



Terms of Reference: Independent Evaluation of the Media Freedom Coalition

Application deadline: 21st August 2024

1. Background

The Media Freedom Coalition (MFC) is a partnership of over 50 countries from 6 continents working together to advocate for media freedom and the safety of journalists.

Established in 2019, the MFC now works with civil society, legal experts, international organisations and journalists to advance and protect media freedom. It does this by promoting improved laws and policies on media freedom and the safety of journalists, intervening publicly or privately in cases where journalists are under threat, mobilising the embassies of MFC members to work together in protecting media freedom, and organising events bringing together senior policymakers, officials, civil society, legal experts and other key stakeholders. MFC member countries also initiated, and continue to support, the Global Media Defence Fund administered by UNESCO.

The goal of the MFC is to improve the media freedom environment and the safety of journalists both at home and abroad. Its objectives are:

- Improve the enabling environment for media freedom, by strengthening laws, policies, and the economic climate for independent media
- Influence governments, state actors and other powerful individuals to uphold media freedom and hold to account the perpetrators of crimes against journalists
- Ensure journalists and news organisations are better protected and better able to protect themselves from threats and intimidation
- Energise and mobilise the MFC's member countries to ensure a diverse, informed, engaged and coordinated Coalition

Further detail on these objectives is available on the MFC's [website](#).

The key stakeholder groups of the MFC are:

The member countries - the MFC is led by two rotating co-chairs (currently Germany and Estonia), while a larger Executive Group provides strategic direction. Members leverage both central government and embassies in order to work towards the MFC's goals.

The Consultative Network (CN) - the Consultative Network is a group of 22 organisations that provides advice to the MFC and highlights cases that it believes require state intervention. The Consultative Network also plays an important role in ensuring the priorities of journalists and media workers from around the world are incorporated in the MFC's decision-making.

The High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom (HLP) - The High Level Panel provides advice and recommendations to MFC members and partners to promote and protect a vibrant free press. Like the MFC, the HLP was established in 2019. It has published [reports](#) which feature recommendations for MFC member states.

UNESCO - UNESCO administers the Global Media Defence Fund and participates in MFC discussions as an observer.

The MFC Secretariat - the MFC Secretariat provides administrative and operational support to all areas of the MFC's work. The Secretariat is hosted by the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Activities of the Media Freedom Coalition and its stakeholders include:

- **Advocacy and case interventions:** the MFC uses its platform to promote a range of media freedom issues through a combination of public statements and diplomatic interventions. Based on recommendations by civil society experts in the Consultative Network, the MFC also takes public or private action on specific media freedom “cases of concern” in which journalists or media organisations have come under threat.
- **Embassy Networks:** member countries leverage their wide network of embassies to promote media freedom through public and private actions.
- **Supporting legal reforms:** the MFC promotes the adoption and reform of policies and legislation that enable media freedom and support journalists under threat. In doing this it is guided by the recommendations of the High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom.
- **Events:** the MFC organises or takes part in national, regional or global events such as dedicated MFC convenings as well as World Press Freedom Day.
- **Global Media Defence Fund:** MFC members initiated, and continue to support, the Global Media Defence Fund administered by UNESCO. The fund supports projects that bolster journalists' legal protection and/or enhance media freedom.
- **Media development coordination:** the MFC has a Working Group on Media Development, which brings together government donors, private donors, civil society organisations and researchers to share learning and coordinate support to independent media.

More information on these activities can be found on the MFC's [website](#), while the website's [news section](#) includes relevant case studies and other stories.

2. Evaluation overview and purpose

The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the effectiveness of the Media Freedom Coalition over the past 5 years and, through this, to help the MFC to learn lessons and improve its efforts towards the promotion of media freedom so that it can have greater impact in the years to come.

The MFC is made up of its member countries and the above purpose therefore has a focus on assessing the actions of those member countries; however, it is important to recognise that many of those actions are carried out in collaboration with one or more of the stakeholders listed above and therefore the evaluation will look at the quality of this collaboration as well as the effectiveness of these actions.

