



API: Serving and Developing Independent Media

Institutional Development and Advocacy Strategy for 2025-2029

June 2025



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This strategy was developed within the "Independent Media and Resilience for Informed Citizens" project, funded by the European Union through the Foreign Policy Instruments Service (FPI) and implemented by the People in Need organization's representative office in the Republic of Moldova.

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I. About API

1.1. *Created by the Press and Serving the Press*

The Independent Press Association (API, www.api.md) is one of the most experienced noncommercial organizations in the Republic of Moldova. Its primary area of activity is the media. Registered on September 29, 1997, the API's mission is “to support politically unaffiliated media institutions, promote the sustainable development of media organizations and independent journalists at the national and regional levels, and strengthen professional capacities, increase resilience, and improve public policies in the field of mass media.”¹

The API was founded by representatives of the first independent local newspapers: *Accent Provincial* (Glodeni), *Business-Info* (Cimișlia), *Cugetul* (Bălți), *Cuvântul* (Rezina), *Est-Curier* (Criuleni), *Gazeta de Vest* (Nisporeni), as well as the press agencies BASA-Press (Chișinău) and DECA-Press (Bălți). The founding documents subsequently underwent some changes.

“We promote democracy, press freedom, human rights, and an open society.” This sentence concludes the API's presentation in the “Brief History” section of its website. Indeed, the API is appreciated for its media campaigns in various areas of public interest, as well as for its advocacy actions aimed at developing the media, defending freedom of expression and access to information, and promoting journalistic self-regulation.

Over the course of its 28 years of operation, API has transcended ‘geographical’ boundaries and established itself as one of the country's most important organizations in the field, promoting and supporting independent media at the regional and national levels.

1.2. *Mission, Values, Objectives*

The organization's current **mission** statement is as follows: “API is a national resource center that contributes to the sustainability of independent media by strengthening its professional and financial capacities, improving public policies, and enhancing the quality and digitization of journalistic products.”

Values:

- ✓ **Independence** - Financial and editorial, freedom of expression, and access to information.
- ✓ **Professionalism** - Professional and technical skills; ethics and professional standards; and editorial and design quality.

¹ <https://api.md/ro/scurt-istoric/>



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- ✓ **Modernization** - Ability to adapt to new conditions, digitization, and technological convergence.

Logo: “For a professional, independent, and sustainable press.”

Key Objectives and Priorities in the Development Strategy Until 2025:

- ✓ Provide leadership in lobbying and advocacy activities to ensure a climate conducive to media development;
- ✓ Strengthen the capacities of API members to ensure the sustainability of the independent media;
- ✓ Promote professional ethics and conduct in order to restore the social role of the media;
- ✓ Promote API’s associative image and ensure its sustainability.

1.3. API Members

According to the [Bylaws](#), members of the Association of Independent Press may include individuals and legal entities (such as public associations) who share the Association’s values and stated goals.

Since 2015, the API has grown in terms of its membership, geographic reach, and form of incorporation. Central editorial offices and new types of media, such as online portals, radio stations, and television stations, have joined the API.

As of June 2025, the Association comprises 25 members: Seventeen legal entities (the legal representatives of sixteen editorial offices with different forms of legal organization, as well as one media organization), and eight individuals (including former legal representatives of editorial offices that have ceased activity):

Legal entities:

1. Elena Motricală, [Est-Curier](#) publication, Criuleni
2. Cătălin Ambros, [Unghiul](#) publication, Ungheni
3. Maria Țurcanu, [Ecoul nostru](#) publication, Sângerei
4. Nadine Gogu, [Independent Journalism Centre](#)
5. Veaceslav Perunov, [SP](#) publication, Bălți
6. Elena Cobășneanu, [Observatorul de Nord](#) publication, Soroca
7. Alecu Reniță, [Natura](#) magazine
8. Alina Radu, [Ziarul de Gardă](#) publication
9. Natalia Junghietu, [Expresul](#) publication, Ungheni
10. Constantin Rotaru, [Gazeta Satelor](#) publication
11. Tatiana Djamanov, [Radio Orhei](#) radio station
12. Victoria Popa, [Gazeta de Chișinău](#) portal
13. Mihail Sirkeli, Comrat-based [Nokta.md](#) portal
14. Veaceslav Tutunaru, [Radio Eco FM](#) radio station



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15. Tatiana Rusnac, Mold-street.com portal
16. Vitalie Guțu, Zonadesecuritate.md portal
17. Ghenadie Lupăcescu, Studio-L TV station, Căușeni

Individuals:

18. Vitalie Cazacu
19. Nicolae Misail
20. Nelly Uncuță
21. Constantin Grigoriță
22. Constantin Uzdriș
23. Mircea Zatușevschi
24. Carolina Buimestru
25. Nata Albot

Organization Structure

General Assembly of API members - the Supreme Governing Body of the Association. It holds regular meetings periodically (when necessary for the interests of the Association, but at least once a year) and extraordinary meetings (when requested by one-third of the Association's members or by the Board of Directors' decision).

President/Vice President of API are elected by the General Assembly for a two-year term and may be re-elected for one consecutive term. They are also ex officio members of the Board of Directors. The current President of the Association is Mihail Sirkeli, director of the Nokta.md portal in Comrat. The current Vice-President is Victoria Popa, founder of the GazetadeChisinau.md portal. They were both elected at the General Assembly on April 25, 2024.

Board of Directors of API is its executive body, consisting of five API members, plus the Association's president and vice president. In accordance with the General Assembly's decision on April 25, 2024, the current API Board of Directors consists of:

1. Mihail Sirkeli, API President, Director of Nokta.md portal (Comrat)
2. Victoria Popa, API Vice President, Founder of GazetadeChisinau.md portal
3. Elena Motricală, Member, Director of newspaper *Est-Curier* (Criuleni)
4. Veaceslav Perunov, Member, Director of newspaper *SP* (Bălți)
5. Alina Radu, Member, Director of newspaper *Ziarul de Gardă*
6. Veaceslav Tutunaru, Member, Director of Eco FM Radio Station
7. Constantin Uzdriș, Member, individual, journalist

Executive Director - the person who manages the Association *de facto* and who is appointed by the Board of Directors. The Executive Director cannot be a member of the Association's Board of Director. Petru Macovei has been the Executive Director of API since March 2006.



