

CIVICUS CRISIS RESPONSE FUND (CRF)

APPLICATION GUIDE

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About the CIVICUS Crisis Response Fund

The CIVICUS Crisis Response Fund (CRF) was set up in 2008 to support civil society organisations and initiatives facing new or escalating restrictions on their work by providing funding for resiliency and advocacy actions. It is designed to protect and strengthen civil society in the face of systemic threats, with a focus on safeguarding the rights to freedoms of assembly, association, and expression (FoAAE).

CRF advances one of CIVICUS's 2022-2027 Strategic Objectives of contributing to stronger emergency and sustained support ecosystems for activists and organisations at risk as part of improving of civic space globally. As an umbrella funding scheme that is supported by multiple funders, its strategy of combining financial support and close accompaniment allows civil society actors to find space for solidarity and partnerships in times of crisis.

The CRF provides short-term grants of 3–6 months, with a maximum grant amount of:

- USD 10,000 for a single organisation, or
- USD 20,000 for consortia of two or more organisations.

There are two types of grants offered:

- **Advocacy grants**
These grants support responses to unexpected restrictions on civic space or seize opportunities to expand and strengthen the environment in which civil society operates, advance rights or prevent backlash.
- **Resiliency/Emergency grants**
These grants support organisations and groups facing immediate and ongoing threats, enabling them to enhance their resilience and implement security measures.

Who can apply for a grant

The CRF accepts applicants from formal or informal civil society organisations, groups or social movements working to expand civic and democratic freedoms.

Smaller organisations, grassroots movements, and collectives that are often excluded from existing funding sources or represent traditionally marginalised groups—such as women, LGBTIQ+ individuals, youth, people with disabilities, Indigenous communities, and rural populations—will be prioritised.

Informal or unregistered groups applying for a grant must ensure they are **sponsored by a registered organisation or have access to a bank account or another appropriate method for receiving funds.**

Applicants do not need to be CIVICUS members or partners to apply for the grants, but members and partners are welcome to apply.

Applicants should not have received funding from the CRF in the last two years, as the CRF is designed to support as many organisations at risk as possible. Partners are not encouraged to consider the CRF as an annual fund for long-term resourcing. However, in mitigating circumstances, partners can apply for additional funds if a continuous threat to civic space is demonstrated. For information on additional resources, partners can refer to our Donor Finder at <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/donor-finder>, which lists potential funding opportunities.

What we fund – Types of responses and actions supported

For advocacy grants:

Partners must demonstrate that proposed activities respond to an urgent and/or escalating threat to freedoms of assembly, association, or expression and that those involved in the project face a high level of risk when exercising these rights.

Examples of activities include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Advocacy meetings and workshops to respond to restrictive laws governing FoAAE and influencing policymakers and key actors to amend restrictions or repeal these laws such as:
 - Convening of working groups of local, regional and international civil society to address the crisis; and/or
 - National workshops to discuss and plan advocacy strategies, such as repealing restrictive legislation.
- Actions responding to unexpected opportunities to raise concerns over restrictions such as:
 - Technical assistance for the analysis of pending or existing repressive legislation.
- Opportunities to expand civic space and enabling conditions for civil society, or for specific groups within the sector such as:

- Networking regionally with other civil societies under siege to exchange best practices and share legal expertise.
- Conducting counter-narrative campaigns to respond to smear campaigns against civil society.
- Harnessing opportunities in multilateral fora, like the United Nations or regional bodies, to put pressure on governments to uphold FoAAE such as:
 - Supporting civil society representatives from the ground in advocacy at international and regional forums.
 - Regional and international advocacy campaigns directed at regional and international bodies.
 - Submissions of reports to the human rights monitoring bodies of regional and international institutions.

For resiliency/emergency grants:

Partners must demonstrate that the proposed activities are designed to strengthen the security, safety, and organisational resilience of the applicant organisation(s) facing imminent risk.

This may include measures aimed at reducing immediate threats, mitigating risks, and enabling organisations to continue their work safely and effectively under restrictive or hostile conditions.

Examples of activities include, but are not limited to the following:

- Developing collective and community-based care and healing strategies to build movement sustainability and resilience.
- Providing psychosocial interventions for civil society actors at risk.
- Pre-emptively creating a strategy to respond to the threat of restrictions on access to foreign funding for civil society.
- Capacity strengthening initiatives including (and not limited to) digital and physical security trainings.

What we do not fund

The CRF is designed to protect and strengthen civil society by supporting groups and organizations facing systemic threats, rather than addressing individual cases. We fully recognise the serious challenges faced by human rights defenders and deeply appreciate your commitment to this important work under difficult circumstances. However, the CRF is not designed or equipped to respond to the following:

- Individual assistance, medical treatment and/or emergency stipends
- Individual relocation support
- Direct service delivery and/or direct financial assistance to individuals

Maintaining a clearly defined and limited scope of support is an essential part of our do-no-harm approach, ensuring that assistance is provided responsibly without creating additional risks or unmet expectations.

