EURASIA PARTNERSHIP FOUNDATION (EPF)

Capacity Statement

About EPF

EPF's guiding **vision** is of a South Caucasus that is peaceful, conflict-free and cooperative with civically engaged citizens, socially responsible businesses, and sustainable, accountable and effective third sector organizations. Because our operating landscape is one of political unrest, military confrontation, economic crisis and limited regional cooperation, we must harness the potential of community activism and local philanthropy to make a contribution to peace- and confidence-building.

EPF's **mission** is to empower people to effect change for social justice and economic prosperity through hands-on programs, helping them to improve their communities and their own lives.

EPF has accumulated 25 years of experience in program implementation, grant making, and cooperation with Armenian civil society. EPF has shaped a unique portfolio of services to position itself as a 'think and do' tank with expertise lying in the nexus of project design and management, network building and consortium management, civil society capacity building, policy research and advocacy, alternative content development, critical thinking and peace building. EPF's **values and principles** include focus on human rights, gender, minorities and anti-corruption; cross-fertilization of programs; the slogan 'organizational development is fun and creative'; capitalizing on the opportunities; innovation and creativity; long-term focus for achieving sustainable impact; teaching via practice; and the motto 'apply your preaching to yourself.'

EPF's capacities

Forming and managing consortia (partnerships)

EPF has a valuable experience in establishing, leading and/or training multi-partner consortia for large-scale programs funded by major donors, such as USAID, EU, Sida. EPF can help with developing a pre-teaming agreement and/or memorandum of understanding that includes consortium guidelines, work principles, ethical rules, etc. directed towards strategic implementation of a joint program. EPF can assume the function of a consortium manager and/or build the capacity of the lead organization in the above-mentioned areas.

1. **Donor-funded large scale program management**

Experienced in managing USAID- and EU-funded programs, EPF can help with (a) building annual work plans and management documents, such as ME, report formats, grant management systems and procedures, grant announcement, justification memoranda, grant agreements, service contracts, as well as (b) programmatic and financial management of programs and sub-grants, including donor visibility and communication guidelines.

2. **Grant-making**

One of the major tools that EPF has used over the years to provide support to CSOs is grant-making. EPF has a comprehensive approach to - and extensive experience in - grant making, and includes grant-making in most of its projects and work directions. In addition to grants selection, distribution, evaluation, and oversight, EPF builds the institutional capacity and internal controls of its sub-grantees. Prior to grant implementation, EPF staff work jointly (co-creation) with

grantees on project design, implementation schedules, evaluation processes, and risk mitigation. Afterward, EPF program officers guide and coach partners further through the grants implementation process. EPF accompanies the implementation of its sub-grantee projects to enhance their quality, and at the same time, EPF maintains the line of not intervening in the creativity of the grant recipients. EPF calls it the *accompaniment* of the grantees. EPF employs a unique proprietary grants management system, which allows for strict fiscal oversight of grant recipients. EPF's accounting practices comply with the highest international standards. In its grant-making, EPF adheres to the human rights-based approach, trying to promote inclusion and participation at all levels. Thanks to its well-established procedures and experience, EPF has earned a reputation throughout the South Caucasus for administering efficient, results-oriented grants.

Over 25 years of its operation, EPF and its predecessor, the Representative Office of the Eurasia Foundation have allocated around $30 million in grants in Armenia. The majority of this money came from USAID; a number of other donors also entrusted EPF with grants and program management. The list of donors includes SIDA, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, United Kingdom, the EU, and others. In 2008-2019, EPF awarded around 400 grants totaling $8.5 million.

One reason that donors entrust their grants management to EPF is that the EPF has earned a strong reputation as a neutral actor in a field where polarized issues tend to pull stakeholders apart. EPF is recognized by state and non-state actors as an honest facilitator in dialogue mechanics. This reputation allows EPF to bring various stakeholders together, ultimately having a greater impact, and to conduct work without the risk of conflict of interest. The rigorous grants selection process and management systems are critical to this perceived neutrality.

Usually, EPF provides grants for civil society development, local governance, human rights, anti-corruption, conflict transformation, media development, and youth. EPF's grants program has proven to be an effective means to spur innovation; and to support new and experimental pilot projects, or projects whose need is time-sensitive. This approach helps EPF stay in touch with the needs on the ground, and helps small, grass-roots organizations to address the salient needs of their communities which are often ignored by larger donors.

