Civic Power: Protect and Expand Civic Space in Europe
Call for Proposals

BACKGROUND

Since the commencement of Civitates’ activities, European democracies have faced new, concomitant crises, including a pandemic, war in Ukraine and an economic slowdown that has generated social discontent across the continent. The question of closing civic and democratic space is a complex issue, driven by long-term and interconnected factors. This, combined with the initially incremental and gradual nature of closing civic space in democracies, means that it can be hard for civil society to see and prioritize the problem or get the attention of the wider public until there is a severe deterioration. There is a need to support civil society to look ahead, to anticipate challenges and opportunities and to empower it to develop strategies and build the capabilities needed to meet such opportunities.

Civitates envisions democracy in Europe being strengthened by an independent civil society powered with the resources, constituencies and capabilities to protect and expand civic space and mobilize support for democratic principles, particularly at moments of emerging opportunity and threat.

GOAL OF THE CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Civitates announces a call for proposals open to civil society organizations registered in Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, and France. With this call Civitates aims to build the readiness and power of civil society in the selected European Union countries to protect and expand civic and democratic space, particularly at key social and political moments. Civitates seeks to support civil society to anticipate transformative moments which present opportunities and threats for civic space and enable it to develop and implement strategies to address these. Civitates sees a need to support civil society to build the capabilities needed to meet such opportunities. This can help broader civil society to understand the emerging threats to their space but also enable coalitions in countries where that threat has already clearly manifested to prepare for social and political events that help them to push back against the trend.

Civitates would be looking to support at least one anchor group in each country to lead this work.

Transformative Moments

Civitates does not predefine key transformative momentums and leaves it to the applicant’s interpretation and context analysis to identify potential opportunities to take advantage of and generate support for civic and democratic space. These transformative events may include a variety of different momentums based on the specific context. Below a few explanatory examples are provided but the interpretation of such momentum should not be limited to the listed examples.
Elections offer one example of such events that illustrate how civil society can create game-changing impact by putting democratic values and civic freedoms onto the public agenda.

Post-election contexts offer opportunities to engage with new governments to take steps to take action once in power. Civil society needs to be able to monitor the actions of new governments and hold them accountable for the protection and restoration of democratic institutions, rights and freedoms.

Planned controversial legislations or policies concerning civic freedoms can provide opportunities for civil society to enter public debates and develop and promote its own agenda for the expansion of civic space.

Emerging protest movements create an opportunity for civil society to collaborate, support and form alliances and use this momentum to engage with the public support and generate support for civic and democratic space.

Strategies

Civitates embraces a wide range of strategies aimed at expanding civic space. Beyond advocacy strategies, this includes efforts that mobilize broad and diverse coalitions of civil society and the public (including youth) to support democratic values and civic participation. Civitates also supports strategies that enhance the ability of organizations to anticipate and address emerging scenarios, rather than solely reacting to threats and challenges. To support these goals, applicants can select from a variety of activities, including but not limited to:

- Building and developing networks across movements at national, regional, and transnational levels
- Creating new alliances beyond civil society (with actors such as professional associations, businesses, trade unions, etc.) to protect civic space
- Developing collective visions for civil society to work towards
- Expansion and transformation of civil society to include a broader range of actors and under represented groups
- Actions to shift narratives and activate values that support civil society and civic participation
- Engaging in futures thinking collectively to anticipate scenarios and developing capacity to address future challenges
- Testing new ways of organising and building stronger constituencies of support for civic engagement.

This list is illustrative, and Civitates strongly encourages applicants with innovative ideas and approaches not described above to apply.

CORE FUNDING

Civitates will provide flexible, core support over two years to ‘anchor’ partners in the six priority countries. Civitates means to provide core support to start building the preparedness of civil society to protect and expand civic and democratic space at key socio-political moments.
Core funding covers the core, operational expenses of the anchor partners. It covers the costs related to leading the coalition and managing the collaborative work. Part of the funding might be redistributed to coalition partners. Please note, as part of our selection process, we may ask you about your selection, due diligence, monitoring, and reporting processes. Please flag if the redistributed/re-granted amount exceeds 30,000 EUR/organization and specify the recipient partner in the application form as “main partner.”

Additionally, funding may cover the efforts of anchor partners to convene broader civil society to engage in forecasting to identify potential moments of transformative change in the country and to map out the necessary activities and capabilities needed. It may also cover costs to mobilize wider civil society and build public and political support for civic values before, during and after such events.

FUNDING +

Selected grantees will be eligible for additional funding covering learning and security needs of the organization. The exact areas of learning would be identified by grantees during the grant period but examples may include those connected to the work undertaken related to, for example, forecasting, work mobilization, coalition-building, and narrative and communication strategies. Other potential areas include developing new funding revenues supporting the coalition work with primary focus on local fundraising (crowdsourcing, individual, micro donations etc). Additional funding might be requested for the development of holistic security models of the grantees. It may cover the strengthening of the security and well-being of the organization and its staff, including psycho-social security.

GUIDELINES

Civitates aims to support up to 7 civil society organizations (at least one key partner from each eligible country) under this call. Applicants should submit fully developed proposals as well as an organizational questionnaire. The language of applications is English. Civitates realizes the difficulties that language requirements may impose on applicants and accepts proposals translated by translation systems (like DeepL or Google Translate). We recommend applicants to clearly flag if translation systems have been used. Proposals will be evaluated based on content and not on language quality.

