

InfoTun Telecommunication Centers

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The USAID-supported 4-year Alternative Resources in Media (ARM) project, implemented by Internews Network, Yerevan Press Club, Internews Media Support NGO Armenia and Eurasia Partnership Foundation, aims to increase alternative sources of diverse news and information through an integrated program that builds civic demand for alternative content, supports its production and dissemination and enhances public advocacy on media freedom. ARM aims to foster skills, perceptions, institutions and polices that transform alternative media content into a mainstream source for civic discussion and decision making. EPF’s strategic plan within this project includes a decision to significantly increase the number of new media literate people in the regions. EPF also hopes that a certain percentage of those who become new media literate will also become citizen journalists.

Internet access is penetrating the regions at a rapid pace, not least thanks to the mobile operators and availability of 3G internet. Having the means accessible to them, people - particularly young people in the regions - need to learn the ABCs of new media, to become learned users. Lack of knowledge of new media in the modern world is equivalent to lack of linguistic literacy in the pre-modern era - without these skills, the population of Armenia will not be able to develop and compete in these times. This is also realized by the government, which puts significant efforts into spreading internet access, by distributing computers to schools, for example. But the state is poor, it cannot reach the entire community, and the ARM project has come to its aid. In order to build a base for spreading new media technologies, EPF is supporting telecommunication centers on the premises of five developed NGOs in Armavir, Gegharkunik, Lori, Shirak and Syunik regions. EPF calls its centers InfoTuns (information homes) and strives to create not just regular resource units but cozy family homes in each community. Until the end of 2011, the InfoTuns served as traditional resource centers with the additional service of information dissemination in their portfolio.

With support from EPF, InfoTuns are becoming regional telecommunication hubs in the regions with a large portfolio of services. EPF has designed a series of mandatory and optional trainings for the InfoTuns. The mandatory (“Flagship”) trainings are identical across the regions. They aim at providing basic media literacy skills to the community in order to influence the consumer side of the information industry.

- a) Monthly practical workshops on blogging and social network navigation for a group of 20-25 people in each InfoTun;
- b) Monthly film screening and debate events in each InfoTun;
- c) Monthly meetings on YouTube and web-based media content;
- d) Meetings on traditional media content;
- e) Meetings/trainings with invited speakers.

EPF also works towards content creation by identifying and training a core capacity of bloggers. Citizen journalists trained in the InfoTuns are re-published in the most popular traditional media outlets today and constitute a core capacity of civic participation in each region.

InfoTuns are run by young leaders identified through the [YouthBank](#) network of EPF. Each of them has passed a TOT training on new media tools and passes the skills to local constituencies through regular training and mentorship sessions.

Through seed support from EPF, InfoTuns were able to renovate and equip state-of-the-art training labs receiving more than 500 people annually.



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