



# CIVICUS Solidarity Fund

## FRAMEWORK SUMMARY

This document proposes a framework for testing the first cycle of fund allocations of the CIVICUS Solidarity Fund (2019-2020), drafted based on (a) research on best practice in the sector, (b) consultation of members and the Board, (c) validation with CIVICUS team and key informants.

The proposal aims to create a member-led & member-resourced mechanism that provides both flexible and rapid response funds. These funds are mobilised in solidarity with deserving causes in restricted spaces that don't receive adequate support from traditional funding and other support mechanisms, and will be complemented by other forms of solidarity from the alliance (tools, mentorship, visibility and knowledge sharing). The framework will be presented for adoption at the CIVICUS Annual General Assembly in December 2018.

## Key features

### Guiding Principles

Solidarity, diversity and inclusion, complementarity, mission-alignment, transparency, power sharing, independence, accountability, innovation, flexibility and learning. The ones underlined shall be given priority over the others.

### Funding streams

- a) Flexible funds** (70% of available funds) – accessible every year through an open call.
- b) Rapid response** (30% of available funds) – open on a rolling basis and accessible by referral from members/secretariat team

### Eligibility criteria

- a) recipients** - all CIVICUS members (flexible funds); anyone in need referred by a member or Secretariat staff (rapid response funds)
- b) proposals** - meaningful for the communities involved/served; mission-aligned; relevant: a) addressing a specific need that cannot presently be met otherwise, b) supporting a visionary, bold action c) an urgent response/action that cannot be meaningfully supported through LifeLine or other available emergency response funds

### Governance and decision-making

- a) governance bodies:** CIVICUS Board (GovMemCo), Members Advisory Group (MAG), Fund Management Team (FTM)
- b) decision-making:**
  - Board—adoption of guiding framework, overall eligibility and selection criteria; selection of MAG from voting member nominations (assisted by the CIVICUS' Diversity and Inclusion Group); annual fund allocation; dispute resolution
  - MAG—decision-making body: short-listing and final selection of applications including decisions on related fund disbursements and other forms of support;

- FMT—supports the Membership Advisory Group and the Board, in both an implementation and advisory role; due diligence and application eligibility check, support to the MAG nomination and selection processes; advice and support to applicants.

### **Funding sources**

CIVICUS membership fees allocated to the Fund by the CIVICUS Board on annual basis; any additional voluntary contribution offered to the Fund by members (solidarity contribution). During this funding cycle, additional funds from CIVICUS core/programmes will be invested to host one face-face meeting of MAG and to cover costs of staff to ensure meaningful facilitation throughout the whole process.

## **GUIDING FRAMEWORK FOR CYCLE 1 OF THE CIVICUS SOLIDARITY FUND (CSF) 2019-2020**

### **1. BACKGROUND**

This document proposes the framework that will guide the first cycle of fund allocations for the CIVICUS Solidarity Fund (2019-2020). It reflects key inputs resulting from a combination of efforts, including research on best practice in the sector, consultation of members and the Board, and brainstorming with CIVICUS team and key informants.

This framework will be presented for adoption by a vote of the CIVICUS Annual General Assembly in December 2018.

### **Why this Fund?**

The Theory of Change underpinning our 2017-2022 Strategic Plan is based on the assumption that we are stronger when we work together. Belonging to a global movement for change that stands in solidarity is a central tenet of membership in the CIVICUS alliance.

In this spirit, CIVICUS membership fees are allocated to a CIVICUS Solidarity Fund (CSF) that complements other solidarity actions. The CSF aims to promote civil society diversity and resilience and seeks to provide meaningful resources and support to members and partners in need through flexible grants and rapid, responsive funding.

The Fund is accessible to a broad spectrum of constituents that normally struggle to access resources and support due to restrictions in the space where they operate, their organising characteristics or simply for who they are and what they challenge. These include small CSOs (formal and non-formal), individuals, movements - particularly from the edges- and early-stage social advocates and entrepreneurs that are contributing to transformational impact in the communities served. In addition to financial support, members accessing the Fund are assisted with tools, mentorship, visibility and knowledge sharing.

It is important to recognise that this is a learning process: the principles, criteria and decision-making processes indicated in this Framework have been chosen over other possible alternatives.

This choice has been based not only on inputs from the consultation process but also on what seemed most aligned with CIVICUS strategic goals, the new membership strategy and the commitment to support a more diverse, resilient and inclusive civil society. The model will be open for review; for this reason it will be important to include a solid learning and reflection component in the process.