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Audit Committee - The General Assembly of Members may appoint one or more auditors or decide to conduct an annual external audit. On April 25, 2024, the General Assembly appointed the following individuals to the API Audit Committee:

1. Constantin Rotaru, Member, Director of newspaper *Gazeta Satelor*
2. Aliona Cenușa, Member, Finance Manager at *Ziarul de Gardă*
3. Carolina Buimestru, journalist, API member, individual

Affiliations and Partnerships

API is a resource organization for various European and international structures on issues related to press freedom and the media situation in Moldova.

The API develops partnerships with the most active non-governmental media organizations in the country. It also collaborates with other national and regional associations, including national public authorities on media issues. API also works with non-governmental organizations in Romania, Poland, the Netherlands, Ukraine, Estonia, Sweden, Latvia, Denmark, United Kingdom, and others.

At the same time, API is:

- ✓ Member of the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers ([WAN/IFRA](#))
- ✓ Member of the [Baltic Centre for Media Excellence](#) which researches the state of the press in various countries and develops recommendations for authorities and donors.
- ✓ Member of the [National Platform of the NGO Forum within the Eastern Partnership](#)
- ✓ Member of the [Civic Coalition for Free and Fair Elections in the Republic of Moldova](#)
- ✓ Member of the [Civic Initiative for a Clean Parliament in the Republic of Moldova](#)
- ✓ One of the founders of the [Press Council of the Republic of Moldova](#) and provides the Secretariat for the national self-regulatory authority for journalism.
- ✓ Partner of the [Independent Journalism Center of Romania](#).
- ✓ At the national level, API is represented in several media development policy groups, such as:
 - Working group attached to the Parliamentary Committee on Media.
 - Coordinating Council for the Protection of Information Space in Moldova.
 - Supervisory Board of the Strategic Communication and Disinformation Centre.

According to the July 2024 API Organizational Capacity Assessment Report conducted by an independent expert, the API's governance structure is clear, functional, and well-



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defined, with distinct leadership bodies. The Board of Directors plays an active governance role, and the Executive Director leads in a participatory and open manner.

API Team

At the time the Strategy was drafted, the API team consisted of 16 people with individual employment contracts, divided into five departments:

1. Training and Organizational Development
2. Advocacy and Publications
3. Assistance and Consulting
4. STOP FALS!
5. Finance

The team also includes people responsible for communication and administrative tasks within the organization.

According to the organizational chart adopted by the Board of Directors in November 2023, the API staff should comprise 26 positions, including 13 part-time or cumulative positions.

Organizational Culture and Policies

The API team works in a participatory and open manner. Employees are well aware of the organization's mission and objectives, and they base their work on these principles as well as on the concrete and ever-evolving needs of the media sector.

API management promotes teamwork and mutual assistance. Processes are designed so that almost any team member can temporarily replace a colleague. The only exception is the Finance Department. Internal communication is transparent and efficient, both vertically and horizontally. Meetings are held to analyze activities, indicators, and impact, as well as plan activities for the next period.

Similarly, employee participation in the internal governance process is encouraged. Employees can propose activities that align with the organization's mission, as well as submit requests and complaints.

Employees are regularly informed about management meetings, decisions made by the Board of Directors and Executive Director, and approved instructions, regulations, and internal orders. Department heads and other employees also communicate with each other about planned and ongoing activities.

The financial and administrative teams work closely with the executive director and consult with each other. Although they have specific tasks, team members participate in joint meetings and stay up to date on ongoing activities and future projects.

Members of all departments regularly participate in training courses and capacity-building events in their fields of activity. This contributes to their professional



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development and cultivates a sense of usefulness, fulfillment, and appreciation within the team.

The API has adopted several policies and procedures, some of which are public and some of which are for internal use, to contribute to the organization's smooth functioning and to regulate certain aspects of its members' activities. The following are published on the organization's website:

1. [Regulations on Cooperation Between Media Outlets Represented in the API and Public Authorities](#), which establishes the general principles of cooperation between API member editorial offices and central, regional, or local public authorities, as well as the principles of reporting on the activities of these authorities in the media;
2. [Regulations on the Placement of Political and Electoral Advertisements in Newspapers and Information Portals that are Part of the API](#), which establishes the minimum mandatory standards for placing political and electoral advertisements on the media platforms of API member editorial offices;
3. [Policy on Protection Against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse \(PEAS\)](#), through which API declares zero tolerance for sexual abuse and exploitation and commits to unconditionally respect human dignity, in accordance with the global policies of the United Nations (UN).

The Association has implemented other policies and internal regulations, such as: API Internal Regulations, the Human Resources Policy, the Conflict-of-Interest Avoidance Policy, the Anti-Corruption and Anti-Fraud Policy, the Employee Performance Evaluation Procedure, and more.

The Organizational Capacity Assessment Report (2024) confirms the presence of a comprehensive framework of policies and procedures at the API, including those related to governance, strategy, human resources, communication, and finance. At the same time, the report recommends developing additional documents, such as a fundraising strategy and guidelines for interacting with the media.



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II. Current Activities: Overview

The API's activities focus on its commitment to “promoting and providing assistance for the sustainable development of media organizations and independent journalists at the national and regional levels by strengthening professional capacities, increasing resilience, and improving public policies in the field of media,” as assumed at the statutory level. Simultaneously, the API aims to fulfill its mission as a national resource center, as outlined in the 2021-2025 Strategy, by strengthening the professional and financial capacities of independent media, improving public policies, digitizing operations, and enhancing the quality of journalistic products to increase their sustainability.

