

## Joining Civitates The European Democracy Fund

### Civitates in a few words

Civitates is a philanthropic pooled fund that supports independent civil society organisations and public interest media in shaping vibrant and open European democracies that work for all.

It is hosted by the Network of European Foundations (NEF) in Brussels – which also hosts other pan-European pooled funds.

Civitates was established in 2018. Since its inception, it has stood in solidarity with more than 50 organisations in 18 countries working to protect and promote civic space (offline and online) and the freedoms to assemble and associate, to enable access to trustworthy information, and to hold power to account.

Civitates advances its work across three sub funds (or “portfolios”) which aims to counter emergent threats that undermine democracy in the European Union by providing core funding to a wide range of organisations in Europe:

- **Our Civic Power portfolio** supports broad civil society coalitions to safeguard space for civil society, advocate for meaningful public participation and create resilient and more diverse communities of civil society actors.
- **Our Tech and Democracy portfolio** supports organisations that expose the truth, fact-check information, and advocate for online platforms to account for their business models that perpetuate these harms.
- **Our Media portfolio** supports media organisations to pioneer innovative solutions to adapt to the new media landscape and strengthen their financial sustainability in ways that enhance their resilience and, more generally, media freedom across Europe.

Over the last five years, Civitates has engaged a total amount of € 13 million in grant-making, capacity building activities, and networking events.

Successes include supporting digital rights organisations to influence European tech legislation, including the landmark Digital Services Act (DSA), which was adopted in 2023 to reduce the risk of online harms such as disinformation and polarisation. We also supported a broad coalition of Slovak civil society organisations to engage with politically disillusioned young people in the run up to the 2023 presidential elections, leading to a surge of young voters - the highest level since the instauration of free elections in the country - and preventing the populist party in power to gain an absolute majority.

## **Why join Civitates as a foundation partner?**

By joining Civitates as a foundation partner, you are joining a community of like-minded philanthropic donors, of different shapes and sizes, working together to deepen and expand their impact across Europe.

The Civitates foundation partners pool their resources and knowledge together with a view to scaling the support available for pro-democracy actors, learning from each other, and experimenting with new approaches in defense of democracy and civic space.

Civitates' donor partners operate at a local, national, or regional level, and are committed to innovative and collaborative funding mechanisms, with the overall objective of increasing the scale of support available for this work. Some join Civitates in search of co-funding opportunities, or a pipeline of organisations to support, or to learn more about the fields of democracy, media, and tech beyond their national borders or priority countries.

Here are a few of the recognised opportunities Civitates creates for donor partners<sup>1</sup>:

- leverage strategic impact
- de-risk by funding collaboratively
- work in a way that is flexible
- share learning and build expertise
- experiment with new ways of doing things
- build the field at a European level

## **What does joining Civitates entail?**

At present, once a Foundation becomes a partner in Civitates, it automatically becomes a member of the Civitates Steering Committee, the governing body responsible for setting the strategic direction and main priorities of the pooled fund. The Steering Committee meets three times a year - twice in-person (March/April and November) and once remotely (usually in June). Foundation partners are strongly encouraged to attend.

Foundation partners can decide whether to participate in one of the three working groups, which oversee the grant making processes in each of the three portfolios.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.jrf.org.uk/wealth-funding-and-investment-practice/shifting-power-exploring-the-value-of-pooled-funds-in-the-uk&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1711715492681794&usg=AOvVaw23CfmS4Y9OON4YqeanHYic>

## How to join Civitates as a foundation partner?

### ***1 - Express your interest***

To express your interest in joining Civitates, you can send an email or letter to the Civitates Team. We invite you to contact Civitates' Director, Mrs. Elisa Peter ([elisa.peter@civitates-eu.org](mailto:elisa.peter@civitates-eu.org)).

We will set up a meeting with you to discuss your interest, to present our strategy 2024-2026, our different sub funds, and our governance, and finally to explore potential partnership opportunities.<sup>2</sup>

We will answer any questions you may have and share any document necessary for your organisation to perform its due diligence process.

If possible, we will invite you to attend one of our bi-annual steering committees as an observer. It is a unique opportunity to meet with the other Civitates' donors and team, and to participate in our internal discussions about governance and the state of democracy in Europe.

There is no minimum amount required to join the pooled fund. Most foundations partners make multi-year commitments (2-4 years) with contributions ranging from Euros 60,000/year to 500,000/year.

Foundation partners may choose to support all or only some of the three sub funds, depending on their areas of expertise and interest. They can stipulate the amount of funding they wish to contribute to each sub-fund, although we encourage donors to make unrestricted commitments to the pooled fund.

### ***2 - Formalise our partnership***

To formally join Civitates, you can send a donation letter or a grant letter to the Civitates Team, indicating your contribution, specifying (if you want) the repartition of your contribution between the different portfolios and the payment schedule. Please note that all Foundations joining Civitates must accept Civitates' annual reports as the only reporting requirement.

Alternatively, you can ask the Civitates Team to prepare an application for the decision-making body of your organisation. To ease the burden on Civitates' small team, Foundations are encouraged to accept the Civitates strategy as the main application document.

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<sup>2</sup> We will share with you Civitates' partnership agreement 2024-2026 and its annexes.

The legal agreement will be between the Foundation and NEF - as the fiscal host of Civitates. The contract or grant agreement will be signed by the NEF Executive Director, Mrs. Peggy Sailler.

The Civitates Team will return the signed donation/grant letter along with a donation notice (DN) with the NEF bank account details for you to transfer your contribution according to the payment schedule.

You will need to sign a Civitates' partnership agreement and return it to us.

### ***3 - Introduction to the community***

With those formalities done, you will be officially part of Civitates!

You will need to notify us of the people who will represent your organisation in our governing structures, i.e. the Steering Committee, and the working groups (of your choice). You will be added to our mailing list to receive our newsletter and invitations to the various meetings and events (offline and online) we are organising each year.

The logo of your organisation will be added to the Civitates' website and any communication in which we specify our donors.

The Civitates Team will send an email to all Civitates' donors introducing your organisation. If required, the Civitates Senior Programme Manager(s) will set up meetings with the relevant people in your organisation to present our portfolios in more detail and explore potential synergies.