The purpose therefore links to both learning (through the generation of lessons learned and their contribution to ongoing improvement) and accountability (through the assessment of effectiveness to date). Lesson learning will contribute both to the improvement of current interventions, by feeding into operational management and decision-making by the stakeholders above, and to potential future interventions, by highlighting areas that are working well or less well and feeding into longer-term decision-making.

The primary audiences of the evaluation are MFC member countries and the stakeholders they work closely with, i.e. the Consultative Network, High Level Panel, UNESCO and MFC Secretariat. All evaluation outputs will be shared with them and there may also be presentations/discussion sessions to further explore the evaluation findings (TBC). These stakeholders will use the evaluation to inform their day-to-day decision-making concerning the MFC, as well as their longer-term decision-making and strategic thinking. It is expected to improve both what they do and how they work together.

The objectives of the evaluation are to:

- Assess the extent to which the MFC has meaningfully contributed towards its goal
- Assess the sustainability of the MFC's results to date
- Assess the quality of the MFC's coordination and collaboration, both among the MFC's key stakeholders, and between the MFC and other relevant initiatives
- Provide recommendations in the above areas to assist the MFC in maximising the effectiveness of its work

With regards to the first two objectives, assessing the entirety of the MFC's work since 2019 and its sustainability is not realistic, therefore these assessments will be made based on selected samples of the MFC's work (see section 3 for more on this), alongside expert inputs from the MFC's stakeholders that can give a more holistic account of the MFC's progress to date.

The evaluation is being commissioned by the MFC Secretariat, in collaboration with the key stakeholders of the Coalition. A **Steering Group** has been established which includes representatives of MFC member countries, the CN, the HLP, and UNESCO. The Steering Group will review the inception report, provide feedback and technical inputs as required during the evaluation, review the draft evaluation report, take part in the validation process, and will be able to act as a sounding board when needed. The evaluation team will be welcome to feed back on the role of the Steering Group.

3. Evaluation questions and scope

The successful evaluation team would be expected to focus on the research questions outlined below. With reference to the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria, Q1 relates primarily to effectiveness (though if evidence of impact is also collected, this would be expected to be incorporated); Q2 primarily concerns sustainability; and Q3 primarily concerns coherence. The questions also touch on relevance by inviting the evaluation team to highlight potential changes to existing activities as well as new activities for consideration.

Please note that the evaluation team would be able to propose amendments to these evaluation questions during the inception phase, which would be considered by the Steering Group.

► **Q1: During its first 5 years, to what extent has the Media Freedom Coalition made a meaningful contribution towards its goal of improving the media freedom environment and the safety of journalists both at home and abroad?**

When answering this question, the evaluation team should highlight results at different levels, which may include changes in the safety of journalists (specific journalists or communities of journalists), changes in the media freedom environment (such as policy change or changes in media viability; the media freedom environment is defined from the MFC's perspective [here](#)), changes in awareness of and commitment to media freedom within governments and among policymakers, etc.

Sub-questions to be considered under Q1:

- To what extent are results achieved differentially, for example, with respect to gender or geographical location? (When looking at gender equality, equity, poverty and inclusion dimensions, the focus should be on the journalists/media workers who are supported – or intended to be supported – by the MFC's activities, whether these activities are geared more towards some journalists than others, and to what extent the MFC's approach is set up to take account of these dimensions.)
- To what extent are results achieved “at home”, which refers to results within MFC member states, versus “abroad”, referring to results in non-member states?
- What are the relative contributions of central government and embassies with respect to different types of action, and what are the strengths and weaknesses of each?
- What are the key barriers and facilitators to achieving results?
- What are the concrete recommendations for the MFC on how its results can be further strengthened?
- What changes might be made to existing activities, and what new actions or approaches might be considered?

It is important to note that many governments have taken a range of actions on media freedom since well before the MFC was formed in 2019. This question is therefore concerned with what *difference* the MFC has made - positively or negatively, intended or unintended – since it was established.

