

**ATTACHMENT A****VENEZUELA: IMPROVED TRAINING & COMMUNICATION SKILLS  
FOR POLITICAL ACTIVISTS**

<b>U.S. GRANTEE:</b>	<b>National Democratic Institute for International Affairs</b>	
<b>DATES OF PROJECT:</b>	<b>October 1, 2013 - September 30, 2014</b>	
<b>AMOUNT:</b>	<b>Direct Costs:</b>	<b>\$239,838</b>
	<b>Indirect Costs:</b>	<b>\$ 55,172</b>
	<b>Total Costs:</b>	<b>\$295,050</b>

**I. BACKGROUND**

Political activists in Venezuela confront increased threats, intimidation, and abuses of power by state institutions, as well as restrictions on their ability to present alternative views to citizens. Given the government's control of mass media, and increased use of state resources to mobilize and intimidate voters, political activists have particular challenges in communicating with citizens as well organizing and mobilizing supporters. Social media in Venezuela has proven less vulnerable to government restrictions and can be a useful tool for independent political activists in Venezuela to disseminate messages and organize. However, many local political activists have limited exposure to ICT best practices and are in need additional technical assistance and support in order to effectively use of social media and other information and communications technologies (ICTs) to overcome the challenges they face in Venezuela. During the past 14 years, Venezuela has experienced profound political and institutional changes as late president Hugo Chavez launched a "Bolivarian Socialist Revolution" which he used to align the functions of the state with his political objectives. Chavez dismantled democratic principles such as the separation of powers; concentrated power in the executive through constitutional referenda to permit indefinite presidential re-election; created new state agencies designed to reduce the power of elected regional and local leaders; nationalized companies and industries—notably oil production and media outlets; and used state funds in support of his Bolivarian partisan agenda. In the process, he increasingly merged his political party, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (*Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela*, PSUV) with official state entities, while continuing to compete in regular electoral processes, implemented by the National Electoral Council (*Consejo Nacional Electoral*, CNE), which is dominated by rectors aligned with the PSUV. The abuse of power and disregard for rule of law and democratic principles -- even of procedures in the constitution adopted in 1999 under Chavez -- have continued under his successor Nicolas Maduro. Then Vice President Maduro assumed the acting presidency after Chavez's death in March contrary to the established constitutional procedures for succession but with the authorization of the PSUV-controlled Supreme Court. The opposition has presented legal challenges calling for a re-running of the April 14 presidential elections in response to the irregularities they and independent organizations witnessed. The challenges are under review by that same court, which is expected to uphold Maduro's narrow victory. While already benefitting from regulations requiring private as well as state-owned media to broadcast government messages, PSUV leaders have recently taken steps to further limit access to mass media for individuals and groups seeking to present alternative positions. They also have stepped up threats against opposition leaders including opening legal prosecutions against two prominent leaders, Leopoldo Lopez and retired General Antonio Rivero. With no requirement for transparency or accountability for oil revenues, the government directs state resources not just for social programs but also for explicit partisan purposes. For example, using vehicles from state-owned businesses to transport voters to the polls on election-day and deploying campaign advertising for the PSUV in government buildings and enterprises. As a result, those seeking to present alternative views are

at a profound disadvantage, not just in terms of access to resources, but also to communications platforms to reach citizens. Venezuela's population relies heavily on television and radio for news, and the government's gradual monopoly in this area has silenced independent voices critical of the government. Fear of state retaliation has led private Venezuelan media outlets to self-censor their reporting. The recent sale of the independent cable television channel Globovisión has further limited access of the opposition leaders and others with alternative viewpoints to mass media. The channel had repeatedly clashed with Chavez and his government over the years, facing multiple fines for the opinions it broadcast. The new owners of Globovisión recently decided the station would no longer air live opposition speeches as it had in the past. Without this media platform open to the opposition, it seems likely that all live broadcasts will conform to government demands and narratives. In response, Venezuelan citizens have increasingly turned to social media to vocalize their frustrations with public policy issues, highlight instances of corruption, connect with like-minded people, and offer alternative perspectives to official news sources. Access to mobile phones in Venezuela is almost universal (98%) and access to the internet is at 40%. This widespread access has increased the use of social media in place of traditional media outlets. Indeed, Chavez helped encourage the popularization of social networking tools by his prolific use of Twitter while president and heavy state investment into improving ICTs. Maduro's slim and disputed victory highlights the sharp division of Venezuelan society and demonstrates the weakness of the Maduro government, leading the PSUV to take radical steps to seek to consolidate power. Two weeks after the election, the President of the National Assembly, Diosdado Cabello used the opposition's rejection of Maduro's electoral victory as justification to bar opposition deputies from speaking in the National Assembly until they recognized Maduro as the legitimate, elected leader of Venezuela. This caused members of the opposition to declare Cabello's actions a parliamentary coup. In turn, PSUV deputies physically assaulted opposition legislators; the brawl on the National Assembly floor left several prominent opposition leaders seriously injured. Intimidation techniques have been directed against government supporters suspected of disloyalty. A month after the election, President Maduro announced that he had the identity numbers of 900,000 *chavistas* who had backed Chavez in October but did not vote for him in April. His suggestion that the secrecy of the vote was compromised and that there would be reprisals could discourage Venezuelans from voting their conscience in the future. It is important that independent voices are able to counter misinformation and threats from the government, despite the limited access to mass media. While the dispute over the April 14 election has not been resolved, the CNE has already announced that municipal elections will be held December 8, 2013. Opposition leaders have announced their intention to participate in these elections to select 335 mayors, 2,435 municipal councilors, 69 local indigenous representatives, two metropolitan mayors and 20 district councils. Increasing the skills of political activists to integrate technology and social media into training, organizing and communications efforts will help expand the channels of communications open to independent voices in Venezuela and improve prospects for constructive public debate and dialogue where citizens can make informed choices about their future.