After discussing with API staff, we propose updating the organization's mission statement as follows: **“Our mission is to contribute to the sustainability of independent media by strengthening its professional and financial capacities, improving public policies, and enhancing the quality and digitization of journalistic products.”**

Over the years, API has demonstrated steady progress in strengthening its leading position in Moldova's media sector by promoting independent journalism and combating disinformation. This conclusion is supported by both the July 2024 Evaluation Report and interviews conducted for the development of the current Strategy. API continues to be recognized as a leader in the media sector, and its influence extends beyond the field of media, significantly impacting public policy and civil society development in the Republic of Moldova.

The API is well-positioned in the public space of the country, being recognized by colleagues from other NGOs, national authorities, and development partners as an active organization with relevant expertise that pursues the goal of developing independent media. API is regularly consulted by domestic actors, as well as national and international organizations in the field. The API team's expertise and opinions are considered in the development of national public policies and the evaluation of their implementation. This is partly because API is involved in all processes related to media development in the Republic of Moldova.

One of the API's strengths is its transparent and responsible operation based on the needs of independent newsrooms and journalists, which contributes to its positioning in the media landscape and the consolidation of its reputation. Thus, none of the respondents interviewed for this strategy's development questioned the API's honesty or good intentions. At most, they acknowledged the lack of institutional capacity or sufficient resources to respond to all requests.



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At the same time, the API is recognized for its media campaigns on topics of public interest, such as combating corruption, promoting human rights, democracy, diversity, non-discrimination, and gender equality, and ensuring the integrity of public officials. These campaigns are carried out with the involvement of many independent media outlets in the country. These campaigns offer partner newsrooms at least two benefits: diversification of editorial content by covering topics of major public interest and increased revenue by distributing this content for a fee.

Similarly, the API is recognized as a leading organization that promotes journalistic self-regulation, ethics, and professional conduct.

Among the API's major impactful actions are:

- ✓ Organizing the most important and representative journalistic event of the year: the [Moldova Media Forum](#).
- ✓ Participating in developing and updating the [Journalist Code of Ethics](#), and monitoring its constituents' compliance with the Code using a [methodology](#).
- ✓ Supporting the activities of the [Press Council of the Republic of Moldova](#).
- ✓ Publishing the investigative journalism work "[Black Book of Public Money Waste.](#)"
- ✓ Participating in the drafting of documents and collective statements by representatives of the journalism profession, such as memoranda, declarations, and addresses to national and international authorities.
- ✓ Organizing competitions for media professionals on various topics.

In terms of advocacy, the following are mentioned:

- ✓ Facilitating dialogue between the authorities and the media sector to improve the legislative and regulatory framework for press activities.
- ✓ Communicating with international organizations in the country about the current situation and issues in the media sector.
- ✓ Actively participating in and/or coordinating working groups that develop draft laws and other public policy documents for media development (The [National Media Development Program for 2023-2026](#), the [Law on the Media Subsidy Fund](#), the draft law on access to information of public interest; the law on advertising, etc.).
- ✓ Support to cover increased newsprint costs for independent publications and management of the [Periodical Distribution Financing Facility for 2024](#) and 2025, established by Government Decision to support quality print media by covering the distribution costs of periodicals.
- ✓ Contributing to the education and professionalization of the media by organizing training sessions for various employees of independent newsrooms, including reporters, media managers, sales managers, and accountants.
- ✓ Implementing programs and projects that aim to increase the economic sustainability of independent newsrooms and improve and diversify editorial



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content. Providing technical assistance and consulting to newsrooms in developing crisis management strategies.

- ✓ Providing sub-grants for the procurement of necessary technical equipment and licensed software.
- ✓ Organizing study visits abroad for the exchange of experience.
- ✓ Establishing an [Advisory and Assistance Center](#) through which independent editorial offices can request support from experts in various fields, such as design, management, advertising, and accounting. The project is currently on hold.

These initiatives are considered crucial for ensuring the sustainability of independent media and protecting freedom of expression by API members and those outside the organization.

Similarly, API remains one of the most active organizations in the fight against disinformation, through fact checking and promoting critical thinking as part of the [STOP FALS Campaign against False and Biased Information](#). This campaign is considered one of the most significant initiatives in the field. It is recognized both nationally and internationally and is “increasingly emerging as a mini-media institution.”



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III. API: Experiences, Perceptions, Expectations

To better understand the mood within the organization, how it is perceived in the public space, and the needs of employees and API members when developing the strategy, several face-to-face interviews were conducted with:

- ✓ The API team and Executive Director;
- ✓ Members of the organization, including the Board of Directors;
- ✓ media representatives who are not API members;
- ✓ representatives of civil society.

A set of questions was developed for each category of respondent. Some questions were repeated, such as “*What are the pros and cons of API?*” Others were targeted, such as “*What made you join API, and to what extent have your expectations been met?*” for API members.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, some of the responses provided by interviewees highlight that API remains a leading organization in Moldova's media sector. This is thanks to API's efforts to promote independent journalism and public policies that support it, as well as its direct support for newsrooms and activities that combat disinformation.

Next, we will summarize the main ideas of each respondent category.

3.1. The API Team

Pros: Constructive and collegial working atmosphere; a relatively clear distribution of tasks; a division into departments that contributes to focus on objectives - team members are informed about each other's activities; flexibility in setting activities; participatory work spirit; team members are consulted on priorities/projects carried out; “STOP FALS!” is API's calling card. People are aware of it, but its success is ensured by all our activities”; effective use of various communication platforms (website, Facebook, Telegram, YouTube, and TikTok); the opportunity to participate in professional events and training courses in the country and abroad; there is a sense of usefulness for both the independent media sector and society in general.

The team does not differentiate between projects “for the press” and projects “for the people,” as both are considered important to society. One advantage is the API's relationships and partnerships with Meta, TikTok, StratCom, and other institutions in Moldova and abroad.

Cons: Insufficient staff; increasing workload; complex projects; insufficient resources for product promotion (e.g., STOP FALS!).



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At the same time, the institution is clearly identified with the Executive Director, at least in terms of public perception. However, this is not necessarily seen as a bad thing, in part because “there are sectors and issues that the director understands best.”

