RL's decision to challenge the Roskomnadzor protocols¹⁷ and not comply with the content labeling regulations¹⁸ led to increased pressure on its Moscow bureau. Due to security concerns, RFE/RL began relocating Moscow-based staff between February and June 2021, ultimately moving half of the Moscow bureau's core employees to Prague, Czechia, and Kyiv, Ukraine. In May 2021, Russia's government froze RFE/RL bank accounts and began enforcement proceedings over unpaid fines related to its refusal to comply with the labeling requirements.

At approximately the same time in Belarus, security conditions worsened for RFE/RL journalists during and after protests over the August 2020 Belarusian election. RFE/RL journalists were subject to government-sponsored detentions and harassment, including a July 2021 raid of RFE/RL offices in Minsk. Through 2021, most Belarusian staff either terminated their employment with RFE/RL or fled the country to avoid arrest. RFE/RL relocated core Belarusian staff to Kyiv, and, by the end of 2021, the only remaining staff in Belarus were not reporting, were under investigation, or were imprisoned.¹⁹ In December 2021, the government of Belarus added RFE/RL's Belarus Service to the government's registry of extremist organizations. With this designation, subscribers to the service's online content channels could face up to 6 years in prison.

In the face of Russia's and Belarus' government-sponsored challenges to media and internet freedom, USAGM initiated a strategic planning process in 2021 to ensure its networks would continue to reach audiences. The planning process included expanding Russian language operations in other countries with Russian language speakers, exploring the possibility of opening RFE/RL news bureaus in Riga, Latvia, and Vilnius, Lithuania, and preparing to relocate staff from Russia and within Ukraine.

¹⁵ The content labeling regulation mandated that every individual text, audio, and video segment published by a media organization designated as a foreign agent carry a prominent disclaimer that the content originated from a "foreign agent." The requirement applied equally to each article and every social media post. Video and audio content were required to begin with a 15-second, fixed-screen disclaimer at the start of each clip, articles were required to include a disclaimer in a font size larger than the headline, and Twitter postings would have required a disclaimer exceeding the social media platforms set character limit.

¹⁶ At the time of OIG's review in October 2022, Roskomnadzor had fined RFE/RL more than \$17 million in fines from 1,160 protocols, approximately half of which targeted the General Director of RFE/RL's limited liability corporation in Russia.

¹⁷ RFE/RL pursued multiple legal avenues to challenge the charges within Russia's legal system, with the European Court of Human Rights, and under the Czech-Russia bilateral investment treaty.

¹⁸ Although VOA and RFE/RL both refused to comply with the content labeling regulations, RFE/RL did publish the required foreign agent disclaimer on some content produced by RFE/RL journalists who were individually designated as foreign agents in order to protect those contributors from legal actions.

¹⁹ At the time of OIG's review, two RFE/RL-affiliated journalists remained imprisoned in Belarus.

On March 4, 2022, 8 days after its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Russia's government passed a law making distribution of "false information" about the armed forces—including calling Russia's war against Ukraine a war or an invasion—a crime punishable by up to 15 years imprisonment. Russia authorities blocked VOA and RFE/RL websites and initiated bankruptcy proceedings against RFE/RL's limited liability corporation in Russia for failure to pay fines. Both VOA and RFE/RL, citing threats to staff, suspended operations in Russia. RFE/RL relocated Russian staff from its Kyiv office to Riga and Belarusian staff to Vilnius, enhanced its Russian and Ukrainian language programming, and expanded on a range of content delivery methods, including digital platforms,²⁰ television, radio, and satellites.

FINDINGS

Program Content and Delivery

Networks Expanded Ukrainian and Russian Language Content

OIG found that VOA and RFE/RL modified, and in some cases expanded, content to Ukrainian- and Russian-speaking audiences in response to Russia's war against Ukraine. USAGM and its entities deployed a range of content delivery methods—including digital platforms, television, radio, and satellites—to ensure programming reached intended audiences in the region. VOA and RFE/RL staff told OIG that, at the time of the review, digital platforms were the primary source of content delivery to Ukrainian and Russian language audiences.

In addition to these efforts, in mid-March 2022 USAGM launched VOA and RFE/RL Ukrainian-language programming on free-to-air television and audio channels via satellite. Furthermore, RFE/RL produced radio content in Russian that it broadcast for several hours each day. USAGM staff told OIG they were considering placing *Current Time* programming on an additional satellite that would reach cable systems in key European markets with substantial Russian-speaking populations.

The RFE/RL Ukrainian Service also responded to the challenges of reporting from a country at war by increasing content delivery on multiple platforms. These included increased reliance on digital platforms to deliver content to occupied regions in Donbas and Crimea after Russia's forces shut down radio broadcasts transmitted from towers in newly occupied areas. The service also increased news programming across Ukraine by converting "Svoboda Live"²¹ from an ad hoc breaking news program to a scheduled, daily 1-hour news show. Furthermore, the Ukrainian Service pivoted the existing investigative "Schemes"²² program from a focus on

²⁰ Digital platforms included Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, TikTok, and YouTube.

²¹ Svoboda Live is a Monday-Friday 1-hour video news program produced by RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service. Prior to February 2022, it was produced on an ad hoc basis to cover breaking news.

²² Schemes (Skhemy) is an investigative news project created in 2014 and run by RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service that originally focused on exposing high-level corruption.

alleged Ukrainian domestic corruption to suspected human rights abuses and war crimes by Russia’s forces.