## **2. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of the CIVICUS Solidarity Fund are to:

- Enhance solidarity within the alliance, fostering a sense of belonging to a global movement for change
- Support civil society diversity and resilience, especially among smaller, non-formal actors
- Create opportunities where they do not exist for change-seeking actors to contribute to a more just, inclusive and sustainable world

The Fund is a mechanism through which the CIVICUS Alliance jointly mobilises in solidarity with groups on the frontline of change that are too important to fail, and yet are struggling to receive meaningful support by existing mainstream mechanisms and therefore are left behind. We intend to keep this as a relatively small, agile mechanism independent from interferences by donors and other external actors, so we can dare to take risks and experiment with bolder and more relevant ways of resourcing activism and pockets of resistance throughout the world. The strength of this mechanism lies in the unique value of mobilising this resource as the collective solidarity of an alliance. The Fund shall function in a way that is not based on the typical donor-recipient dynamic.

## **3. GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

While we recognize that solidarity can be understood and expressed in different ways by members of the alliance, we agree on a set of guiding principles for how members of CIVICUS will uphold and apply this concept through the Fund.

### **Solidarity**

We believe that people and their organisations, working together, can change the world. By building solidarity among civil society across borders and at scale we will collectively achieve a more just, inclusive and sustainable world. The CSF aims to foster solidarity with our members and partners in need, and is one of the ways the alliance supports each other, promoting a sense of unity and common purpose. Solidarity and collective action inform all aspects of the Fund's operations, sources of funding, and decisions; this entails creating the best conditions for members' agency and impact, beyond a simple financial contribution.

### **Complementarity**

Beyond the financial support provided, the Fund facilitates connections and engagement with other members, partners and stakeholders. The Fund is also designed in synergy and

complementarity with other CIVICUS programming and existing and prospective funding mechanisms. This way, the financial support provided is enhanced by solidarity and strengthened capacity which improve members' resilience and impact.

### **Mission Alignment**

Funds are allocated to actors and initiatives that support our mission to strengthen civil society and citizen action for a more just, inclusive and sustainable world. Similarly, any interest derived from the potential investment of funds is mission-aligned according to a green/socially responsible investment policy.

### **Transparency**

Transparency is key to ensuring that the trust upon which the Fund is based is maintained. Members engaged in the management of the Fund will be selected through an open and transparent nominations and elections process, and their identities made safely known to all members. Similarly, all applications to access the Fund will be shared with the full CIVICUS membership, and all applicants will receive the selection criteria and assessment of their applications. Successful applicants will be required to report back on their use of the Fund to all members. Transparency and accessibility of information related to the Fund will facilitate a shared understanding and clarity throughout the process, which is especially important given the diverse backgrounds of our members and the need for common ground.

### **Power Sharing**

The Fund is not only member-funded, but also member-directed. Within the framework of these shared principles and values, those engaged in the Fund's decision-making and advisory bodies together decide who gets funded and how. Board members, nominated by and representing the alliance, oversee the CSF work and set the amounts to be disbursed every year, while members play the deciding role in the allocation and disbursement of funds.

### **Diversity and Inclusion**

Within the alliance we embrace diversity as strength and strive to empower and amplify the voices of those not usually included. We recognise diverse contexts, experiences and ways of working, respectfully learning from one another's practices. Through the CSF we offer diverse forms of support that are responsive to the specific context of each group, while always respecting CIVICUS' values. We embrace the principle of "nothing about us without us" and will make sure that - when needed- knowledgeable people from the same groups/ geography of the applicants are consulted during the selection process and that people directly impacted by the applicants can have a say during the final selection process. This principle is also informing the composition of decision-making bodies and the most appropriate facilitation to intentionally mitigate bias and imbalanced engagement.

## **Independence**

One of the principles behind the Fund is to ensure that the freedom and independence of civil society is never compromised. To that end the funding for the CSF is derived from membership fees and voluntary contributions from members. This model preserves independence from external priorities and agendas and ensures flexibility to pursue our goals. It also aligns our funding practices with our strategy by encouraging an independent, free civil society. Independence from traditional donors allows this mechanism to test and demonstrate more meaningful ways of practicing accountability and reporting to the alliance. This will be based on trust and on sharing of lessons, achievements and failures, rather than just listing what was paid with the money received.