Applicants should provide an analysis of their national context describing the most relevant threats to civic and democratic space. We do not expect a fully-developed scenario planning or forecasting but a brief overview of emerging trends and potential opportunities for transformative change that gives us a better understanding of the national context.

Applicants should describe how they engage with and build powerful connections with others in civil society through coalitions, networks, movements or other types of platforms. Civitates will prioritise applicants with a demonstrated commitment to and practice of collective action. Please describe how the planned work engages a broad range of civil society players. Applicants should reflect on the
participation of organizations representing marginalized communities and younger generations in the collaborative work.

Applicants should provide an analysis on their capacity and development needs related to engage in cross-sectoral networking, alliance and coalition building as well as preparation for collaborative work and action. It may include reflections on convening civil society to engage in forecasting to identify potential opportunities for change to civic space in the country and to map out the necessary activities and capabilities needed. It may also include capacity-building needs to enable these groups to mobilize wider civil society (including youth activists) and build support for civic values before, during and after transformative events. Applicants should also reflect on learning opportunities when civic space actors can gather together and learn from each other to develop and refine their individual and collective strategies.

Applicants should describe their outreach strategy to convene broad civil society collaboration and public support for civic space. Applicants should also reflect on their outreach toward wider audiences including strategic communication, mobilization and public advocacy strategies.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Civitates looks for key civil society organizations registered in Slovakia, Romania, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria and France that have a proven track record of work for civic space and democratic values. Civitates regards an organization as a “key” actor if the organization:

- works at the national level in its country, with connections to groups and collectives at the local level
- has a proven track record of work to protect civic freedoms, civic space, democracy
- has achieved significant results and has a central position in its national contexts with demonstrable impact
- Civitates prioritizes working with groups leading or working with coalitions and networks. Organizations with a clear commitment to build broader civil society coalitions might be also considered.
- Civitates also prioritizes organizations that conduct activities that have significant domestic and pan-European visibility and recognition.

Non-eligible and exclusion criteria:

- Political party-affiliated organizations are not eligible to apply for our support.

REQUIREMENTS DURING THE GRANT PERIOD

Grantees will submit annual financial and narrative progress reports as well as related documents (audience matrix and annual financial reports) one year after the start of the grant and a final report
within 30 days after expiration of funding. Grantees participate in mandatory, online and offline workshops and network events organized by Civitates.

GRANT PROCESS

The deadline for submitting applications is 18 August, 2024. Applications should be submitted through the Network of European Foundations’ Optimy portal.

Questions regarding the application process can be directed to the following e-mail address: secretariat@civitates-eu.org with the following subject line: SF1 Call 2024 (name of your organisation).

SELECTION OF GRANTEEES

Applications that are submitted by the deadline and meet the eligibility and administrative criteria (see below) will be reviewed. Please note that this is a competitive process under which a Selection Committee will evaluate all submitted applications that is competitive based upon the quality, the clarity and relevance of submitted proposals. Only limited number of applications will be selected for support (up to 6 proposals).

Administrative criteria

- Eligibility
- Completed proposal and budget template
- CVs of leadership team of the coalition
- Last official annual report of the applicant (2023)
- Due diligence questionnaire
- Registration document as a non-profit organisation
- Audited accounts and reports for 2021, 2022, 2023

Evaluation criteria

- Organizational commitment: the organization including its leadership is committed to building and leading a broad civil society coalition for the protection and expansion of civic space as a long-term, strategic goal, beyond the timeline of the proposal.
- Relevance: how the planned work of the coalition reflects on the challenges and opportunities concerning civic space in the respective national context.
- Capacity: the organization has a solid assessment of its as well as its partners capacity building needs to implement its plans.
- Contextual analysis: the organization has a strong understanding of the current trends impacting civic space in Europe and has a solid interpretation on their implications for its national contexts, including potential emerging opportunities for change.
- Partnerships and target audience: the proposal identifies relevant partners and concrete constituencies relevant for its mission to protect democratic freedoms and expand civic
The proposal reflects how the audiences as well as relevant issues of marginalized communities might be addressed.

- **Tools and methods**: the planned methods of development are well planned and adjusted to the goals of the organization.
- **Diversity, equity and inclusion**: organization's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion concerning the representation of different social groups within the team, the partnerships of the organisation and addressing the situation of marginalized groups most impacted by restrictions and attacks throughout the work.
- **Results, and impact**: the expected results and impacts are clear and measurable.
- **Budget**: the planned budget and its items are relevant and reflect priorities of the organization.

Applicants receive written notification of Civitates decision. Please note that Civitates is not obliged to provide detailed explanations of its decisions.

Applicants may submit one proposal per organization by using the attached proposal and budget templates. The duration of a grant is 2 years. The maximum amount is €120,000 for two years and the grant amount may not exceed the half of their last year of total spending. There is no eligibility limitation on the budget items as far as they are relevant for the implementation and comply eligibility criteria above.

Expected starting date of the grant: **1 January, 2025**

APPLICATION AID

All interested organizations are cordially invited to participate in a webinar on Civitates' Civic Power program on **17 June, 2024 between 11.00 and 12.00 (CET)**. The webinar combines conceptual and practical sessions and features a Q&A with Civitates staff. Please register [here](#).

Limited places are available, please register in time to secure your place.

Annexes

Proposal template

Budget template

CVs of leadership team

Due diligence questionnaire

Registration document as a non-profit organisation

Audited accounts and reports for 2021, 2022, 2023