Audience Data Subject to Potential Limitations

OIG reviewed USAGM-furnished audience data related to Ukrainian- and Russian-language programming and found that data collected in wartime and censorship conditions created potential limitations. For example, USAGM staff told OIG that it was difficult to measure satellite audiences, including in Ukraine’s television market where the Ukrainian government’s “United News Tele-marathon” had been dominating television programming since the beginning of the war.²³ In addition, although USAGM satellite programming technically was available within Russia, it was excluded from Russia satellite providers’ programming and, as a result, was accessible only to users who were able to manually tune their satellite receivers. Similarly, staff told OIG that audiences’ use of circumvention tools, such as virtual private networks (VPN),²⁴ could complicate their analyses of audiences’ use of USAGM digital tools. However, despite these challenges, OIG found USAGM and its entities were able to accurately measure and analyze key statistics to inform programming and strategic planning. Accordingly, OIG included USAGM-furnished audience data in this report because, in its professional judgment, USAGM and its entities were rigorous in their efforts to collect accurate and complete data despite the challenging circumstances.

Network Audiences Remained Stable After Russia’s 2022 Invasion

USAGM-furnished audience data indicated that, overall, Russia audiences for USAGM broadcasting entities remained relatively stable following Russia’s February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, as shown in Table 1, below. OIG found that early and continuous planning by USAGM, VOA, and RFE/RL, with assistance from OTF, ensured content availability for audiences.

Table 1: Audiences in Russia for USAGM Broadcasting Entities – 2021–2022

	June 2021	July 2022
USAGM Total Audience ^a	8.9 percent of adults 10.0 million people	10.6 percent of adults 11.7 million people
RFE/RL	8.5 percent 9.7 million	10.2 percent 11.3 million
VOA	2.7 percent 3.1 million	1.6 percent 1.7 million

^a Total audience numbers are fewer than the combined total audiences of RFE/RL and VOA due to overlap among audiences of the two networks.

Source: Data provided by USAGM.

²³ The United News Tele-marathon is a Ukrainian government-directed telethon launched at the start of Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Television channels owned by four Ukrainian media groups broadcast around the clock with information regarding the war.

²⁴ A virtual private network, or VPN, is an encrypted internet connection that users access remotely and that gives the user privacy, anonymity, and security. For example, a VPN provider can unblock censored sites by changing the virtual location of the user. VPNs also protect the user’s data from surveillance.

VOA worldwide usage metrics provided to OIG showed viewership numbers for Ukrainian- and Russian-language programming increased steadily since Russia's 2022 invasion,²⁵ while RFE/RL reported that between February 24 and March 16, 2022, the number of views of RFE/RL videos on YouTube from Russia tripled to nearly 238 million.²⁶ USAGM staff told OIG that although audience consumption for content distributed through television, radio, and satellite was lower than through digital platforms, all forms of distribution played a role in providing content to intended audiences. To further their reach, many programs were distributed through multiple content mediums.

Open Technology Fund Programs Enabled Networks to Reach Millions of Russians

After the February 2022 invasion and Russia's actions to block websites, OTF metrics showed that the number of users in Russia who relied on OTF-supported VPNs grew from tens of thousands to millions of people. This dramatic increase in the use of OTF circumvention tools, such as VPNs, after the invasion demonstrated that Russians sought a variety of news sources despite their government's attempts to block information. As a result, OTF continued its focus on supporting internet freedom and strengthening VPN capacity. OIG found that OTF had a system of ongoing analyses to measure the effectiveness of its tools to combat Russia's censorship and provide users in Russia and Ukraine with trusted technology.

In addition to VPNs, USAGM and its entities worked with OTF to develop other advanced solutions to fight potential service disruptions, including circumvention tools and mirror sites,²⁷ to assist individuals facing digital threats or attacks. For example, OTF supported a variety of circumvention tools which, according to OTF staff, generated a substantial increase in audience views after the 2022 invasion. One circumvention tool's audience views increased from more than 540,000 monthly active users in February 2022 to more than 2.6 million in October 2022. Another circumvention tool's views increased from more than 79,000 monthly active users to more than 2.2 million over the same period.

Human Resources and Staff Relocations

Networks Adequately Planned and Executed Staffing Relocations

OIG found that RFE/RL and VOA adequately planned, prepared, and executed the relocation of staff from Russia and Ukraine in 2022. Furthermore, RFE/RL made progress in establishing new offices in Vilnius and Riga, as mentioned earlier, as well as in Lviv, Ukraine, and hiring new staff for these offices. Beginning in December 2021, RFE/RL leadership prepared for a potential full-

²⁵ VOA data indicated that digital media views increased 173 percent for Ukrainian language programming and 97 percent for Russian language programming from February to October 2022.

²⁶ RFE/RL March 17, 2022, press release, "As War Transforms Media Landscape in Europe, RFE/RL Opens Offices in Latvia, Lithuania."

²⁷ Mirror sites are replicas of other websites or any network node. Such sites have different URLs than the original site but host identical or near-identical content and often are located in a different geographic region than the original site.

scale invasion of Ukraine by keeping in close contact with its journalists based in Ukraine, arranging for transportation of Ukrainian staff to a safe haven in Lviv, and transmitting frequent security guidance. In February and March 2022, RFE/RL relocated Russian staff members from Kyiv to Riga and Tbilisi, Georgia, and relocated Belarusian staff from Kyiv to Vilnius and Ukrainian staff members from Kyiv to Lviv. VOA coordinated closely with USAGM in early 2022 to relocate staff and journalists from Russia and journalists from Ukraine to neighboring countries.