## **Accountability**

We commit to uphold processes and agreements with accuracy, integrity, and accountability. Relationships with those accessing the Fund are built on trust, respect, equality and transparency. Peers assess fund applicants against clear criteria, and the results of the process are shared with all applicants and broader membership. Any conflicts of interest will be openly declared, and MAG representatives will excuse themselves from decision-making in these instances. We will encourage open feedback from recipients; we recognize that we are all learning and experimenting together and that open communication and reflection are crucial. We will seek reasonable, proportionate and context-appropriate ways of sharing how funds are utilised so that Fund recipients can use their energy and resources to generate impact rather than reports. The relationship and accountabilities between the Fund managers and advisors and recipients will be based on members acting in solidarity versus donors and grantees.

## **Innovation, Flexibility and Learning**

Innovation, flexibility and experimentation are core features of the CSF and entail thoughtful risk-taking, bravery, a willingness to make mistakes and learn from these. Collaboration and mutual learning are key to promote, model and disseminate best practice, translating the insights and solutions of those engaging in the Fund into lessons for the alliance. Flexibility is about catering for different needs and responses but also openness to change this framework as needed. Changes may be made through a vote by the Membership Advisory Group and validated by the CIVICUS Board. Flexibility will also inform the funding decisions and mechanisms, enabling support to flow to members and partners in need, even where they might not fulfil all the normal requirements (e.g. allowing transfer of funds when a member is forced into exile; facilitating alternative ways of accessing the funds for beneficiaries whose bank accounts have been frozen; etc.).

### **Note:**

We recognise that, although all important, there are principles that could complete for priority. In order to stay true to our ambitions the following principles will be prioritised over others during the design of the process: solidarity, diversity and inclusion, independence, innovation, flexibility and learning. We will revert to these principles at each stage of the process

## 4. ELIGIBILITY

### 4.1 Recipient Eligibility

**Flexible funding** can be accessed by all CIVICUS members provided they are vetted and meet voting membership eligibility requirements.

**Rapid Response funding** can be accessed by civil society groups and individuals irrespective of CIVICUS membership; in this case applicants are referred by CIVICUS members/staff and vetted using specific criteria (with voting members being eligible by default).

**Related tools:**

Eligibility guidelines  
CIVICUS Monitor country ratings  
Voting members eligibility criteria  
Voting members directory

In line with CSF's objectives and principles, priority will be given to small, informal groups and individuals from the global south and from contexts with restricted spaces. However, if duly motivated, proposals can be also accepted from established organisations of different geographies/contextes.

### 4.2 Proposals Eligibility

Proposals will be assessed according to the following criteria:

**Related tools:**

Strategic Plan 2017-2022  
Eligibility Guidelines  
Application form

- I. **Meaningful for the communities involved:** funds support actors whose mission and activism clearly benefit a broader community. Programme initiatives will be a result of a collective planning process in which those impacted by the project will play a lead role in its design.
- II. **Mission-alignment:** the applicant and/or proposed initiative clearly strengthens civil society and citizen action, contributing to a more just, inclusive and sustainable world. Alignment to the broader principles and priorities of the 2017-2022 Strategic Plan will be also considered, as well as the Diversity and Inclusion components of the application.
- III. **Relevance:** the motivation behind the request of support should clearly meet at least one of the following aspects: **a)** addressing a specific need that cannot presently be met otherwise; **b)** supporting a visionary, bold action (that traditionally risk-averse funders don't or can't support); **c)** resourcing an urgent response/action that cannot be meaningfully supported through Lifeline or other available emergency response funds

In addition to the above, further criteria can be proposed by the MAG and/or the Secretariat's team and included in the Eligibility Guidelines.

## 5. GOVERNANCE, ROLES, AND DECISION-MAKING

The CSF enacts participatory decision-making and efficient implementation through clear roles and responsibilities among the Board, voting members and Secretariat of the alliance:

### Tools

MAG decision-making protocol  
Guidelines for FMT  
Guidelines for Advisors

### a) CIVICUS Board

**What:** (a) makes all final decisions related to the Fund's guiding framework (including approving subsequent changes), (b) adopts eligibility guidelines and selection criteria; (c) selects, with the support of CIVICUS' Diversity and Inclusion Group, the Membership Advisory Group (MAG), who are nominated by and represent the voting membership, (d) decides annual allocations to the Fund\* and (e) serves as forum for resolution of conflicts/challenges related to the Fund.

**Who:** Governance and Membership Committee (\*full Board as part of adoption of annual budget)

**How:** CSF included as a special item at regular Governance and Membership Committee meetings and bi-annual Board meetings.

### b) Membership Advisory Group (MAG)

**What:** reviews applications, shortlists the top 20, decides final selection and related disbursements; proposes revisions to the Guiding Framework based on outcomes of the learning process; recommends additional support to complement funding for all successful applicants; reviews recipients' progress and discusses key learning for both the Fund and for the alliance; reports back to Members' AGM on progress and learning.