EPF provides various types of grants: open door grants based on open competition procedures; targeted (thematic) grants; invited grants; and grants to individuals and unregistered groups. EPF has procedures for allocation of grants to organizations, individuals and groups (consortia), non-profits and, in some cases (such as the media) for-profits, based in Armenia or elsewhere.

3. Policy advocacy and influence on legislation

For many years, EPF, with the support of its donors, and in collaboration with a variety of partners and networks, has been engaged in advocacy work, aimed at influencing the policies of the Armenian government in the areas related to human rights and freedoms. This work has been based on thorough analysis and planning, as well as creative advocacy and flexibility. Apart from a thorough study of the need and developing evidence-based recommendations, a serious advocacy impact requires also communication skills to constructively engage with decision-makers, alongside a long-term perspective. It is thanks to this perspective (which its donors have given it over the years) that EPF is able to claim important results. Since acquiring significant locally-tailored advocacy experience, recently EPF has also been empowered to support and motivate its sub-grantees to use the same approach in their work; thereby expanding the culture

of successful policy advocacy in Armenia. Below are the examples of some of the notable advocacy processes that EPF and the civil society of Armenia have recently undertaken:

- Removing discriminatory provisions and making amendments to the draft Law on Equality, 2015-2021;
- Withdrawal of a discriminatory draft Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations (2017);
- The compulsory school subject History of the Armenian Apostolic Church has been opted out as a result of a new government decision (2020);
- Removing employment restrictions for religious minorities in the Laws on Rescue Service, Penitentiary Service, Compulsory Enforcement Service and the Law on Public Service of the Republic of Armenia (2020);
- Recommendations to the Law on Commercial Arbitration (2022);
- Mandatory mediation process for family-related disputes, development of referral procedures, and other related recommendations have been included in the draft amendments to the Law on Mediation (2021);
- Recommendations to the Law on Higher Education and Science were accepted to empower Student Councils, as well as to allow a non-limited number of such bodies to be established at Higher Education Institutions (2021); etc.

EPF has built strong constituencies who engage in policy advocacy, including the religious communities' network - a unique one in Armenia, the anti-discrimination legislation network, and the judicial reform network. EPF is also engaged in public councils adjacent to the Police, Ministry of Justice, working group of the Council of Women's Affairs with the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, working group on Combating Hate Speech established by the Standing Committee on Human Rights Protection and Public Affairs of the National Assembly. In this and other work with government, EPF advises the government agencies on how to make these councils more productive and effective. EPF also has a special consultative status with the United Nations ECOSOC.

Through its Data for Accountable and Transparent Action program co-created with USAID, EPF has developed tools, media products and methods for Policy engagement of CSOs, has built the capacities of CSOs to implement policy research and recommend improvements in the areas of Mental Health, Labor Rights, State Procurement, Human Security and Social-Environmental LG strategies.

EPF's proprietary methodology of coalition-led advocacy includes facilitation of the engagement of multiple organizations with specific skill sets: grass-roots, academia, think tanks, media/communication entities, businesses, etc.; enhancing their skills through training and project implementation *accompaniment* based on their functions and needs; facilitating the policy engagement work based on evidence-based research and policy paper development; and building the capacity of CSOs to network, communicate and advocate policy recommendations to stakeholders.

4. Networks, contacts and high quality research

EPF has developed a proprietary database with more than 10,000 contacts of Armenia-based and international CSOs, experts, development consultancies, researchers, think tanks, and policy-makers with whom it has worked in recent years. This set of active contacts and contact-

management methodology allow EPF to find needed high quality experts or potential partners, both locally and internationally, relatively easily.

EPF pays special attention to collecting evidence for its policy advocacy work. EPF is specialized in both commissioning out and implementing qualitative research of highest quality. EPF has special quality assurance procedures to deliver credible and useful research results. EPF's papers influence public policy, become recommendations included in draft laws and influence Armenia's international obligations. The recent research topics include: the problem of early marriages and access to education of Yezidi children; CSO capacity assessment for working on migration issues; Armenia's implementation of concluding observations on the Rights of the Child; on the Rights of Women; and Social and Economic and Cultural Rights; COVID-19-related vulnerabilities among migrants in Armenia; human security issues; study on the implementation status of the revised European Social Charter by Armenia; successful business responses to the crises (COVID-19 and the 2020 war); gaps in state-level medical services for people with disabilities; current needs of CSOs, the population's and state employee's perceptions of civil society; reflections of the war participants; etc.

