The purpose of this prompt sheet is to provide a clear set of guidelines to support the assessment of applications from individuals to the Influence Operations Researchers’ Guild.

As far as possible, the standards in this document aim to be objective; the focus is on identifying good practices and sound methodology. The development of these guidelines drew on the methodology of DFRLab’s Foreign Interference Attribution Tracker, the International Fact-Checking Network’s Code of Principles, and NewsGuard’s Rating Criteria for assessing websites.

The six categories—diversity, collaboration, attribution, collection, privacy, and accuracy—reflect the core values as stated in the Influence Operations Researchers’ Guild Charter.

Please note: some of the guidelines below relate to more than one question in the application form.

PRELIMINARY DUE DILIGENCE

Reviewers should consider the following basic due diligence questions before assessing an application. Please use the applicant’s submitted CV and open-source checks as the basis for this assessment. Does the applicant:

☑ Have a good reputation in the community?
☑ Maintain a nonpartisan stance?
☑ Not promote mis- or disinformation?
☑ Have an open and honest corrections policy?
☑ Have a track-record of working with established organizations or of producing high quality work as an independent researcher?

SECTION 1: RESEARCH APPROACH

Question 1a: Quality Assessment of Submitted Work

In the work submitted as evidence of high-quality and respected analysis and reporting, does the applicant:

☑ Provide open access to a data set or archived links of alleged assets?
☑ Provide a clear illustration of the methodology, tactics, and platforms involved in the alleged information operation?
☑ Provide research replicable through publicly available information?
☑ Avoid using biased wording, innuendo, or emotive language?
Use titles that accurately convey the content of the report?
Clearly distinguish factual information, argumentative analysis, and assumptions?
Remain transparent about alternative interpretations of the evidence, gaps, and confidence levels?
Make their contribution to the submitted work clear, if they are not the sole author?

SECTION 2: DIVERSITY, ACCURACY, AND ATTRIBUTION

Questions 2a and 2b: Diversity
Does the applicant:
- Identify influence operations in understudied parts of the world or influence operations that target understudied populations?
- Provide a different perspective on influence operations, for example by collaborating on cross-sectoral research?
- Use analytical and research tools and techniques flexibly, depending on the circumstances of the influence operation being studied?
- Demonstrate an awareness of factors that may restrict their research?

As long as any factors that may restrict the topics an individual is able to research are acknowledged, these limitations should not in themselves work against an individual applicant.

Questions 2c and 2d: Accuracy
Does the applicant explain:
- Their research methodology?
- The starting point and starting reasons for the investigation and provide a step-by-step explanation of their role in the investigation?
- Rely on primary source evidence wherever possible and clearly identify any secondary sources?
- Responsibly assess the reach or impact of the influence operation based on available facts (by not over- or understating estimations of reach or impact, and explaining the limitations of these sorts of assessments)?
- A clear process of internal or external peer review?
- The strengths and weaknesses of tools or techniques they are required to use by the organization(s) they work with (if relevant)?

Questions 2e and 2f: Sampling and Bias
Does the applicant:
- Demonstrate awareness of sampling and bias?
- Acknowledge relevant limitations, anomalies, or mitigating factors?

Question 2g: Attribution
Does the applicant:
- Provide compelling evidence to justify the identification of actors allegedly responsible (if relevant)?
- Provide confidence levels and support them with evidence?
- Take care not to amplify narratives or actors involved in the influence operation?
Seek to clearly explain the strategic goal and rationale of the actors who conducted the alleged information operation (if relevant)?

- Explain the reasons why they may or may not make attributions in their work?
- Provide compelling evidence to justify the identification of actors allegedly responsible (if relevant)?
- Provide confidence levels and support them with evidence?
- Take care not to amplify narratives or actors involved in the influence operation?

**SECTION 3: COLLECTION AND PRIVACY**

**Questions 3a and 3b**

Does the applicant:

- Show an understanding of and commitment to GDPR compliance (if relevant)?
- Show how they acquire and store data legally, and in compliance with social media policies, including details of any data collection tools they use? (If this is done through an organization they are affiliated with, then the applicant should demonstrate how their actions are aligned with organizational compliance.)
- Demonstrate ethical and legal practices for storing data and protecting personal information?
- Have work processes to protect personal data and the integrity of individuals whose user data is studied?
- Protect the identity of unwitting social media users?

**SECTION 4: WORK CULTURE AND COLLABORATION**

Does the applicant:

- Demonstrate ethical considerations that guide their work?
- Credit other researchers fairly?
- Successfully mentor or partner with any other organizations or individuals?
- Engage with the wider community of influence operations researchers and behave professionally and respectfully toward others when doing so?