► **Q2: How sustainable are the MFC's results to date, and how can the MFC maximise the sustainability of the results that it does, or could, achieve?**

In line with question 1, the evaluation team should explore the sustainability of results at different levels. Sub-questions to be considered under Q2:

- How can the engagement of MFC member countries be sustained (and where possible, enhanced further), both at central government and embassy level?
- Are there mechanisms that could contribute to improved sustainability of engagement, such as mechanisms for holding states to account for their commitments on media freedom?
- What is the sustainability of the engagement and operation of key stakeholders of the MFC, including the Consultative Network, High Level Panel, and MFC Secretariat?
- What other approaches might contribute to better sustainability? (There are many external factors that might affect whether particular results can be sustained, such as

elections and changes in government, but MFC stakeholders are still keen to better understand how the likelihood of sustainability can be maximised.)

► **Q3: What is the quality of coordination and collaboration between the MFC's stakeholders, and between the MFC and other international efforts and initiatives on media freedom?**

The first part of this question refers to collaboration within and between the key MFC stakeholders listed above. The second part refers to the MFC's interactions with other media freedom initiatives, since coordination with such initiatives is vital to avoid duplication and capitalise on synergies.

Sub-questions to be considered under Q3:

- The MFC has the potential to act as a platform for more systematic and fruitful collaboration both between governments themselves, and between governments and non-governmental stakeholders, but to what extent is this happening in practice?
- Does the collaboration between the MFC's stakeholders enable more effective and coordinated day-to-day work, actions and activities – for example, through more effective action by embassies in specific countries, or through states implementing recommendations of the HLP and/or CN?
- Does the collaboration between the MFC's stakeholders enable more strategic alignment between these stakeholders, and better strategic decision-making overall?
- Does the collaboration between the MFC's stakeholders enable better information exchange, such that the actions of MFC member countries are better designed and delivered, and better respond to the needs of journalists and media workers?
- How can the collaboration between the MFC's stakeholders be improved or optimised?
- To what extent does the MFC avoid duplication and capitalise on synergies with other media freedom initiatives?

The **scope** of the evaluation will also determine how the above questions are addressed, and it is not expected that this evaluation will study all of the MFC's interventions over the past 5 years. In addressing Q1 and Q2, i.e. the effectiveness and sustainability of the MFC's interventions, and with respect to the list of activities set out in section 1 of this TOR, the evaluation would be expected to:

- Use available data (see below) alongside knowledge and experience of MFC stakeholders to explore the overall effectiveness and sustainability of interventions;
- Select representative examples of the MFC's work from these activity areas to study in greater depth and distil lessons on why some interventions were more effective than others (selection would be made with input from key MFC stakeholders including the Steering Group, and would consider diversity of geographical location as well as gender and inclusion; number of examples is to be determined with the evaluation team);
- Have less focus on the Global Media Defence Fund, because a separate evaluation is due to be conducted into the Fund and we wish to avoid duplication. We will explore the possibility of information exchange between the two evaluation teams.

In addressing Q3, the focus will be on the quality of collaboration at the global level, i.e. between the key stakeholders including MFC states, High Level Panel, Consultative Network,

UNESCO, MFC Secretariat, etc. However, through studying the effectiveness of embassy networks, it may also be possible to draw conclusions and lessons about the quality of collaboration between embassies and other actors at the country level.

4. Evaluation approach

Teams that bid for this evaluation are welcome to propose a methodology that they believe is most appropriate for this assignment. However we do expect that this would include interviews with the key MFC stakeholders outlined above, as well as other individuals who have interacted with the MFC, who the MFC has aimed to benefit (such as journalists and media workers themselves) or experts in the media freedom field or related fields. Evaluation proposals would be expected to consider how to incorporate a diversity of stakeholders and perspectives, with consideration given to gender, sectoral and geographical diversity. Engagement with all stakeholders, including people the MFC aims to benefit, should align with the principles of respect, participation and inclusion, and feedback on the evaluation process itself should be encouraged and welcomed from stakeholders that the evaluation engages with.

After an evaluation team is selected the MFC Secretariat will be able to assist with connecting the evaluation team with MFC stakeholders based on the team's sampling strategy.