Although USAGM carried out relocations with minimal difficulty, OIG found that the RFE/RL staff relocations and the subsequent need for staff to rebuild lives in a new country created ongoing uncertainty among staff and their family members. Staff members described feeling stressed and worried about their legal status and salaries, as well as the inability of their spouses to work or fully settle into their new lives. Relocated staff in Latvia and Lithuania expressed concerns to OIG about:

- The long-term legal status for themselves and their spouses.
- The adequacy of salaries, compounded by higher income tax rates in host countries.
- The adequacy of healthcare reimbursement rates, particularly when staff had yet to receive residency permits that would allow them to access the state-run healthcare system.
- The category of employment after contract changes during relocation.²⁸ RFE/RL leadership acknowledged the confusion over employment status.

At the time of OIG's review, RFE/RL was undertaking an audit to address concerns about employment category and working with the highest levels of the Latvian and Lithuanian governments on the issues of visas and residence permits.

Progress Made on Opening Offices in Vilnius, Riga, and Lviv

OIG found that RFE/RL made progress toward opening offices in Vilnius, Riga, and Lviv. RFE/RL moved its Lithuanian operations to permanent office space on October 18, 2022, after working for approximately 6 months from a temporary space. When completed, the office will accommodate approximately 25 staff members in addition to a studio and podcast room.

In Riga, RFE/RL operated from a temporary office located near the temporary studio used by journalists while it negotiates for permanent office space. When completed, the new office is expected to house approximately 150 staff in addition to a studio and digital innovation lab. RFE/RL leased office space in Lviv in January 2022 as a back-up should the RFE/RL office in Kyiv become unusable due to the February 2022 invasion. RFE/RL originally anticipated having the

²⁸ RFE/RL used multiple different types of contracts to hire staff depending on where they were located and their duties. These included core employee contracts, core freelance contracts (in countries where RFE/RL cannot legally hire employees), and five other types of freelance contracts. RFE/RL placed employees from Russia and Belarus onto core freelance contracts when they were relocated first to Kyiv or Tbilisi and then to Riga or Vilnius. RFE/RL said it intended to convert the relocated staff to local employment contracts once it established a legal presence in the country and the staff received work or residency permits.

Lviv office operational by the start of 2023, but progress on the office stalled in mid-October 2022 due to an increase in hostilities that destabilized the electricity supply in the city.

Hiring New Staff Moving Forward, but Some Challenges Remained

OIG found that VOA and RFE/RL also made progress toward hiring the staff necessary to respond to the Ukraine crisis and that their hiring policies and procedures were in line with most Office of Personnel Management guidance and human resources best practices. For example, VOA and RFE/RL posted job announcements for a required minimum period, pre-screened candidates prior to interviews, and used structured interviews. At the time of the inspection, RFE/RL had made offers on 27 of 89 positions it anticipated filling in FY 2023. VOA, as of mid-October 2022, had filled 6 new personal services contractor positions for its Russian and Ukrainian Services and had another 14 in the hiring process—approximately 91 percent of its expected 22 new hires in FY 2023. However, VOA’s and RFE/RL’s hiring processes took up to several months to conclude, which leadership and staff noted could put both at a disadvantage for recruiting in markets where candidates have other offers or are unwilling to wait for a long process to conclude. VOA staff also expressed concerns that the network’s vetting program, discussed in more detail later in this report, resulted in hiring delays.

Networks Did Not Systematically Track Hiring Process-Related Metrics

VOA and RFE/RL did not fully and systematically track hiring metrics, such as the length of time between different stages of the hiring process or why an applicant declined a job offer. While RFE/RL had a system capable of collecting this data, staff told OIG the information was not regularly collected or used. In addition, RFE/RL told OIG it had hired a talent acquisition coordinator to, among other tasks, help streamline the hiring process. VOA told OIG that it did not track job offer declinations or reasons. The Government Accountability Office *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*,²⁹ Overview 4.08, states that documentation is required for the effective design, implementation, and operating effectiveness of an entity’s internal control system. Furthermore, Principles 7.01³⁰ and 9.01³¹ state that management should identify, analyze, and respond to risks and changes related to achieving their defined objectives. Without accurate hiring metrics, the organizations will be unable to identify and quantify the potential bottlenecks in their processes that might affect their ability to quickly hire new staff.

Recommendation 1: The U.S. Agency for Global Media, in coordination with Voice of America, should systematically track and review the metrics on all stages in Voice of America’s federal hiring processes to gather actionable analytics for possible adjustments to these processes. (Action: USAGM, in coordination with VOA)

²⁹ Government Accountability Office, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, page 19 (GAO-14-704G, September 2014).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, page 37.

³¹ *Ibid.*, page 42.

Recommendation 2: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty should systematically track and review the metrics on all stages in its hiring processes to gather actionable analytics for possible adjustments to these processes. (Action: RFE/RL)

Voice of America’s Russian Language Service Did Not Follow Editorial Review Standards

OIG found that VOA Russian Language Service staff did not comply with VOA editorial policy in all cases with respect to web site content management. VOA Russian Language Service staff expressed concerns to OIG regarding lapses in adherence to editorial review standards for the service’s Russian-language website, resulting in, for example, the posting of stories sourced to statements by Russia’s government officials or institutions without providing full context. VOA’s Eurasia Division, which includes both the Russian and Ukrainian language services, required all copy, audio, and video to be reviewed by two editors before broadcast or posting. Furthermore, VOA’s Best Practices Guide³² requires that senior editors in a service, the News Center, or the VOA News Standards and Best Practices Editor review content provided by state-controlled media before any decision is made about airing video or posting text. Additionally, the guide states “State-run media material that is cleared for broadcast or for use on the web MUST include proper credit to that news organization and the disclaimer that VOA cannot confirm the accuracy of the material.”