5. Institutional strengthening of implementing partners

EPF supports civil society organizations (CSOs), initiative groups and individuals engaged in them seeking to strengthen their competencies, build organizational sustainability and set new standards for organizational excellence. EPF strives to continuously improve the services it provides to organizations and individuals, and incorporates new practices and innovation in the process of consultancy. EPF strengthens the capacities of CSOs in management and governance, strategy development, organizational accountability and transparency, policies and procedures, planning financial sustainability of the organization, budgeting, fundraising, financial management, grant management, human resource management, program design and management, financial planning, funding application development and submission, consortium management, proposal writing, communication and public relations (external communication, public relations materials, electronic tools, etc.).

6. The InfoTun Network

In 2011, within the framework of the USAID-supported "Alternative Resources in Media" project, EPF, in cooperation with the members of a consortium led by Media Initiatives Center, established a network of regional information hubs (InfoTuns) to promote internet and media literacy in the regions of Armenia. One of the main features of the InfoTun model, which ensured its sustainability and effectiveness over time, was the establishment of these hubs adjunct to the existing strong local CSOs. Throughout the 10 years of its operation, the InfoTun Network that currently covers every region of Armenia (there are 10 InfoTuns, one in each of the regions) has organized and hosted more than one thousand events. The work with the InfoTun Network allows EPF essentially to cover the entirety of Armenia with any activity that requires full country coverage. If a project has a significant success worth replicating, it can be replicated and adopted by other InfoTuns. InfoTuns are recognized hubs of local expertise, extensively used by local and international development actors which need access to the regions of Armenia.

The InfoTun Network has developed and applied various tools and methods to organize and promote non-formal education, public participation, community mobilization, monitoring and evaluation of reforms and institutions, as well as research and analyze policies at the central and local levels. The past decade of the InfoTun Network operation illustrates that InfoTuns are

equally effective as individual hubs acting at the regional or community level and as a network of local actors with unified methodologies and approaches that are based on universal values, such as respect to human rights, promotion of democracy, intolerance towards corruption and violence, as well as on extending the understanding of the public good and the rights of an individual in its context. Since 2020, EPF has been implementing its Civil Society Support project funded by Sida. This project signified a new phase for the InfoTun Network development with coverage of new sectors and topics, such as anti-plagiarism, conflict of interest, urban development, anti-discrimination and others. There are many significant outcomes and achievements that EPF will capitalize on with the InfoTun Network to boost progress and development in the localities of Armenia in the spheres of social protection, human rights, anti-corruption, civic education, community development, participatory democracy and civic journalism.

7. Communication and outreach training

Under CSO DePo program (2014-2019), EPF has provided training on external communication to 320 organizations, and advised on their internet presence. EPF created and maintains the DePo Portal where CSOs display their profile, learn CSO news, see opportunities, and connect with each other. Since its inception in 2015, it has an average of 4,000 monthly visitors. EPF also provided CSOs with media literacy skills to orientate in information and avoid fake-news (see above the information on the work of InfoTuns and below - on Jam Sessions). EPF also worked on improving society-CSO communication via engaging media as intermediaries, to make the CSO work more understandable to the media and therefore to the public. In 2014-2021, 23 instances of media-CSO cooperation took place, and 120 films and other media stories were produced about CSO work. EPF also works as an intermediary-facilitator of CSO-government and CSO-business dialogues, supporting CSO efforts to reach the government and businesses. EPF also recently developed the communication strategy of the Constitutional Court of Armenia to increase its outreach and public trust.

8. Tools and methodology development

To ensure the sustainability of projects and activities, EPF develops tools and methods that can be applied by beneficiaries continuously. Examples include an *advocacy tool* for designing and implementing advocacy activities; the Capacity Enhancement Tool (CET) for CSO institutional capacity assessment and improvement; and the Systemic Thought Activity (MSTA) for effective organization of collective thought and identification of out of the box solutions to complex issues. The Municipal Capacity Enhancement Tool (MCET) to improve the functioning of the Local Government is another proprietary instrument developed by EPF and successfully piloted in some consolidating communities; this tool allows for the planners to see the gaps in their LG capacities and plan actions to fill these gaps. EPF adjusted the *Positive Youth Development (PYD)* methodology to Armenia's realities (including the translation of *Youth Programs Assessment Toolkit (YPAT)* – a tool that helps organizations measure the implementation of youth programs' effectiveness and identify areas that need strengthening or further development) for developing meaningful youth engagement and self-actualization. A *Problem Identification Checklist* helps CSOs research and validate the reform subject. A recent addition to this set of tools is *The gender mainstreaming in the policy processes* tool for facilitators.