## II. PROGRAM OBJECTIVE

- [REDACTED]

## III. PROPOSED ACTIVITIES

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] As a result of its non-partisan work in Venezuela with civil society and political parties for more than 15 years, NDI has established strong relationships with major centers of independent thought, including civic organizations, universities, and political parties in the majority of Venezuela's 23 states. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] To provide this core group with access to expert advice in a setting conducive to open discussion, NDI would host a seminar outside Venezuela on the use of technology and social media for citizen outreach and engagement. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] To implement program activities, NDI would be flexible and adjust strategy and programming as required by political developments that could include increased threats and intimidation of political activists and/or NDI staff and consultants, unexpected outcomes from the elections, and possible changes to the electoral calendar.

*International Seminar: Using Technology to Organize, Mobilize, and Communicate with Citizens*

[REDACTED] The seminar would take place prior to the December 8 municipal elections. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] These potential participants would be asked to complete a short online questionnaire to help NDI assess their qualifications. When selecting candidates, NDI would try to balance the number of participants with experience in training and participants with technical skills on the use of ICTs. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. All participants would be introduced to the NDI Virtual Toolbox ([www.redinnovacion.org](http://www.redinnovacion.org)), a NED-funded web platform (core grant 2012-283 MM) that provides online customized capacity-building courses on a range of issues relating to political innovation. After the seminar, this platform would allow participants to review the course materials,

interact with one another, and solicit feedback from the instructor. As described in more detail below, the seminar also would include individual strategic planning sessions facilitated by NDI consultants during which all the seminar participants would design strategies for online citizen outreach, engagement, and information dissemination for the December municipal elections.

*Strategic Planning Sessions*

[REDACTED]

Given the limited time available to implement the strategies prior to the municipal elections participants would be advised to set realistic goals. After the municipal elections, NDI staff and consultants would host a second strategy review session with seminar participants in Venezuela to develop longer-term strategies to maintain contact with citizens and improve their ability to communicate and disseminate information using ICTs. This session would be facilitated both in person and virtually by NDI staff and trainers outside of Venezuela. Participants would discuss their experiences applying ICTs before the elections, discuss any challenges they faced, and define their post-election objectives for citizen outreach and engagement.

[REDACTED]

*Ongoing Virtual Technical Assistance and Coaching*

NDI would hire a consultant with expertise in ICTs to provide ongoing coaching for program participants. Based on available resources, NDI anticipates that it would offer individualized assistance to no more than eight program participants who have demonstrated an ability to engage and influence others.

[REDACTED]

Ongoing coaching would include the ability for program participants to ask questions from NDI staff and consultants, regular virtual check-in sessions between program participants and the coach, and review of participants' materials and outputs such as training manuals, videos, and website content. In the regular virtual check in-sessions, the coach and NDI staff would monitor program participants' progress, discuss challenges and lessons learned, and identify what type of additional support they may need. The coach could recommend already-available training or online tools that could assist program participants to improve the quality and reach of training and online communications with volunteers and supporters. Program participants also would have access to virtual training through [redinnovacion.org](http://redinnovacion.org). This web platform would give program participants access to customized online courses to help reinforce the skills they learned at the seminar. This platform would allow them to interact with one another and solicit feedback from the instructor. These online courses can be designed to have limited access to a specific audience to address any security and proprietary concerns about the materials shared. The site was

designed taking bandwidth limitations into consideration to ensure participants can access the materials, regardless of their location's ICT infrastructure. The online course section of the website also is optimized to be viewed on smartphones if the participants wish to access them that way. If program participants request specific topics not currently available through this web platform, NDI staff and consultants would work to identify a trainer or expert that can develop and deliver the virtual training requested.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

#### IV. EVALUATION PLAN

[REDACTED]

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]

**V. ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND**

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) is a nonprofit organization established in 1983 working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide. Calling on a global network of volunteer experts, NDI provides practical assistance to civic and political leaders advancing democratic values, practices and institutions. NDI works with democrats in every region of the world to build political and civic organizations, safeguard elections, and to promote citizen participation, openness and accountability in government.

**VI. FUNDING HISTORY**

93-103	\$118,901
2003-180	\$116,000