Staff told OIG that personnel shortages and crisis operating conditions limited the Russian Language Service’s ability to consistently ensure editorial oversight for website publication. After OIG raised this issue with VOA leadership, the Office of Program Review conducted spot checks of the content posted on the Russian Language Service website and the Eurasia Division reiterated to all Russian Language Service staff its policy of content review by two editors. However, even occasional lapses in adherence to established editorial policy risk undermining VOA’s stated mission of providing accurate, authoritative, and comprehensive news and information.

Recommendation 3: Voice of America should implement practices to ensure adherence to editorial review standards by the Russian Language Service prior to content dissemination. (Action: VOA)

Security

Broadcasting Networks Improved Their Security Programs

OIG found that RFE/RL and VOA improved and institutionalized their respective security protocols. For example, RFE/RL’s security office maintained a schedule to train journalists on reporting from a hostile environment, encouraged journalists to have personal relocation plans, was preparing continuity of operations plans for its bureaus, and was enhancing physical security standards of its facilities in accordance with the RFE/RL 2022 Physical Security

³² VOA News Standards & Best Practices, October 2022.

Handbook. In addition, RFE/RL security officers developed a travel plan to conduct regular visits to all 23 bureaus.

Similarly, VOA's security office advised that all journalists who anticipate reporting from a conflict zone receive appropriate training in reporting from a hostile environment. In addition, VOA contracted with a security consulting firm to assist with journalists' travel in Ukraine and established a protocol requiring the VOA Director to approve travel to a hostile environment. USAGM revised its Broadcasting Administrative Manual³³ on September 12, 2022, to include a section on journalist safety that codified these changes.

Employee Vetting Programs Did Not Include Local Background Investigations and Records Checks

USAGM's employee vetting programs were limited to information available to U.S. national agencies and would not in most cases include criminal records maintained by foreign governments. Furthermore, the vetting programs, as applied to RFE/RL, did not include local background investigations and records checks that could determine prior criminal history and ties to the governments of Russia or Belarus. RFE/RL is USAGM's only overseas entity and 98 percent of its staff work and live outside of the United States. OIG concluded that USAGM's vetting programs were unlikely to thoroughly identify RFE/RL personnel security risks without local background investigations and records checks. As stated in Title 2 Code of Federal Regulations § 200.303(a), a non-federal entity must have effective internal controls and provide reasonable assurance that the federal award complies with statutes, regulations, and the terms and conditions. Failure to perform comprehensive background checks on current and prospective employees, and periodic reinvestigations of employees, could pose security risks to RFE/RL programs and operations.

OIG did not make a recommendation in this report because, at the time of OIG's review, two 2017 recommendations on this issue were open and had yet to be implemented by USAGM. Recommendation 6 from OIG's 2017 inspection of RFE/RL³⁴ stated that USAGM should revise its grant agreement with RFE/RL to include specific requirements for security policies. Recommendation 7 of the same report stated that USAGM, in coordination with RFE/RL, should establish a written protocol on background investigations to comply with the grant agreement. Subsequent to OIG's review, in February 2023, USAGM provided OIG with documentation to show that it had implemented recommendation 6. OIG will continue to work with USAGM to ensure, as it implements recommendation 7, that its written protocol includes local background investigations and records checks.

³³ The Broadcasting Administrative Manual (BAM) consists of policies, procedures, and guidance that govern USAGM's federal elements. The BAM is meant to be an authoritative, centralized compilation of policies that affect USAGM's operations. Its purpose is to serve as an organizational and management tool to help USAGM elements act consistently and effectively. It also provides entities outside of USAGM with a source of information about the agency's policies, operations, and organization.

³⁴ ISP-IB-17-21, May 2017.

Spotlight on Success: Evacuation Data Card Program Assisted Staff in Planning for Possible Evacuations

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty developed an in-house evacuation data card program to prepare and support staff based in Ukraine for evacuation. Modeled on the Isolated Person Recovery Plan used by the Department's Bureau of Diplomatic Security and the U.S. military, the data card program assists RFE/RL personnel in planning their own evacuation and provides RFE/RL with information to help locate missing personnel during an evacuation. The form asks staff to consider factors such as available transportation, possible evacuation routes, status of family members, travel documentation, and medical conditions. Most staff in Ukraine completed the form, and RFE/RL expanded the program to include staff in Moldova and Kyrgyzstan.

Budget and Funds Management

Agency Oversight Funding Consistent With Federal Requirements

OIG reviewed the oversight of federally appropriated funding used for activities related to the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. This included funding from the FY 2022 annual appropriation, the Ukraine Supplemental Appropriations Act (USAA),³⁵ and interagency agreements with the Department. (See Appendix D, Actual Spending and Sources of Funding.) OIG found that USAGM oversaw this funding in line with federal requirements.