9. Formal education

While a lion's share of EPF's entire work can be characterized as non-formal education, based on EPF's methodology (see the link to EPF's Education and Learning strategic document), EPF has also worked on formal education, e.g. supported the piloting of nonprofit management course with AUA. Through its current Student Democracy Now program, funded by the EU, EPF promotes the establishment of various types of student unions ensuring involvement of students of various social backgrounds to educate them on students' rights protection. EPF also developed the methodology for the National Assembly Education Center. EPF can further work with schools and HEIs to support the mainstreaming of social inclusion and other priorities of the Call in their programs, as a way to ensure the sustainability of the outputs. This is particularly important given the Armenian governments' priority of reforming the educational system and making it competence-oriented; civic competences in this new system play a key role.

10. Mardamej social innovation camps

EPF has developed a specific proprietary format aimed at boosting the creativity of young people in Armenia while addressing the issues of public interest or concern. The Mardamej Social Innovation Camp (Mardamej) is a format designed specifically to promote the development and implementation of innovative projects with social impact tailored to the needs of the regions of Armenia. It was first held in 2014, and it has been organized every year since; with 650 young people participating in total from all regions of Armenia. At Mardamej, young people learn to be creative, cooperate with each other in their regions as well as across the country, pitch their development projects, and implement the winning ones. Thanks to this process, many young people have entered the field of public participation, and have been empowered to become leaders in their communities and beyond. EPF and invited donors together supported 40 projects developed at Mardamej events. The projects addressed issues of local governance, human rights, social services, anticorruption, transparency and accountability, media literacy and critical thinking. EPF plans to continue organizing Mardamej at least once a year in the period 2023-2027.

11. Conflict Transformation School (CTS) and Critical Thinking School (CrTS)

EPF has developed a specific proprietary methodology to enhance the skills of civil society members, particularly youth, in conflict transformation and critical thinking. CrTS and CTS are very close in their methodologies. More than 700 participants from Armenia and Nagorny Karabakh have attended these two types of schools starting from 2012. When appropriate, EPF, in cooperation with partners from Georgia and Azerbaijan, conducts CTS for mixed groups of young Armenians, Azerbaijanis and Georgians. EPF plans to hold at least one CTS and one CrTS every year in the years 2023-2027.

Conflict Transformation School (CTS). Civil society peacebuilding and conflict transformation approaches constitute the *forte* of EPF and one of the methodological pillars on which a major part of its work is based. The CTS approach is based on citizen peacebuilding: it paves the way for civil society actors from different sides of the conflict to build trust using critical thinking skills and accumulating experience via joint undertakings. EPF runs CTS for a variety of actors, from civil society representatives, media, youth, and international organizations' personnel to state employees, both Armenia-based as well as international. The CTS is not a traditional educational institution but rather a coherent, continuous and methodologically determined peacebuilding learning and sharing process. EPF sees the CTS as a sustainable platform to

support the new generation of civil society peacebuilders to access alternative sources and counterbalance mainstream propaganda with critical thinking skills.

The CTS' methodology is based on an assumption that critical thinking and rationality are the basis for a dialogue, and that the best mutually beneficial solution to the conflict will come when both sides accept that the truth is born from a constructive dialogue between the two, and that it is not fully owned by either of them.

Critical Thinking School (CrTS). Since 2017, EPF, in cooperation with Media Initiatives Center, within the framework of the 'Media for Informed Civic Engagement' (MICE) and PeaCE programmes, commenced the Critical Thinking School. The participant to the CrTS develop critical thinking skills and competencies, engaging heavily in text analysis, data verification, discerning fake news and disinformation, as well as dismantling propaganda messages. The purpose of CrTS is for the beneficiaries to become more conscious and literate media users and producers, and learn to recognize the propaganda and manipulation tricks and their impact on the audience. During 2017-2019, EPF held CrTS for about 120 participants from Yerevan, the regions of Armenia and Nagorny Karabakh. EPF developed the first edition of its Critical Thinking Handbook (2018, second print run 2021), the only handbook that exists in Armenian on critical thinking. EPF plans to expand this edition and develop the second volume, as well as develop a handbook for CTS and CrTS trainers/facilitators.