In the case of **STOP FALS Department**, hiring someone to edit photos and videos was noted to contribute to diversifying content, developing distribution channels, and increasing audience numbers. The team considers activities in the field with representatives of educational institutions, young people, and local public authorities to be useful. Therefore, the team plans to expand the STOP FALS! network of collaborators to include regions with predominantly Russian-speaking populations and the Gagauz autonomy. The team will promote sponsored content, form partnerships with influencers, and use materials from API member publications. The team considers activities in the field with representatives of education facilities, young people, and local public authorities to be useful. Therefore, the team plans to expand the STOP FALS network of collaborators to include regions with predominantly Russian-speaking populations and the Gagauz autonomy. The team will promote sponsored content, form partnerships with influencers, and use materials from API member publications.

The **Training and Organizational Development Department** values its relationships with member and beneficiary editorial offices. The department derives the most satisfaction when editorial offices and their staff achieve professional success, either individually or as a team. Employees in this department acknowledge that a more selective approach to projects is needed. However, they cannot say that they have had any “useless” projects. Communication with partners, such as local public authorities, is considered good. However, since cooperation with these authorities is not formalized, additional communication, information, and persuasion are sometimes necessary. In this regard, concluding formal agreements and strengthening communication and visibility are welcome steps. Another challenge is encouraging participation in events. Editorial offices often have a small number of employees, so it is important to plan activities well, prioritize certain events, and develop activities according to their needs.

From the perspective of the **Advocacy and Publications Department**, the API is a growing organization that adapts well to current changes—including digital ones—and responds promptly to challenges and crises, such as increases in newspaper distribution prices. It is a credible institution for funders and partners. Regarding impact, media monitoring on various topics and advocacy campaigns were mentioned, especially those aimed at changing media legislation. Other initiatives were also mentioned, such as the new Media Subsidy Fund and the Media Forum. Additionally, participation is demonstrated through appeals, consistent statements, and support for the journalistic community. At the same time, the team needs to interact more closely with API members to strengthen communication about issues and initiatives that directly affect



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them. In this regard, it is reasonable to hold joint meetings more frequently. It is also important to consolidate and develop the initiatives that have been carried out thus far, particularly the in-house training courses offered to editorial offices on various topics and the reactivation of the Advisory and Assistance Center. The Center operated for two years with seven experts from outside the organization. “It was an effective tool for quickly responding to members' needs, and it is certainly needed again in the current circumstances.” Ultimately, the focus should be on providing members with more opportunities to optimize costs through project writing training (e.g., an online subscription system) and training young journalists for the regions. In terms of expectations, the continuation of the psychological support program for journalists, including API members and staff, is welcome. Given the upcoming elections and the hybrid attacks on various Moldovan institutions, improving the API's cybersecurity system is important.

The **Finance Department** does not see itself as, nor is it seen as, a separate entity within API. The team is familiar with the organization's objectives and activities. All department activities are planned and carried out in accordance with API's projects and activities. Of the challenges mentioned, the biggest would be the specific donor requirements, particularly the differences in reporting. However, these can be overcome with internal procedures and adaptation to different requirements. Regarding API management, the organization is responsive at technical and organizational levels, including participation in financial legislation training.

3.2. The Executive Director

The **Executive Director (ED)** highlights the growth of the organization's image, stating, “It is due to our activism and the fact that we are more vocal and visible. We are involved not only in the media but also in promoting democracy in general” (e.g., supporting the 2024 constitutional referendum and promoting and protecting human rights).

The ED acknowledges that the organization is currently implementing several projects and carrying out various activities that require greater involvement from its employees. Even though the number of employees has increased over the past year, the ED cannot redistribute tasks, especially to new employees, without affecting the quality and efficiency of performance. To ‘dilute’ the workload, efforts are made to fill existing vacancies in each department. Employees' professional development is encouraged and supported according to the possibilities and workload, as well as the needs of the employee and the organization.

Regarding the API's impact on the journalistic community, the ED considers STOP FALS!, the Media Forum, and support for the Press Council's work to be among API's most



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important achievements, which must be continued and strengthened. The organization's greatest strength is its backing by several independent media outlets. “First and foremost, we are in a position to respond to the needs of our members. However, our members cannot exist in a vacuum. They exist in a real market with real systemic problems. Through our programs, we try to address these problems and help our members.”

In recent years, API has expanded its scope of activity to include various independent media platforms, not just the local and regional press. Several radio stations and one TV station have joined the association, and discussions are underway with several other TV stations. At the same time, the ED states that, although expanding membership is an ongoing goal with new regulations being drafted to that effect, the decision to accept or reject new members remains strategic. The focus must continue to be on quality rather than quantity.

In terms of challenges, the ED mentioned the first one as increasing the efficiency of assistance programs for members of the organization so they become more sustainable – “the mission and objective that underpinned the creation of API and which are always on the agenda.” To this end, the aim is to improve strategic and budgetary planning and reconnect and professionalize members.

One of the major priorities for a more robust response to the concrete and immediate needs of the independent press is revitalization of the [Media Advisory and Assistance Center](#), a project implemented between 2020 and 2023, which was discontinued due to lack of funding. This service would provide small teams of journalists with assistance in various specific areas. There is also a need for more support in acute financial crises, which some independent newsrooms face. “We need a fund to support the media in crisis situations” (*note that at the time of the interviews, the crisis caused by the cessation of USAID funding had not yet begun*).

Another issue concerns the API's relationship with state authorities regarding its support for the ruling party's media policy initiatives. Respondents outside the API also mentioned the issue in interviews as a potential risk for the organization. According to the ED, “this is a useful partnership as long as it benefits the media sector, which is precisely the goal of the programs and draft laws that the team has contributed to, coordinated, and supported.”

3.3. **API Members / the Board of Directors**

Regardless of when they joined the organization, the main reason API members were guided was that they all shared the same values, along with the desire to be part of a protective media community umbrella. They wanted “to be affiliated with a group of professionals who could defend well-intentioned journalists.” They also wanted “to



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contribute to the development of the media, decide together on directions, and receive moral support, solidarity, and backing.” However, interviews with API members revealed that the organization “was primarily and strategically created to manage the press in the regions. Over time, this focus has diminished somewhat.” Though it is more of an observation, this opinion conveys the members' perception of API's role.