It will be vital for the evaluation team to incorporate a do-no-harm approach into their evaluation. For example, through interaction with individuals involved in the MFC, the team may collect information that would have the potential to cause harm if shared more widely. This might include details of a "case of concern" in which a journalist is under threat. Proposals should briefly explain how they would apply a do-no-harm approach in practice.

Prospective evaluation teams have the option to propose fieldwork. For example, there are countries in which embassies of MFC countries have been working together to promote media freedom, and these countries may be good locations to explore the MFC's progress to date. Countries in which embassies of MFC members have worked together on media freedom include Bangladesh, the Philippines, Mexico, Cameroon and Vietnam. There are other countries where embassies of MFC members have been active on a more private basis, which can be discussed in confidence with the successful evaluation team.

The evaluation report may feature case studies, i.e. specific examples of MFC work or interventions alongside associated outcomes and the degree to which the MFC's work contributed to them, and the corresponding lessons learned.

Potential challenges and limitations include:

- Limited availability of MFC stakeholders, as well as short-notice changes to availability
- Staff turnover – for example, staff positions in embassies can turnover quite frequently and this will affect institutional memory
- Coordination with many diverse stakeholders over many time zones
- Some interviews/communications may need to be conducted in a language other than English
- Discussion of sensitive topics and the need to build trust with stakeholders

5. Existing data

The successful evaluation team would be able to analyse and draw on existing sources of data about the MFC's activities and results, including:

- Annual reports of the MFC, which have been produced for 2022 and 2023 (the 2023 annual report is [here](#))
- Records maintained by the MFC Secretariat, including logs of actions by member countries and their embassies since mid-2022 (these have brief information on each action and links to information wherever possible)
- Case studies and articles about the MFC's work, which can be found via the [news section](#) of the MFC website
- Reports and case studies relating to the High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom
- Results of the MFC's annual survey of its stakeholders, which has been carried out in 2023 and 2024 (includes both qualitative and quantitative data, and can be disaggregated by type of stakeholder, though not by gender or geographical location)
- A previous evaluation of the MFC, titled "Reset Required? Evaluating the Media Freedom Coalition after its first two years" published in February 2022 (available [here](#))

The data described above is credible and of good quality. For example, annual reports and case studies go through a verification process where key stakeholders check relevant content and quotes.

The evaluation team will also be welcome to access and review other documents that illustrate how the MFC works, such as resources, toolkits, terms of reference documents, and process guides.

6. Ethics and safeguarding

Prospective evaluation teams should consult [FCDO's Ethical Guidance for Research, Evaluation and Monitoring Activities](#) and explain how they will implement relevant ethical standards as part of their approach and methodology. Potential risks to be considered include:

- Receiving/storing sensitive information that could cause harm to (for example) a journalist, activist, or human rights defender
- Receiving/storing sensitive information that could damage diplomatic relations
- Interacting with journalists, activists or human rights defenders who are under threat
- Conducting research in contexts where there are restrictions on research activity

The evaluation team will be responsible for securing relevant approval from an Ethical or Institutional Review Board if this is a requirement in specific countries to be visited.

If evaluation teams are proposing to use digital tools within the evaluation, for example tools for data collection or analysis, then they must adhere to the [Principles for Digital Development](#).

The evaluation team must implement responsible data practices including secure storage and transmission of data, maintaining confidentiality, and securing informed consent for the handling, storage and use of personal data.

The evaluation will be contracted through the Thomson Reuters Foundation and the evaluation team must adhere to the Foundation's [safeguarding policy](#), as well as Thomson Reuters' [Supply Chain Ethical Code](#) and [Anti-Bribery/Anti-Corruption Policy](#).

The evaluation team will be responsible for their own security arrangements within any fieldwork, however the MFC Secretariat will assist where possible, for example by connecting the team with relevant contacts in-country.

7. Timeline, budget and deliverables

An approximate timeline for this evaluation, including the procurement process, is below. This timeline is chosen in order to align with funding timetables and availability of key stakeholders.