Agency Did Not Provide Clear Guidance on Distribution of Supplemental Funds

OIG found that USAGM did not clearly communicate the process for distributing the USAA funding to grantee organizations. Grantee organization officials expressed confusion and frustration to OIG over what they perceived as a delay in awarding USAA funding months after USAGM approved the USAA spending plan in May 2022. USAGM staff told OIG that under its regular funding process, the grantees must first request the funds. However, grantee organization staff told OIG they were unaware of this requirement and instead were waiting for instruction from USAGM on how the supplemental funding would be awarded. The agency first issued awards to two of the four grantee organizations (OTF and the Middle East Broadcasting Networks) in September 2022. Meanwhile, other grantee organizations continued to redirect other available funding to respond to the crisis in a timely manner, as they had done before Congress approved the USAA legislation in March 2022. Table 2, below, displays the proposed use of USAA funding in USAGM's October 2022 spend plan as compared to the actual status of funds obligated to agency entities.

³⁵ Public Law 117-103, Division N.

Table 2: USAGM Ukraine Supplemental Appropriations Act Funding Proposed Use and Obligation Status, October 2022

Organization	Proposed Use of Funds^a	Obligated by USAGM
Voice of America	\$9,174,104	\$21,342
Content for New Ukrainian Television Channel	\$4,494,704	\$5,335
Ukraine Regional Reporting	\$1,697,400	\$5,335
Expanded VOA Washington Coverage	\$1,492,000	\$5,336
Expanded Polygraph: Fighting Misinformation ^b	\$1,490,000	\$5,336
Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty	\$9,013,000	\$0
Programs and Program Support	\$4,378,000	\$0
Kyiv & Regional Bureaus Initiative	\$2,400,000	\$0
Mobile Equipment	\$1,045,000	\$0
Travel, Emergency Relocation, and Realignment of Operations	\$810,000	\$0
Temporary Office/Studio Space	\$380,000	\$0
U.S. Agency for Global Media	\$6,117,896	\$848,966
FY 2023 and 2024 Bureau Broadcasting & Transmissions Enhancement	\$4,142,000	\$0
Technology Services and Innovation (TSI)	\$1,795,896	\$848,966
Office of Policy and Research	\$180,000	\$0
Open Technology Fund	\$320,000	\$320,000
Rapid Response Fund	\$320,000	\$320,000
Middle East Broadcasting Networks	\$125,000	\$125,000
Providing Ukraine/Russia Coverage in Regional Markets	\$125,000	\$125,000
Office of Cuba Broadcasting	\$125,000	\$0
Providing Ukraine/Russia Coverage in Regional Markets	\$125,000	\$0
Radio Free Asia	\$125,000	\$0
Providing Ukraine/Russia Coverage in Regional Markets	\$125,000	\$0
Grand Total	\$25,000,000	\$1,315,308

^a As reported by USAGM in October 2022.

^b Polygraph.info is a fact-checking website produced by VOA.

Source: OIG generated from information provided by USAGM.

In the absence of the supplemental funding, RFE/RL and OTF told OIG they used FY 2022 base funding to cover expenses related to Ukraine that they had identified in the supplemental spending plan. For example, OTF initially spent \$320,000 of its Rapid Response Fund on Ukraine and Russia-related efforts, depleting 65 percent of the fund's annual budget, prior to receiving USAA funding in September 2022. The *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal*

Government,³⁶ Principle 15.03, requires management—in this case USAGM, as the grantor—to communicate its internal control procedures to external parties—in this case, the grantee organizations. This would include the processes for distribution and receipt of funding outside of the annual appropriations process. Although both grantee organizations were able to reallocate other funding to cover Ukraine-related expenses, further delays in awarding USAA funding could weaken grantee ability to respond to concurrent crises.

Recommendation 4: The U.S. Agency for Global Media should improve and disseminate procedural guidance for grantee organizations covering distribution and receipt of Ukraine Supplemental Appropriations Act funding. (Action: USAGM)

Strategic Planning

OIG reviewed USAGM, VOA, RFE/RL, and OTF's strategic planning processes for responding to Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine and to Russia's increasing pressure on media freedoms up to and after the invasion. OIG found USAGM regularly briefed Congress on its strategic plans to ensure network programs would reach target audiences despite Russia's efforts to spread disinformation and limit internet and media freedoms. Furthermore, USAGM and entity staff told OIG that their proactive communication efforts contributed to FY 2022 increases in congressional funding for RFE/RL and OTF budgets.³⁷

OIG also determined that VOA, RFE/RL, and OTF complied with strategic planning requirements leading up to and following the invasion. For example, VOA reassigned the director of the Ukrainian language service as the Eastern Europe Bureau Chief to broaden content production and coverage reach,³⁸ while RFE/RL's close coordination with USAGM and the Department assisted the network to evacuate staff from Kyiv before the 2022 invasion, as discussed previously in this report. OIG also found that, as the invasion of Ukraine progressed, USAGM, VOA, RFE/RL, and OTF coordinated productively to expand programming and ensure content delivery.

³⁶ GAO-14-704G, April 2014, page 62.

³⁷ Congress increased RFE/RL's FY 2022 budget by more than \$21 million above its FY 2021 budget and OTF's by more than \$7 million.

³⁸ Reports in English by VOA's Eastern Europe Bureau Chief were available for use in multiple programs and regions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

OIG provided a draft of this report to U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM) stakeholders for their review and comment on the findings and recommendations. OIG issued the following recommendations to USAGM, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Voice of America, and the Open Technology Fund. USAGM and its broadcasting and grantee entities' complete responses can be found in Appendix E.¹ USAGM, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and Voice of America also provided technical comments that were incorporated into the report, as appropriate.