Image. The API is seen as an independent, respectable, and trustworthy entity that is still necessary in the local media landscape. It is described as “an association with a rich CV, traditions, team, and name that knows how to find projects”; “a strong network that has stood the test of time”; “strong support for journalism – educational, media, and professional – especially for journalists in the regions, which helps media institutions through completely free training, grants, and development programs”; and “a very useful organization that is also a link between national and international media.”

API's cooperation with public authorities is considered beneficial for promoting the interests of independent media. “A bridge between the state and the press is necessary, and API is that bridge because it knows the market and is an autonomous voice.” API's involvement in drafting media-related legislation and policies, as well as lobbying the state-owned company Poșta Moldovei on distribution issues, is particularly appreciated. At the same time, API members acknowledge that this relationship can also be delicate.

Activities. Respondents appreciated the key activities through which the API has established itself over the years, such as training sessions, which were considered “useful due to their thematic diversity and the participation of individuals from both Bălți and Gagauzia”, and exchange of experience and study visits, which “allow participants to see things from a different perspective and implement what they have learned at home”; the STOP FALS campaign; media monitoring programs; activities related to the Press Council and the Media Forum, which “bring together the efforts of several organizations”; and various thematic competitions for journalists, which “convey a message of support and encouragement for independent journalists,” among others. Some skepticism was expressed regarding the psychological support program for journalists, even though many media workers requested it.

In conclusion, while not all API activities meet the needs of all members, everyone finds something useful that can be applied to their institution's work.

It is also worth mentioning the discrepancy in opinions regarding the STOP FALS campaign. While some editorial offices view it as a strength and benefit to the joint effort to combat disinformation, others consider it a competing project that “uses the API network to distribute materials.”

Expectations. Although they joined the API at different times – *Ziarul de Gardă* has been a member for almost 20 years, while Radio Eco FM and Nokta.md joined more



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recently – respondents say their expectations have largely been met. This response comes from teams that have a certain degree of financial sustainability and do not have ‘financial’ expectations from the API. At the same time, all respondents agree that the API “needs to emphasize the economic and financial aspects of the press so that it can be strong and sustainable.”

Regarding the API's response to the current and future needs of its members, the general consensus is that “more must be done to support smaller organizations.” Similarly, it is felt that more effort is needed “to develop the capacities of local media.” To this end, API should collaborate more closely with large, financially capable international organizations (e.g., Internews and Deutsche Welle Akademie), hire international experts to share their experience, and organize internships, visits, training sessions, and technical assistance. Additionally, API is expected to be involved in reforming the local press, which would serve as “cells of information and combating disinformation in the regions.”

Many view the issue of API member quality as a challenge, whether from the perspective of ethics and professional conduct, editorial policies, content, or financial sustainability. Some argue that there are members “who do not want or are unable to evolve and develop.” However, no one has a clear solution. One thing is certain: actions are expected to improve the situation. These actions may not necessarily be restrictive or exclusionary from the API. As one member said, “We must find a middle ground, work with members, motivate them, and make them meet the standards. For this, the association must be attractive.”

Relationship with the organization. API members believe they have a good relationship with the organization's management. They feel well-informed about API's current activities, and they have ongoing, informal communication with management. They can communicate with management via email, phone, or various other channels, including with the ED. One advantage is that API does not dictate editorial policy or content topics.

The association is considered a consolidated voice for all - “if there is an idea or draft statement, it is discussed by the Board of Directors and consulted with the members.” However, only one respondent was skeptical about “the way some statements are supported and others are not.” A sense of community seems to be missing, especially among the ‘older’ members of the organization. While this is not necessarily seen as the API's fault, there is an expectation that the API will take the initiative to ‘repair’ the situation. Specifically, members should be sought out not only for training, the General Assembly, or when a joint statement is needed, but also for strategic decisions. “Let's discuss what training we want and our needs. Let's not be faced with priorities set without us.” “Editorial offices should learn to identify their needs. Some don't know how to do that.” One solution would be to take more joint actions to create connections



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between members, including at the editorial level. This would strengthen the sense of community and the API's unified public image. One solution would be to take more joint actions to create connections between members, including at the editorial level. This would strengthen the sense of community and the API's unified public image. Examples include the subscription campaign, in which API members sent messages encouraging people to subscribe and which were shared by members who do not produce newspapers, and the Europe Day campaign, in which each member created a message. Another example is the API anniversary campaign, which featured the slogan, “We are 25 years old, and we are not stopping here.”

3.4. **Non-API Member Media** Representatives

API is perceived as one of the most visible and influential media NGOs outside the organization. It is actively involved in promoting the interests of the journalistic community. As a result, several media outlets are considering joining API in the near future. Some have begun the process but have not yet completed it due to certain technical procedures, not because they have given up on the idea of joining this organization.

Even though they are not API members, several editorial offices have benefited from API's professional development and consulting programs. They are familiar with how the association interacts with the media and were satisfied with the provided content: “It was good because we chose what was useful to us. It wasn't imposed on us. We are selective and only attend the training courses we deem necessary. API understands our needs and those of the market, which is useful to us.” At the same time, there is a desire for faster responses to emergency situations. For example, the war in Ukraine revealed the need for journalists covering armed conflicts to receive training. There is also a desire for faster responses and involvement in cases of attacks on the press or policy decisions/legislative changes that “are detrimental to the media.” Certainly, cooperation between relevant NGOs is preferable to competition. From the perspective of non-member newsrooms, an important aspect is API's contribution to the sustainability of the community. This is set to become an essential part of API's activity and the activity of other media NGOs. Additionally, API contributes to providing member newsrooms with advertising, especially local ones.

Respondents consider the periodic criticism of API's proximity to the current government to be a misinterpretation/misperception. Given the API's involvement in managing the Print Media Distribution Financing Facility and the Media Subsidy Fund, the suggestion is to “eliminate any doubt regarding the credibility and objectivity” of the decisions made. At the same time, there is an expectation that some ‘cleanup’ will be done among member editorial offices that violate professional ethics. “Joining the



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API should not be a one-way ticket. If you can't cope or have violated the rules, your membership will be revoked.” Additionally, more effective mechanisms for protecting journalists will be identified.

