

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Defending Digital Rights and Civic Space Online

The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) is pleased to announce a call for proposals to defend digital rights and civic space online. Grants of up to \$23,000 are available for organizations registered and operating in [OECD-DAC Recipient](#) countries with projects meeting the criteria below.

Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis; all applications must be submitted by October 9, 2026.

Background

Civil society plays a leading role in addressing the most important priorities of our time. Local activists, civil society organizations (CSOs), community leaders, and human rights defenders are making essential contributions to protecting civic space and human rights in the digital realm.

ICNL's Digital Rights Program seeks to support organizations working to protect the exercise of fundamental freedoms across five thematic areas: Artificial Intelligence (AI) Governance; Surveillance/Right to Privacy; Data Protection; Freedom of Expression; and Access and Inclusion Online.

Promoting and protecting digital rights requires investment in appropriate reforms; support for civil society in navigating challenges and constraints; and advocacy in multilateral fora to highlight challenges and advance effective responses.

As governments around the world grapple with implementing laws to address new concerns rising from emerging technology, civil society plays a crucial role in advancing development and good governance, by promoting accountability, providing expertise, and representing community interests. There is a need to increase support and assistance to CSOs engaged in these activities.

Project Activities

ICNL has identified several issues where civil society capacity building, advocacy, and research is needed: 1) strengthening transparency and oversight mechanisms for the

procurement and deployment of technologies by governments, including those used for targeted or mass surveillance, “smart city” projects, digital identification systems, and others; 2) strengthening the independence of data protection authorities;¹ and 3) identifying and leveraging opportunities for meaningful multistakeholder consultations during the design and implementation of “digital transformation” and “digital public infrastructure” projects. Project proposals that address one or more of these issues will be given stronger consideration.

Activities that may be supported include:

- Advocating for the adoption, amendment, or repeal of laws, policies, and other measures²;
- Bolstering civil society’s capacity and resilience by developing resources, trainings, and networks to enable strategic advocacy; and
- Enhancing understanding of laws or practice through applied research designed to address a specific advocacy goal.

Project activities may address one or more target countries. If advocacy, capacity building, or research activities address more than one country, the proposal must demonstrate the basis for choosing the countries and how they are linked to achieve impact. We encourage proposals that: (a) engage diverse coalitions of advocates; (b) include support to women and marginalized communities, and (c) are innovative and impactful.

All project activities must be completed by October 31, 2027.

Eligibility Requirements

This call for proposals is open to any non-profit organization based and registered in OECD-DAC Recipient countries.

Applicants may submit only one proposal as the Lead Organization. Organizations may be part of multiple applications as consortium members.

Application Instructions & Content of Proposal

Applications will be reviewed in two phases. To apply for the first phase, applicants should complete all information in the [Online Application Form](#) in English. If selected

¹ Based on best practices, the independence of a data protection authority is strengthened when 1) independence is formally guaranteed through legislation; 2) law and practice prevent the executive from directing the actions of the authority; 3) members of the authority are appointed for a fixed term; 4) removal is only based on just cause; 5) the authority is properly resourced; 6) transparency mechanisms enable public oversight; 7) the authority is permitted to speak publicly on matters within its purview, and 8) the authority is empowered to hire its own staff and manage its own budget.

² These measures may be adopted by a range of government entities, including legislatures, ministries, regulatory bodies, law enforcement agencies, and courts.

to proceed to the second phase, ICNL will contact selected applicants to provide more detailed information about the project objectives, activities, outputs and outcomes, and budget.

The proposal must address the following elements:

- The project concept, including
 - Problem statement that describes the need for the proposed activities, including particular challenges and opportunities relating to digital rights or civic space online that you aim to address;
 - Project goal and objectives.
 - The project's anticipated outcomes and impact;
 - Actors whom the activities are intended to affect or influence, including ministries, regulatory bodies, law enforcement agencies, courts, multilateral institutions, civil society actors, and the public;
 - Length of project. All project activities must be completed by October 31, 2027.
- A budget of no more than \$23,000 USD that describes personnel, contractual, travel, meeting/event, and other costs, as indicated in the Online Application Form. If selected for further review, applications will be required to submit a detailed line-item budget.
- The applicant's experience and expertise relating to defending and expanding civic space and the activities covered in the proposal.

Applicants may submit only one proposal as the Lead Organization. Organizations may be part of multiple applications as consortium members.

Selection Criteria

Applications will be evaluated based on the following factors:

- Compliance with eligibility requirements and application instructions;
- Likelihood of impact of project activities in addressing challenges and taking advantage of opportunities relating to civic space;
- Quality of proposal, including that proposed activities are described in appropriate detail and feasible within the project period;
- Proposed budget and apparent value for cost;
- Demonstrated experience and expertise related to proposed activities; and
- Demonstrated capacity to exercise responsible stewardship of received funds.

Terms of Reference

All grant recipients will be required to submit progress reports during the grant period and a final report on activities conducted and project outcomes prior to receiving their final grant disbursements.

All project activities must be completed by October 31, 2027.

How to Apply

Interested applicants can apply by completing the [*Online Application Form*](#).

If you have any questions or run into issues, please send an email to digital@icnl.org with “Defending Digital Rights and Civic Space Online” in the subject line. Please provide the following information in your email so that ICNL can follow-up, as appropriate:

- Name of organization applying for grant support
- Project point of contact (name, position, email address, telephone number)

Deadline

Applications will be accepted until October 9, 2026. Due to the number of expected applications, only shortlisted candidates will be contacted.

ABOUT ICNL

INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR NOT-FOR-PROFIT LAW (ICNL)

ICNL works with civil society, governments, and the international community in more than 100 countries to improve the legal environment for civic space around the world. We believe that when people have the space to come together, positive, lasting change can be made. To achieve this vision, individuals must be able to join together, speak out, and take action to make the world a better place. Since 1992, ICNL has worked with our partners at all levels to promote and protect an enabling legal environment for civil society. Our international staff includes experts in all aspects of the laws governing free association, assembly, and expression, spanning from the local to global contexts. We also foster a worldwide network of organizations and individuals with in-depth expertise on a diverse range of issues relevant to civil society. Learn more about our work and browse our research at www.icnl.org.