**Who:** a diverse group of voting members representatives (approximately 10 but not less than 7 for deliberation), with balanced coverage in terms of geography of origin (with preference for Global South), languages, issues, as well as other intersections (gender, age, ability, race, etc). MAG members serve on a voluntary basis for 2 years with staggered yearly rotation of half of the group to ensure continuation (for the first round, half of the MAG team will serve for 1 year only). Any voting member can nominate a representative to sit on the MAG and the selection is made by the Board, assisted by CIVICUS Diversity and Inclusion Group, based on the above criteria. Current Board members do not qualify as MAG members.

**How:** The group is facilitated by the FMT in accordance with this Guiding Framework and follows a participatory, inclusive decision-making protocol for all its engagements. Members of the group commit to dedicate enough time for this role, including at least the following: a) review and shortlist a portion of all eligible applications using a standardised scoring system; b) attend a face-to-face meeting (usually during International Civil Society Week) to jointly discuss and select final applicants; meet virtually at least twice per year to check progress and reflect on learnings/possible improvements ahead of the next funding cycle. A dedicated virtual collaboration space will be created to ensure continuous flow of information and responsiveness



of members for decision-making. Whenever possible, a sub-group of the MAG can also meet in person ahead of physical AGMs where progress and learnings are reported back to the alliance.

### **c) Fund Management Team (FMT)**

**What:** The team in the Secretariat responsible for supporting and implementing the decisions of the Board and Membership Advisory Group, assisting the Board, facilitating MAG members' deliberations in a way that ensures inclusion and diversity; and for coordinating all aspects of Fund operations. Moreover, since this team is not involved in funding decisions, it can also support applicants to craft and improve their applications and reporting.

**Who:** Composed of staff members and consultants of CIVICUS Secretariat who are responsible for CSF operations, or who belong to the Diversity and inclusion Group, under the supervision of the Membership and Networks Lead.

**How:** Acts in service to the Membership Advisory Group and the Board, in both an implementation and advisory role. When a decision is made, the team has the responsibility to coordinate action to implement that decision. When the Board and/or Membership Advisory Group are preparing to make a decision, the Team is responsible for bringing information, recommendations, and questions to them. This includes compiling information on recipient activity, progress, and learnings through quarterly and annual reports to the broader membership and Board. The FMT supports also the collection of MAG nominations from voting members and maintains the related roster.

### **d) Experts/Advisors (optional)**

During the selection process, in case specific knowledge and/or group representation is not available within the current MAG composition but is deemed necessary for a properly informed decision, MAG could decide to consult additional members or external experts with that specific geographic or thematic background.

## **6. FUND STRUCTURE**

CSF includes both flexible and rapid response funding schemes. Of the total resources allocated to the Fund every year, the aim is to share approximately 70% as flexible funds and 30% for rapid responses. This is an indicative partition that can be reallocated mid-term through the cycle based on actual expenditure and needs. Sources of funding include:

- CIVICUS membership fees allocated to the Fund by CIVICUS Board on annual basis
- Any additional voluntary contribution offered to the Fund by members (solidarity contribution)

#### **Tools**

Solidarity contributions guidelines  
Due diligence protocol

#### a. Flexible Funds:

- **Purpose:** The Fund may be used to address a problem or need identified by a CIVICUS member without necessarily stipulating a specific response/project (core funds) or may be used to support cutting edge work or bold and innovative ideas (seed funding). Costs of legal action, media coverage, travel/participation support to mission-aligned events and enhancing safety/wellness of activists and their communities are also admissible.
- **Due diligence:** applications must meet the criteria listed in section 5 above, as well as additional criteria specific to CIVICUS outlined in a dedicated due diligence protocol. The FMT does a first screening on eligibility and provides the MAG with a shortlist of proposals for consideration.
- **Decision-making:** Taking into account the funds available for the year, the MAG makes decisions about how these will be used, upon careful consideration of the due diligence findings by the FMT. For each specific case, MAG decides also the most suitable payment instalments which will be later reflected in the MoU.
- **Proposals accepted:** once a year through open call; normally between July and September (in year 1, proposals will be accepted between January and March)
- **Timeline:** funding periods should not exceed 24 months. Exceptions are considered when duly justified.
- **Minimum/Maximum request:** none; but the average request is expected to be between 10.000-20.000 USD per year.
- **Reporting and accountability:** While Fund recipients are not required to submit comprehensive narrative and financial reports, it is expected that they keep the FMT informed about how funds are being used and share related learning with their peers at the AGM and/or other relevant forums and platforms. Furthermore, a full account of Fund applications, selections, allocations and recipients is presented in the annual report of CIVICUS.
- **Complementary support:** In addition to financial support, fund recipients are assisted with tools, mentorship, visibility and knowledge sharing.