Those outside the association consider themselves well-informed about its activities, and communication with staff is as easy for them as it is for members. They find API to be visible on the web and on social media. As a product, STOP FALS is highly regarded as “an effective tool for checking the most serious fakes, although it could do with being a little faster, and serves as a source of both inspiration and documentation for editorial offices.” Regarding useful products and actions from the past that are currently lacking in the profession, mention was made of the online debate project on the MediaForum.md website, which addressed issues of ethics and professional conduct. Thanks to contributions from several professionals in the field, the forum provided an opportunity to exchange opinions and best practices.

Ultimately, in this media segment too, one of the key expectations from the API relates to lobbying and advocacy. Opinions also depend on the media profile.

3.5. **Civil Society** Representatives

API actively collaborates with various non-governmental organizations to establish strategic partnerships. These partnerships promote press freedom and journalistic ethics in the country while strengthening API's presence and impact in the Republic of Moldova's media sector. These partnerships have included collaborations on organizing events, campaigns, and joint projects that have benefited a large number of people. One major example is the annual Media Forum event, which attracts numerous participants and assesses the media situation in Moldova. The Forum Resolution, which includes requests for further reforms, is also adopted at this event.

Civil society organization representatives (*excluding the IJC, an API member*) have good relationships with the association, both directly and through various civic coalitions, platforms, and events. It is seen as a traditional and proactive organization present in the journalistic community and the media field in general. It deals with everything media-related and provides support for journalists, including those in the local press. The latter, the “network of local members and partners,” is also one of its strong points. “They are more open in the journalistic environment; they feel more at home.”

For these CSOs, the STOP FALS portal is the API's calling card. They sometimes respond to it as experts or political analysts, followed by the Press Council. However, some respondents consider the impact of STOP FALS to be ‘limited’ given the effort required to combat fakes. Therefore, it is suggested that the portal team focus “on more complex issues and analytical messages, also known as strategic communication.”



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The Executive Director is the person with the highest public visibility within the API, which “sometimes creates the impression that it is a one-man organization.” In this context, the suggestion is to place more emphasis on team members who specialize in certain areas and highlight this. It is also suggested that the organizational chart be reviewed and one or two deputy executive director positions be created. It is also appropriate to more actively involve the members of the Board of Directors and its president, who are well-known figures in the journalistic community. “It would be good to have more public figures speaking on behalf of the organization—more voices.”

API's collaboration with the government on developing public policies is not viewed by civil society colleagues as a concession. On the contrary, it is advantageous as long as impartiality is maintained and power is criticized when necessary. “These are risks that any organization working on public policy takes on. In our case, however, we are seen as working for the government.”

In terms of products, the OSC segment suggested creating a newsletter that reports on API activities, in addition to social media pages and a website. It is also considered appropriate to create a subpage-blog where API members can publish editorials and opinion articles, including those from their publications. This would increase their visibility.



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IV. SWOT/PEST Analysis: Potential Risks and Mitigation Measures

The interviews, as well as the respondents' feedback on API activities and developments in recent years, formed the basis for a **SWOT analysis**. This analysis will serve as a starting point for API's development strategy in the coming period.

Considering the strong connection between the media in the Republic of Moldova and socio-economic and political developments, including geopolitical volatility, a **PEST analysis** was conducted to better understand the external factors influencing the sector/Association's activity.

4.1 **SWOT** Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Extensive regional network2. Team of professionals3. Credibility among funders4. Tangible results in supporting national media5. Flexibility and strong advocacy capacity	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Financially vulnerable members2. Members who fail to develop their capacities3. Rapid changes in the media market4. Too many/too diverse activities/projects/products5. Overburdening of the team
Opportunities	Threats
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Enjoys trust among the journalistic community2. Is a leader in lobbying and advocacy3. Good cooperation with authorities4. Diversified financial sources5. Digitization of the media6. Increased team capacity	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Change in ownership/editorial policy of members2. Withdrawal of some members3. Withdrawal of some donors4. Change in political course5. Amendment of CSO legislation6. Prolonged economic crises

The SWOT analysis shows that the API has the capacity to adapt its future activities to changing expectations and needs of its members, the Moldovan journalism community, and trends in the modern media world, as well as the challenges facing independent media. To improve efficiency, API should focus on several key areas:

- **To capitalize on its image and trustworthiness**, as well as the results achieved over the years in cooperation with the media, and to strengthen its interaction with the press in the country—both regional and national. This can be achieved by providing professional development activities for individuals responsible for editorial content in newsrooms, as well as by taking actions to strengthen the sense of media community (e.g., debate clubs and informal discussions).



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- **Focus on projects promoting the financial sustainability of the press** by facilitating access to grants and the ongoing professionalization of editorial management, including in terms of interaction with the advertising market and project management. Although this may seem like it has been done before—and it has—at least one generation of the country's journalism guild has changed, so we need to start over.
- **Review the procedures for admitting new members, simplifying them as much as possible** in order to expand and consolidate the media field and achieve greater representation not only geographically, but also in terms of media diversity. In this context, we could consider attracting independent professionals and freelancers who combine media work with other activities, as well as independent media institutions. However, this should not come at the expense of API's core values.
- **Continue lobbying and advocacy activities**, but also ensure, through internal policies and procedures, that vulnerabilities that may arise from politics are mitigated. The priority here would be to increase visibility of positions within the organization so that attacks cannot be directed at a single person.