Recommendation 1: The U.S. Agency for Global Media, in coordination with Voice of America, should systematically track and review the metrics on all stages in Voice of America's federal hiring processes to gather actionable analytics for possible adjustments to these processes. (Action: USAGM, in coordination with VOA)²

Management Response: In its April 18, 2023, response, the U.S. Agency for Global Media concurred with this recommendation. The U.S. Agency for Global Media noted an estimated completion in the first half of FY 2024.

OIG Reply: OIG considers the recommendation resolved. The recommendation can be closed when OIG receives and accepts documentation that the U.S. Agency for Global Media, in coordination with Voice of America, systematically tracked and reviewed the metrics on all stages in Voice of America's hiring processes to gather actionable analytics for possible adjustments to these processes.

Recommendation 2: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty should systematically track and review the metrics on all stages in its hiring processes to gather actionable analytics for possible adjustments to these processes. (Action: RFE/RL)

Management Response: In its April 18, 2023, response, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty concurred with this recommendation. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty noted an estimated completion in FY 2024.

OIG Reply: OIG considers the recommendation resolved. The recommendation can be closed when OIG receives and accepts documentation that Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty systematically tracked and reviewed the metrics on all stages in its hiring processes to gather actionable analytics for possible adjustments to these processes.

Recommendation 3: Voice of America should implement practices to ensure adherence to editorial review standards by the Russian Language Service prior to content dissemination. (Action: VOA)

¹ OIG requested that Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Voice of America, and the Open Technology Fund work through USAGM to incorporate their comments into the single, official response.

² OIG revised the recommendation in response to comments USAGM provided on the draft report.

Management Response: In its April 18, 2023, response, Voice of America concurred with this recommendation. Voice of America noted an estimated completion in FY 2023.

OIG Reply: OIG considers the recommendation resolved. The recommendation can be closed when OIG receives and accepts documentation that Voice of America implemented practices to ensure adherence to editorial review standards by the Russian Language Service prior to content dissemination.

Recommendation 4: The U.S. Agency for Global Media should improve and disseminate procedural guidance for grantee organizations covering distribution and receipt of Ukraine Supplemental Appropriations Act funding. (Action: USAGM)³

Management Response: In its April 18, 2023, response, the U.S. Agency for Global Media concurred with this recommendation. The agency noted an estimated completion date in FY 2023.

OIG Reply: OIG considers the recommendation resolved. The recommendation can be closed when OIG receives and accepts documentation that the U.S. Agency for Global Media improved and disseminated procedural guidance for grantee organizations covering distribution and receipt of Ukraine Supplemental Appropriations Act funding.

³ OIG revised the recommendation in response to comments USAGM provided on the draft report.

APPENDIX A: OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

This review was conducted from August 29, 2022, to February 6, 2023, in accordance with the Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation, as issued in 2012 by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, and the Inspections Handbook, as issued by the Office of Inspector General (OIG) for the Department and the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM).

The Office of Inspections provides the Secretary of State, the Chief Executive Officer of USAGM, and Congress with systematic and independent evaluations of the operations of the Department and USAGM. In accordance with the U.S. International Broadcasting Act of 1994, this review focused on the policies, procedures, and internal guidelines of USAGM, Voice of America (VOA), Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), and the Open Technology Fund (OTF) related to Russia's hostility toward—and ultimate full-scale invasion of—Ukraine on February 24, 2022.

OIG's specific review objectives were to determine whether USAGM, VOA, RFE/RL, and OTF:

- (1) Modified program content in response to Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine.
- (2) Employed content delivery methods and contingency plans to reach intended audiences and contend with service interruptions.
- (3) Engaged in human resource, contracting, and other management practices consistent with applicable criteria and guidelines.
- (4) Instituted methods to ensure the security of direct hire and contract staff.
- (5) Oversaw and distributed appropriated funding consistent with federal requirements.
- (6) Demonstrated strategic planning and use of performance metrics for the expenditure of resources.

The International Broadcasting Act of 1994 bars OIG from evaluating the philosophical or political perspectives of broadcasting content.¹ Therefore, OIG did not assess journalistic content.

OIG used a risk-based approach to prepare for this review. OIG reviewed pertinent records; conducted interviews; observed daily operations; and reviewed the substance of this report and its findings and recommendations with offices, individuals, and organizations affected by the review. OIG conducted portions of the review remotely and relied on audio- and video-conferencing tools in addition to in-person interviews with relevant sources and personnel. OIG used professional judgment and analyzed physical, documentary, and testimonial evidence to develop its findings, conclusions, and actionable recommendations.

¹ According to the United States International Broadcasting Act of 1994, Public Law No. 103-236., "The Inspector General of the Department of State and the Foreign Service shall respect the journalistic integrity of all the broadcasters covered by this chapter and may not evaluate the philosophical or political perspectives reflected in the content of broadcasts."

Amy Bliss, Benjamin Ellis, Colleen Ayers, Kristi Hogan, Thomas Leary, Vandana Patel, and Derwood Staeben conducted this review. Other report contributors included Dolores Adams and Caroline Mangelsdorf.