#### b. Rapid Response Funds:

- **Purpose:** The Fund may be used to support quick, principled civil society responses that harness emerging opportunities and/or counter threats during crises. The Fund will only be eligible if the applications are deemed worthy of support but cannot qualify through the Lifeline or other available rapid response mechanisms.
- **Due diligence:** Applicants must meet the criteria listed above in section 5, as well as additional criteria set in the Rapid Response fund guidelines. Due diligence is conducted by the FMT and the broader CIVICUS Secretariat.
- **Decision-making:** given the need to make very rapid decisions (ideally within 48 hours), the FMT vets eligibility and proposes a decision to MAG (or a designated sub-set if applicable) by email, including a recommendation on payment instalments. If no objection is raised within a 48-hour notice period, there is an assumption that the application is approved (silence=consent).
- **Proposals accepted:** at any time, by approaching FMT
- **Timeline:** up to 6 months, with possibility to renew/extend if need is shown
- **Maximum request:** 10.000 USD

- **Reporting:** Fund recipients are not required to submit comprehensive narrative and financial reports; however, it is expected that they keep the FMT informed about how funds are being used and share progress, outcomes and related learning. Furthermore, a full account of Fund applications, selections, allocations and recipients is presented in the annual report of CIVICUS.
- **Complementary support:** In addition to financial support, grantees are assisted with tools, advice, visibility and solidarity mobilization/calls to action.

## 7. LEGAL AND FINANCIAL STRUCTURE

The Fund is housed at the CIVICUS Secretariat and exists as a dedicated line of its annual budget. CIVICUS Secretariat is the entity through which the Fund receives and sends payments (grants, membership fees and solidarity contributions), and it is also the entity that facilitates all governance and decision-making processes by members. This structure provides for accurate accounting around the Fund contributions and allocations, as everything is tracked on the financial reports of CIVICUS.

### Tools

Annual Report  
Annual Budget  
Guidelines for  
endowment investment

**Operating costs:** The costs associated with the administration of the Fund and the monies allocated through the Fund are member-derived. Member contributions go into a general pot of funding and cannot be earmarked for specific initiatives or actors, except in instances when these contributions are made in response to a ‘special appeal’ for an intervention identified by the CIVICUS Board based on clear needs and criterion.

At the start of the cycle, the Board allocates the amount coming from membership fees and solidarity contributions that will resource the Fund. A management fee of 10% of the total allocated funds is retained by CIVICUS Secretariat at the beginning of the cycle to contribute towards costs associated with the Fund management (staff costs, bank transaction costs, IT and communication/translation costs). During this funding cycle, specific costs that cannot be fully covered under that 10% allocation will be covered through the Secretariat’s core funds to ensure enough quality/time of dedicated staff to facilitate the process and meaningful spaces for engagement of the MAG members, overcoming as much as possible any possible bias in equal participation. This will be the case for instance of costs related to the organisation of the face-to-face meeting for MAG members as well as staff costs.

In case of abundance, the Board might want to consider investing a portion of the amounts allocated to this Fund.

## 8. LEARNING, REFLECTION, AND SHARING

Given the experimental nature of this initiative we are committed to ensuring that learning and reflection happens at each step, and that these learnings are shared in ways that are useful for our alliance and the actors we strive to influence. This happens in several ways:

### Tools

Dashboard/indicators  
Guidelines for learning and  
evaluation

- Reflection at all meetings of the MAG. The FMT compiles case studies, stories, and important data from the quarter preceding the meeting (including analysis of applicants' support needs and major constraints using the data of the applications received), to support a focused, fruitful reflection activity during the meeting;
- FMT connects periodically with recipients one-on-one and in small groups, to talk through open-ended questions, bring attention to emergent learnings, and engage in contextual analysis. In this way, the FMT seeks to be a resource and support rather than extractor of information and data; the information is shared back with the MAG and with the wider alliance, especially to harness support and solidarity.
- Learning exchange of MAG members at the end of every cycle, if possible through a face-to-face meeting. The Fund Management Team ensures that the agenda for the Learning Exchange builds on the key questions and interests that have arisen throughout the previous exchanges.

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