4.2 **PEST** Analysis

Political 1. The tendency of politicians to control the media/create subordinate media structures 2. Poorly functioning legislation 3. Advertising targeted on political criteria 4. Restrictions on freedom of expression/access to information 5. Regulations prohibiting inconvenient media/CSOs	Economic 1. Economic crisis/lack of support and subsidies 2. Lack of investment in media/reduction in advertising budgets 3. Withdrawal of donors 4. Lack of financial sustainability of media 5. Outdated/underdeveloped distribution system
Social 1. Low trust in the media 2. Low prestige of the profession 3. Dominance of social media 4. No more subscriptions/reluctance to subscribe online 5. Lack of workforce	Technical 1. Digitization of the media 2. The growing role of artificial intelligence (AI) 3. Diversification of products and information channels 4. Increased speed of reaching the public/consumer



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Most of the points in this analysis have negative connotations and are only slightly influenced by the media. This is evident in the situation created in 2025 by the withdrawal of USAID funding.

In addition, the media has been operating under conditions of insecurity in recent years, primarily due to Russia's war against Ukraine, which is particularly important given our geographical location. These conditions affect investment in Moldova, fuel political instability, and, through collateral hybrid actions, spread disinformation and jeopardize the EU integration process.

Furthermore, many of these vulnerabilities may seem hypothetical at first, but they can become a real threat depending on economic or political changes in society.

- **Political.** As in many places, politics tends to influence the media in Moldova. This influence can be seen through the subordination of existing media structures, the creation of new entities, poorly functioning or amended legislation, the direction of advertising based on political criteria, and the restriction of certain freedoms, such as freedom of expression and access to information. One recent example of this is the initiative on "foreign agents" launched by socialists and communists. At the same time, political influences are easier to manage when the press is economically sustainable. Therefore, the current window of opportunity—a government that is largely open to the press—should be used to strengthen the press economically, fortify relevant legislation, and establish safeguards against future political interference.
- **Economic.** The media sector has been severely affected by economic turmoil. This turmoil manifests indirectly through reduced investment and advertising budgets, increased service prices, inflation, and consumers' inability to pay. This also includes the withdrawal of donors, which will severely impact the Moldovan media in 2025 with the termination of USAID press projects. To anticipate and mitigate these risks, the solution is to diversify revenues and donors and create the financial "cushion" recommended to everyone to weather economic shocks more easily.
- **Social.** The public's declining trust in the media and journalism as a profession has grown in recent decades alongside the expansion and dominance of social media around the world. This is happening in parallel with distribution systems that can no longer keep up with the flow of information and a general reluctance to subscribe. The solution is to rebuild trust in journalism and journalists step by step by highlighting the advantages of journalism, such as responsibility, documentation, and fact-checking.
- **Technical.** The digitization of media and the growing role of artificial intelligence (AI) in the documentation and production of journalistic material



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present both risks and opportunities, and it is up to media teams to strike the right balance. One thing is certain: the technical field is almost the only one that continues to offer opportunities for developing the media sector. This is achieved through technology that serves the public interest and the human mind, as well as through the diversification of products and information channels.



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V. Strategic Objectives and Priorities for 2025-2029

In general, API members and others expect the association to strengthen the capabilities of independent media in the Republic of Moldova at various levels, helping them become stronger financially and editorially. To this end, API should create, offer, ensure, and respond to a series of future expectations.

In addition to the interviews conducted for the development of the strategy, suggestions made by managers and editors of nine independent national and regional newsrooms were used during informal "APIBrunch" meetings organized by API between May 27 and 29, 2025, in celebration of Press Freedom Days. They discussed the state of the free press and its prospects for development. They answered two questions: "What is the biggest challenge your editorial office is facing this year, and what solutions are you trying to implement?" "What could we do together to increase the impact of independent media in Moldova? What would you expect from API if you became a member?"

As with the interviews, the participants of the regular APIBrunch events concluded that we can only effectively respond to the growing pressures and difficulties facing the independent press in Moldova through a united, active, and supportive network. Building a stronger, more resilient press that is closer to citizens requires constant cooperation, mutual trust, and coordinated action.

Responses from the mini-survey, "Training and Assistance Needs for API Members," were also taken into account. The survey was conducted separately for managers and for journalists, accountants, and other editorial staff by the organization's team. The survey reconfirmed the conclusions from the strategy development process: member newsrooms and API members still need training in various professional areas and assistance to become more competitive in the new digital media environment.

For clarity, the summarized **key expectations** have been grouped into professional-geographical categories. The derived **objectives and priorities** have been grouped into blocks of needs and problems.

5.1 Key expectations

➤ API Team

- Clear **identity** of the organization, focused on its strategic priorities and objectives.
- **Maintaining** a balance between donor objectives and our own, so that all projects and initiatives align with API's mission and values.
- **Hiring** enough staff to prevent team burnout.



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- **Increasing** the visibility of multiple API team members to reduce the vulnerability of the organization by taking potential attacks off a single person.
- **Promoting** the organization to increase its overall visibility and contribute to fundraising, including through the percentage designation mechanism.

➤ **API Members**

- **Mapping** media needs and providing **support** for project development and management, including dedicated training.
- **Projects focused on members** and which, above all, benefit API members— including consulting to help editorial offices strengthen their editorial and personnel capacities and modernize their technical/logistical/equipment capabilities.
- **Adapting** to market trends and supporting digitization.
- **Mediating** between the business and journalistic communities so businesses, including those in Chişinău, can advertise in regional media.
- **Continuous professional training** for journalists - centralized, but also *in-house*; training on economic topics, especially for media management.
- **Collaboration** with university journalism departments to encourage journalism graduates to seek employment at regional media outlets.
- **Advocacy** for visibility and equitable access to publicly funded information campaigns and events organized by central authorities for regional newsrooms.
- More and more focused **opportunities** for individual API members.
- **Promotion** of regional products by corporations through API channels and its partners.

➤ **Journalism community**

- Ongoing **advocacy** for:
 - ✓ Strengthening journalists' rights and ensuring their protection;
 - ✓ Improving the policy framework on ethics and professional conduct;
 - ✓ Empowering regional media economically;
 - ✓ Providing financial support to the media from the state budget;
 - ✓ Establishing a dialogue with the advertising market;
 - ✓ Regulating online advertising;
 - ✓ Streamlining the Competition Council's activities regarding the fair regulation of the advertising market.