July-September 2024	Procurement process and selection of evaluation team
October 2024	Inception period (inception report delivered)
November 2024 – January 2025	Data gathering and analysis
February 2025	Validation of findings (including validation sessions and delivery of draft evaluation report)
March 2025	Evaluation finalised and completed (final evaluation report and summary document delivered)

The budget for this evaluation (inclusive of any taxes, VAT etc.) is **£50,000 GBP**. A payment schedule will be agreed with the successful evaluation team after their selection. The evaluation team will be responsible for all local taxes.

The evaluation team would be expected to deliver:

Output	Primary target audience/s
An inception report, at the end of the inception period, describing the evaluation approach in detail, expected timeline, detailed budget, anticipated risks and mitigations	Steering group
One or more validation sessions, in which findings are presented to the Steering Group and potentially other stakeholders for feedback	Steering group and selected other MFC stakeholders
A final evaluation report (presented firstly in draft form for comments from MFC stakeholders), including background, methodology, findings, conclusions and recommendations	All MFC stakeholders and MFC's network
A summary document (approx. 2 pages) highlighting the key findings in an accessible way	All MFC stakeholders, MFC's network and wider media freedom field

The draft evaluation report will also be submitted to FCDO's Evaluation Quality Assurance and Learning Service ([EQUALS](#)).

The team would also be expected to present the findings of the evaluation to MFC members and stakeholders.

The MFC Secretariat will lead on a “use and influence plan” to ensure the evaluation achieves its purpose and the evaluation team will be encouraged to feed into this.

The funders of the evaluation, FCDO, Global Affairs Canada and the German Federal Foreign Office, will have unlimited access to material produced by the evaluation team.

The evaluation team’s day-to-day point of contact will be Derek Thorne, Head of MFC Secretariat. The MFC Secretariat will coordinate an evaluation response with input from MFC stakeholders including the Steering Group. No single stakeholder will be responsible for implementing the evaluation recommendations – evaluation teams will be expected to link each recommendation to the stakeholder/s that it applies to.

8. Skills, experience and selection criteria

We welcome applications from evaluation teams which have:

- Experience of comparable evaluation assignments
- Experience of researching/evaluating initiatives involving stakeholders from multiple sectors such as government, civil society, legal profession, UN agencies, etc.
- Knowledge of the systems, structures and processes that determine how governments, civil society, senior lawyers etc. can engage and collaborate with each other
- A good understanding of appropriate data collection methods and their limitations
- Independence from the primary stakeholders of the MFC
- Ability to produce in-depth analysis, leading to detailed findings and recommendations that take account of different stakeholders’ limitations and constraints
- Ability to present findings and insights in a concise and constructive manner

Ability in multiple languages in addition to English may be advantageous.

Knowledge of media freedom, safety of journalists, freedom of expression, media development and/or related fields would be beneficial.

Evaluation teams can be based anywhere in the world.

Evaluation proposals will be assessed based on the following criteria:

- Quality and appropriateness of the proposed evaluation approach and methodology (30%)
- Expertise and experience of the team (30%)
- Extent to which proposal and any work samples are clearly presented and communicated (10%)
- Use of budget and value for money (30%)

9. Application procedure

Proposals for this evaluation should include:

- A proposal document (max. 5 pages), which outlines:
 - proposed approach, methodology and work plan

- approach to sampling (including estimated sample sizes and stakeholder mix), data collection, analysis, and quality assurance as well as expected challenges and limitations (and how these would be addressed)
- the proposed team, including roles and responsibilities and relevant experience and expertise of each team member (concise biographies are preferred to CVs)
- any other information that demonstrates how your team meets the selection criteria
- A budget that includes (for example) day rates of evaluation consultants and their level of effort, other costs such as travel, etc.
- Details of two references who could attest to the ability of your team (or key members of your team) to carry out this kind of work
- Maximum two examples of previous relevant work. These may be provided as links, or if unpublished then they may be attached and will remain in confidence

Please send completed proposals to info@mediafreedomcoalition.org by 21st August 2024 (close of business).

Please note that, due to capacity constraints, we will not be able to give feedback on unsuccessful applications. However all applicants, successful and unsuccessful, will be notified.