APPENDIX B: HISTORICAL CHRONOLOGY OF U.S. GOVERNMENT INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING

1942	The Voice of America (VOA) began broadcasting in 1942 to counter Nazi propaganda.
1948	The United States Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948 (Pub. L. No. 80-402), known as the Smith- Mundt Act, established the terms for U.S. Government engagement in public diplomacy and authorized creation of an “information service to disseminate abroad information about the United States, its people, and policies.”
1950	Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) went on the air with a broadcast to Czechoslovakia.
1953	President Eisenhower established the United States Information Agency (USIA), under Executive Order 10477 and the President’s Reorganization Plan No. 8, to carry out public diplomacy. VOA became the single largest element of USIA.
1973	The Board for International Broadcasting Act of 1973 (Pub. L. No. 93-129) established the Board for International Broadcasting to oversee and fund RFE/RL.
1976	President Ford signed into law (Pub. L. No. 94-350) the Voice of America Charter, intended to protect the independence and integrity of VOA programming.
1983	The 1983 Radio Broadcasting to Cuba Act established Radio Marti.
1990	The Television Broadcasting Act to Cuba established TV Marti; Radio and TV Marti merged under the Office of Cuba Broadcasting (OCB).
1990	USIA established the Bureau of Broadcasting to consolidate its three broadcasting services—VOA, the WORLDNET Television and Film Service, and Radio and TV Marti—under one umbrella organization supported by an Office of Engineering and Technical Operations.
1994	The International Broadcasting Act of 1994 (Pub. L. No. 103-236) abolished the Board for International Broadcasting, established the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) within USIA and brought all U.S. nonmilitary international broadcasting under the aegis of BBG.
1996	Radio Free Asia (RFA) was founded under the provisions of the 1994 Act (Pub. L. No. 103-236).
1998	The Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act of 1998 (Pub. L. No. 105-277) abolished USIA and divided its duties between the Department of State and BBG, which became a separate agency in 1999. BBG assumed authority for VOA, OCB, and its three grantee organizations (RFE/RL, RFA, and the Middle East Broadcasting Networks).
2002	Radio Sawa began broadcasting in 2002. The Middle East Broadcasting Networks (MBN), established in 2003, began Alhurra Television broadcasts in 2004.
2013	The Smith-Mundt Modernization Act of 2012, which was included in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013 (Pub. L. No. 112-239), allowed BBG to disseminate its programming within the United States for the first time.
2016	The National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2017 (Pub. L. No. 114-328) contained technical amendments to the 1994 Act, establishing the position of Chief Executive Officer and an International Broadcasting Advisory Board, in place of the Board of the Broadcasting Board of Governors established in the 1994 Act.
2018	BBG changed its name to the United States Agency for Global Media (USAGM) to reflect its modern operations beyond radio and television into digital and mobile platforms.
2021	The William M. (Mac) Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 (Pub. L. No. 116-283) confirmed the adherence to editorial independence and journalistic standards and modified the authorities of the Chief Executive Officer and the Advisory Board.

Source: Compiled by OIG from information supplied by U.S. Agency for Global Media, Department of State, and other sources.

APPENDIX C: USAGM BROADCASTING LANGUAGES

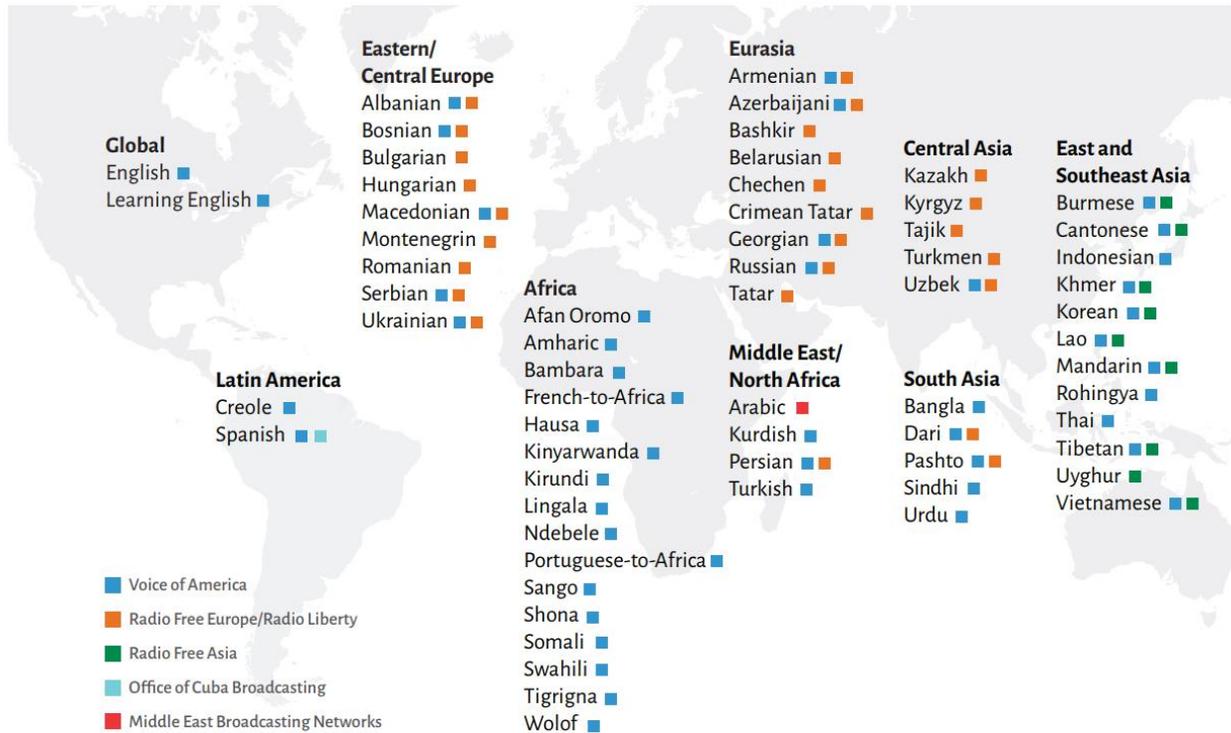


Figure 1: Around the world, more than 410 million people consume U.S. Agency for Global Media programming in a typical week in 63 languages. (Source: USAGM, 2022 Performance and Accountability Report)