Application requests for emergency assistance for an individual or a CSO where two or more individuals are at risk can be made through other organisations identified through the [Rapid Response Directory](#). These organisations will evaluate requests using their own established guidelines and protocols.

Application and review process

Steps for applying to the CRF and evaluation of the application:

1. Take an [eligibility test](#) to assess whether your application meets the initial criteria.
2. Submit your application through our [online form](#).

Partners can submit an application in Arabic, French, and Spanish. We request that budgets are submitted in English.

Only in circumstances where partners feel unsafe or have limited access to the internet, they can download the [application pack](#) and email them to crisis.response@civicus.org.

3. The CRF team will evaluate requests on a rolling basis based on a set of eligibility criteria. Applicants can expect to hear back from the CRF team within 2-4 weeks of their application and, if necessary, provide initial feedback.
4. If the application meets the required criteria and the partner verification process is successful, partners can expect a total of 8-10 weeks processing of their application, verification, assessment, contracting and initial disbursement.

Please note that the CRF team may contact applicants for clarifications or additional budget information during the review process. The overall processing time will also depend on the availability and responsiveness of the partner during the review and contracting process.

Guidelines used to assess your application

The CRF will be used in cases that require immediate action – either to forestall imminent threats (through resiliency/emergency grants), or to address ongoing and new restrictions (through advocacy grants). Although responses should be as immediate as possible, CIVICUS evaluates when, why and how it should respond to particular situations.

If the situation under review affirms the following three questions, CIVICUS will then consider mobilising the CRF's resources:

1. Is it a crisis?

- For advocacy grants: Is it a crisis in freedom of assembly, association, and expression?

- For resiliency/emergency grants: Is it a crisis that requires action to enhance the resilience of civil society actors in response to violations of freedom of assembly, association, and expression?

A crisis can be categorised as one of the following:

- Significant deterioration of civic space in the areas of freedom of assembly, association, and expression. For example, urgent response is necessary to prevent the curtailment of civil society activities, because there are enough indications that restrictions on civil society are imminent.
- Escalation of existing threats to civil society: for example, civil society is already suffering from restrictions on its activities. This includes cases where civil society activity has been recently curtailed, as well as situations involving a growing number of threats over a period of time.

2. Are there systemic threats to civil society?

Systemic threats to civil society include:

- Those which undermine civil society in general in the country or region
- Threats to specific sectors of civil society, e.g. women's groups, environmental organisations, indigenous movements, among others

An individual attack on an activist would not generally be seen as a systemic threat; however, numerous attacks on activists could be part of a campaign to intimidate civil society groups, which would then be seen as systemic.

3. Will the proposed actions be beneficial?

In addition to deciding whether a situation has become a 'crisis', we must assess whether a response will be of assistance and will have a positive impact.

In evaluating potential positive impact, some of the criteria to consider are:

- Security: Will our actions place CIVICUS' staff or local members, partners or civil society in general in greater danger?
- Local actions: How will the proposed actions complement and enhance, or undermine, the work of local civil society?
- Presence of other actors: Are there already other actors working on this crisis? How would the proposed involvement provide additional assistance, or make an additional impact?
- Strategic value: To what extent does the country have the potential to influence other countries in the region, within the country, or locality of the area?

Notes to consider before/when applying

- **Proposed budget allocations:** Applicants are eligible to apply for personnel costs from the CRF, but these must be in proportion to the activities undertaken and should not be more than 30% of the overall budget. Personnel costs should be allocated based on the Level of Effort (LoE) that

each staff member will dedicate to the project, expressed as a percentage of their time.

Similar to personnel costs, core costs such as those for rent, ordinary internet access and other overheads, can be charged to the project budget at a level commensurate with project activities. Budgets with high overhead and core costs will undergo review in conversation with the CRF team.

As the CRF prioritises an urgent response or advocacy opportunities, the majority of budget proposed must be allocated to direct project activities.

- **Grant disbursements:** Grant amounts are disbursed in tranches. An initial tranche (e.g. 60% or 80% of the grant) is paid upon the signing of the grant agreement, **while the final tranche has to be pre-financed by the partner**. The final tranche will be reimbursed after completion of the project, following submission and approval of final reports (within 14–20 working days). Please note that this does not include time taken for the review of the final reports.
- **Costs incurred:** Costs can only be incurred once the grant agreement is signed by all parties and follows the start date specified in the grant agreement. Any costs incurred before the start date and after the end date will not be eligible for support under the CRF.
- **Language needs:** Please be advised that the grant agreement will be drafted in English.
- **Reporting requirements:** Partners are required to submit regular updates, narrative and financial report(s) and an impact report as part of their undertaking in the implementation of the grant.
 - Narrative report(s): The narrative report completed in the provided template, attached with all reports created during the project, multimedia and news articles related to the project activities.
 - Financial report(s): The financial report completed in the provided template, attached with all receipts, invoices and payments in English (or translated into English), and proof of the exchange rate used for payments.

If you have any further questions, please refer to the Frequently Asked Questions on our [website](#).

If your questions are not answered there, please contact the CRF team at crisis.response@civicus.org.

Thank you.