12. YouthBank

The youth civic engagement and leadership program called YouthBank (YB) helps youth to positively participate in community improvement. The YB employs a unique, participatory learning model designed to involve young people in civic and community activism. The YB Armenia is part of YouthBank International Network operating in 27 countries worldwide and applying similar methodology of youth-led participatory grant-making. All YBs follow the *Golden Rules* of equal and inclusive participation. Over the last 15 years, EPF's YB methodology promoted community participation and volunteerism, conflict transformation, cross-cultural, entrepreneurship and business skills development, environmental awareness, human rights and other themes related to building local democracy mechanisms and capacity. YB is also a personal development program that builds young people's self-esteem and confidence, YB initiates a big number of volunteer and charity actions and projects in the targeted communities. YB participants indicate that their engagement in the YB program has a positive impact on their employability. EPF implemented the YB program in all 10 marzes of Armenia.

13. Creative games

The Methodology of Systemic Thought Activity (MSTA) and its application in the format of Creative Games are an innovative tool for strategic planning, community resource and needs visualization, mapping, and planning. The MSTA is a combination of several methodological tools aimed at effective organization of collective thinking and finding out-of-the-box, often breakthrough solutions to complex issues. The rationale behind the method is the 'unpacking' of the mind and getting rid of 'snail-paced' thinking and 'tunnel vision,' which hamper human creativity to a great extent. The application of MSTA mechanisms builds the screen of collective thinking and develops a group vocabulary that allows participants to be on the same page while speaking about this or that notion and process. The collective thinking screen also secures the flow of thinking from abusive interferences, since the flow is visible for the whole group, and

any idea can be caught, developed, used or criticized by each member of the group. Please see the brochure [here](#).

14. EPF University

Education and learning are the primary areas that need improvement and development in Armenia. EPF has been producing video presentations (called 'Jam Sessions') and off-line publications under the heading 'EPF University.' EPF has worked on and explored specific topics that have not been much articulated or debated in Armenia including research on such values as democracy in Armenian literature; the roots of violence in Armenia; expressions of tolerance and intolerance in literature and education; a study of 20th century Armenia with special emphasis on the impact of Soviet times on today's Armenia and alternative history education; the concept of power and its various manifestations. EPF has developed several practical manuals on conflict reporting by media, critical thinking, Armenia and the European Union, democracy and human rights, gender, various aspects of judicial reform, religious tolerance, etc. These publications are disseminated in online and print versions. They are available on EPF's on-line resource platforms such as CSO Depo portal and EPF's website which have a unique archive that stores numerous lectures, publications, research papers, books and articles. They are also disseminated via international publication networks, such as academia.edu and goodreads. In Armenia, these videos and publications are disseminated widely among the public, as well as educational and research institutions, libraries, CSOs, governmental, international and other organizations. They are also used by EPF as well as others in trainings, strategic discussions, and other knowledge-relevant activities. These materials are intended to provide civil society with a deeper level of knowledge on the topics that are important for it to function successfully. The need for such materials is determined by the fact that most of the time these issues are not discussed at the sufficient depth in either formal education institutions or outside of them, whereas the capacity to orientate in these issues determines the success of concrete undertakings and projects of civil society.

"EPF University" covers four large thematic directions: Critical Thinking; War and Peace; Civil Society; Education, methodology of history, culture and values

15. Other resources

- EPF has conference facilities consisting of three rooms – conference room, small meeting room and an open space area. The conference room is equipped with state-of-the-art communication and presentation facilities, which makes it suitable for holding conferences and workshops, online conferences, hybrid events, media events and video-recorded focus-group discussions. The room comfortably accommodates up to 50 participants in a 'theater' setup and up to 30 participants in a 'U-shape' format.
- EPF has also developed a 'Publishing algorithm,' a unique guide in Armenian to guide beneficiaries on the process of preparing documents for publication, and can train them on that.
- EPF has a developed methodology of engaging interns and fellows, both from Armenia and internationally, and providing them with a learning environment to enhance their skills, as well as contribute to EPF's activities.