APPENDIX D: ACTUAL SPENDING AND SOURCES OF FUNDING

Table 1: All Sources of Funding for USAGM, VOA, RFE/RL, and OTF (\$ in thousands) – FY 2022

Organization	FY 2021 Carryover	FY 2022 Program Plan	Ukraine Supplemental Appropriations Act	Interagency Agreements	Currency Gains/Losses	Subtotal
Federal Entities						
Voice of America	-	\$257,754	\$9,174	-	-	\$266,928
U.S. Agency for Global Media	-	\$234,584	\$6,118	-	-	\$240,702
Non-Federal Entities^a						
Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty	\$7,432 ^b	\$145,730	\$9,013	\$235 ^c	\$2,653	\$165,063
Open Technology Fund	\$26,734	\$765	\$320	\$4,520	-	\$32,339
Total	\$34,166	\$638,833	\$24,625	\$4,755	\$2,653	\$705,032

^a Non-federal entities receive their funding from U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM) through federal assistance awards.

^b This figure is the sum of two RFE/RL FY21 Federal Assistance Award amendments for carryover and transfer funds, making the funds available for use in FY22.

^c This figure is based on USAGM's FY22 award amendment to RFE/RL, dated 4/12/2022.

Source: OIG generated from information provided by USAGM, Voice of America (VOA), Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), and Open Technology Fund (OTF).

Table 2: Actual Spending for Response to Ukraine, All Funding Sources – FY 2022

Organization	Expenses
Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty	\$3,032,757
Voice of America	\$348,285
Open Technology Fund	\$320,000
U.S. Agency for Global Media	\$262,386
Total	\$3,963,428

Source: OIG generated from information provided by USAGM, VOA, RFE/RL, and OTF.^a

^a OIG did not collect detailed financial information from USAGM entities that were not included in the scope of this review, specifically the Office of Cuba Broadcasting, Middle East Broadcasting Networks, and Radio Free Asia.

APPENDIX E: MANAGEMENT RESPONSES



U.S. AGENCY FOR
GLOBAL MEDIA

330 Independence Avenue SW | Washington, DC 20237 | usagm.gov

April 18, 2023

UNCLASSIFIED

TO: OIG – Arne Baker, Acting Assistant Inspector General for Inspections

FROM: USAGM – Amanda Bennett, Chief Executive Officer

SUBJECT: Response to Draft OIG Report – Review of the U.S. Agency for Global Media
 Response to Russia’s 2022 Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Office of Inspector General’s (OIG) draft report titled, *Review of the U.S. Agency for Global Media Response to Russia’s 2022 Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine*.

The U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM) appreciates the thoroughness of the report and the highly professional work of OIG staff during this inspection. The agency values the OIG’s acknowledgement of USAGM, Voice of America (VOA), and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty’s (RFE/RL) successes in response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine by ensuring content availability for audiences, maintaining and expanding content for Ukrainian- and Russian-speaking audiences, and executing the relocation of staff members to safer locations.

USAGM and its networks have reviewed the draft OIG inspection report. We provide the following comments in response to the recommendations provided by OIG:

OIG Recommendation 1: Voice of America should systematically track and review metrics on all stages in its hiring processes to gather actionable analytics for possible adjustments to these processes. (Action: VOA)

Management Response: USAGM and VOA concur with Recommendation 1. As the human resources functions reside with USAGM, the agency suggests that the recommendation be edited to read: “USAGM should systematically track and review with VOA the metrics on all stages in the VOA federal hiring processes to gather actionable analytics for possible adjustments to these processes. (Action: USAGM, in coordination with VOA).” USAGM and VOA anticipate completion of this recommendation in the first half of FY 2024.

OIG Recommendation 2: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty should systematically track and review metrics on all stages in its hiring processes to gather actionable analytics for possible adjustments to these processes. (Action: RFE/RL)

Management Response: RFE/RL concurs with Recommendation 2. RFE/RL has already begun implementing this recommendation, and anticipates completion of this recommendation in FY 2024.

OIG Recommendation 3: Voice of America should implement practices to ensure adherence to editorial review standards by the Russian Language Service prior to content dissemination. (Action: VOA)

Management Response: VOA concurs with Recommendation 3. To further clarify this recommendation, VOA suggests that the recommendation be edited to read: “Voice of America should further strengthen editorial review of its content by the Russian Language Service according to established standards prior to distribution.” VOA anticipates completion of this recommendation in FY 2023.

OIG Recommendation 4: The U.S. Agency for Global Media should develop and disseminate procedural guidance for grantee organizations covering distribution and receipt of Ukraine Supplemental Appropriations Act funding. (Action: USAGM)

Management Response: USAGM concurs with Recommendation 4. To further clarify this recommendation, USAGM suggests that the recommendation be edited to read: “The U.S. Agency for Global Media should improve and disseminate procedural guidance for grantee organizations covering distribution and receipt of Ukraine Supplemental Appropriations Act funding. (Action: USAGM).” USAGM anticipates completion of this recommendation in FY 2023.

The point of contact for this memorandum is Executive Director Oanh Tran (hotran@usagm.gov, 202-920-2583).



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