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- **Support** for attracting advertising and training in this area in the new online context.
- **Identifying** new ways to direct advertising to regional media.
- **Assistance** to the media on current and strategic issues, particularly through the relaunch of the **API Assistance/Consultancy Center**.
- Continuously **strengthening** cooperation with relevant NGOs and external partners, as well as with central and local public authorities.
- Constant **updating** of the [database](#) of media outlets in the country's regions and creation of a database of advertising agencies/providers.
- **Creating** an internal platform for editorial collaboration through which journalists and editors from central media outlets can request collaboration and materials from those in the field.

Of course, API cannot and should not fulfill all of the aforementioned requests. However, summarizing these requests reveals key trends that could inform API's strategic priorities over the next four to five years. Naturally, given that the country's media problems and needs have persisted or intensified despite general developments, the key objectives and priorities of the previous development strategy (2021-2025) are outlined in the strategy for 2025-2029.

Based on the above, we suggest the following **five objectives / key priorities for 2025-2029**:

- 1) **Strengthen leadership in advocacy activities within the media sector to ensure a favorable climate for the development and operation of independent media outlets in the country, through:**
 - ✓ Ongoing advocacy activities (including as needed and as developments warrant) in areas where API has already achieved results—for example, improving the public policy framework to ensure and strengthen the rights of journalists.
 - ✓ Advocacy for solving current problems faced by media institutions/journalists through public debate, identifying solutions, and promoting them within the Moldova Media Forum.
 - ✓ Advocacy for the effective implementation of the Law on the Media Subsidy Fund (No. 50 of 12-04-2024).
 - ✓ Advocacy for the protection of journalists, including for joining the [EU anti-SLAPP initiative](#).
 - ✓ Support in ensuring the digital security of journalists, with a focus on API members.



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- ✓ Monitoring activities related to the implementation of the Law on Access to Information of Public Interest.
- ✓ Activities that promote a secure information space include expanding the coverage of responsible and public interest media outlets and increasing their audience.
- ✓ Consultations on adapting the legal framework to eliminate unfair competition and lack of transparency in the distribution of advertising budgets, sanctioning hidden advertising, and providing reporting and auditing mechanisms for publicly funded online campaigns.
- ✓ Advocacy for establishing direct and constant dialogue (formal or informal) with local and international advertising providers to negotiate the allocation of funds in a fair manner, avoiding excessive agency intermediation, and to raise awareness of the importance of supporting journalism in the public interest, including in the regions.
- ✓ Advocacy for improving the efficiency of the Competition Council's activities related to regulating the advertising and media markets.
- ✓ Advocacy to promote the involvement of regional newsrooms in national information campaigns funded by public funds and in events organized by central authorities and development partners.
- ✓ Strengthening the idea of a free press community in Moldova, bringing together API members and non-members to exchange views and discuss current issues facing the profession (APIBrunch).
- ✓ Advocacy to encourage the employment of journalism graduates in regional media outlets.

2) Strengthen the economic and institutional capacities of local journalism through:

- ✓ Literacy projects/activities/training in the field of advertising (knowledge about how the market works, how budgets are formed and distributed, etc.) and for the professional training of editorial staff involved in advertising sales.
- ✓ Professional development activities in the field of project management (development, management, design, and calculation of indicators, etc.).
- ✓ Support for increasing the economic capacities of API member media institutions - financial support (direct, through sub-grants) and indirect support (placement of editorial products), relaunch of the advertising brokerage/sales service for independent media.
- ✓ Creation of a database of advertising agencies and providers that the media can access.



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- ✓ Creating an internal platform for editorial collaboration between journalists/editors from national and regional media outlets in order to strengthen media products and their dissemination.
 - ✓ Relaunching the Advisory and Assistance Center which will offer preferential services in various fields (legal, economic, editorial) for members of the organization and non-member editorial offices (depending on possibilities and needs/current issues).
- 3) Encourage API members and potential members to adhere to professional ethics and conduct, by:**
- ✓ Continuously motivating API members and potential members to comply with professional ethics and conduct (continuously monitoring compliance with ethical standards by API members and editorial offices/journalists applying for API membership).
 - ✓ Encouraging diversity in the editorial content of API members by promoting investigative journalism through internal API professional competitions and competitions for the best investigations.
- 4) Support the adaptation of the journalistic community, including the local community, to new digital realities in the context of media market and societal developments by:**
- ✓ Contributing to the technical and technological digitization of API members by facilitating partnerships and investments, or by assisting in their identification.
 - ✓ Training in the use and management of new digital tools, including Artificial Intelligence.
 - ✓ Constant updating of the database of media outlets in the country's regions.
 - ✓ Developing a flexible online guide or platform that can be supplemented with useful information and tools for journalistic work.
- 5) Promote the API's associative image and ensure the association's sustainability by:**
- ✓ Continuously strengthening of API team cooperation with relevant NGOs and external partners, central and local public authorities.
 - ✓ Strengthening the sense of community among API members.
 - ✓ Internal training and filling existing positions to strengthen the API team's capabilities.
 - ✓ Increasing the public presence and visibility of the API team and API members and delegating them to various professional structures.



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- ✓ Developing and diversifying the information campaigns carried out by API, such as “STOP FALS!”, “Ask for Accountability for Public Money,” and “For a Clean Parliament,” and initiating new campaigns with API members involved in their implementation.



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VI. Conclusions and Recommendations

The main conclusion of this document is that API has solid potential for image and credibility: among the **journalistic community** in the Republic of Moldova, it is seen as a source of support for current challenges and crisis situations; in **society**, the association (STOP FALS!) is a stronghold in the fight against disinformation and propaganda; for **central and local public authorities**, API is a strong partner for developing and implementing media policies and promoting critical thinking among different categories of citizens.

This potential is the ideal foundation for the organization's next stage of development, from which both the API and its members will benefit. They will receive the expertise and support necessary to significantly increase their capabilities and adapt to today's digital media landscape.

In this sense, the main recommendation is to **increase the involvement of API members in decision-making processes** and not just in "pre-established" activities. This will strengthen the sense of belonging to a community and to a brand. This will encourage members to contribute to organized events, distributed messages, public statements, and so on.



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