

Law or Rule-Based Restrictions



Background

The international community is increasingly adopting an ecosystems approach to address shrinking civic space. This approach acknowledges the importance of the linkages and communication that occurs among nonprofit organizations, and among informal and grassroots organizations. According to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace's *Global Civic Activism in Flux*, "Civic activism has become more sporadic, tactically innovative, and intent on using local autonomy and ownership."²⁵ It appears that new forms of civil society are becoming less dependent on established, formalized and institutionalized members and are less likely to channel funds exclusively through traditional nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).²⁶ Coordination and information sharing among engaged civil society and grassroots organizations can be pivotal to the success of the campaign or movement. This new interpretation and structure of civil society is manifested in global trends. First, the recipients of development, human rights, and humanitarian organizations are increasingly seen as beneficiaries rather than victims without agency. The spread of mobile phones and payment technologies has in part facilitated a power shift away from donor agencies to the grantee and beneficiary base. Secondly, a growing range of organizations seeks to directly serve poor communities, with public-private partnerships between civil society organizations and the business sector becoming more common. All parties need new skills and experience to navigate this changing landscape and to bridge the cultural divide often found between integrated civil society organizations (CSOs), social enterprises,

and corporate social responsibility initiatives.²⁷ Thailand's mass mobilization through large-scale campaigns, Brazil's emphasis on local collectives for civic engagement, and the upswing of volunteerism in the Middle East and North Africa illustrate the impact of informal grassroots networks. Given the impact, informal connections between organizations representing diverse interests can have, alongside fast-paced change in this modern era of philanthropy, effective coordination and information sharing among civil society organizations is even more vital to resilience against shrinking civic space.

Strategies

- **Support the creation of regional resource centers and NGO platforms (Funder):** Funders can effectively support coordination and information sharing amongst their grantees through regional resource centers and platforms. For example, the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency installed regional hubs to provide civil society with access to funder knowledge and research. The hubs also provide networking and collaboration opportunities.²⁸ The Prague Civil Society Center offers an innovative model for coordination based on the specific problem facing the grantee. As a part of its Technology and Innovation Labs platform, the center seeks out new technology and campaigning methods to assist a particular NGO. The center then identifies leading experts and professionals and brings them in to provide training and host workshops for the activists. These training often involve activists from across the world and ideas from the private sector. The parties produce a new project, product, or campaign on behalf of the NGO requesting support. The center funds the most promising projects and supports coordination among global activists to spread knowledge across regions of civil society.²⁹ Funders have also sought to improve coordination amongst themselves through platforms such as Worldwide Initiatives for Grantmaker Support (**WINGS Forum**), which brings together a diverse philanthropic staff to discuss innovations in the sector, share practical lessons, and give inspiration. In 2014, the WINGS Forum met in Istanbul, Turkey, to explore the theme "The Power of Networks." Members of the philanthropic sector met to discuss developments in infrastructure and the featured success stories.³⁰

- **Use different funding modalities (Funder):** [Solidaire's](#) “pooled fund” and “aligned giving” processes provide two different examples. Through a pooled fund, Solidaire provides risk capital for leaders on the ground whose goal is to spark social change. By pooling resources, Solidaire is able to offer funding for creative and “innovative experiments in movement-building” that might not be funded through the traditional proposal process. In contrast to funding short-term experiments and interventions, Solidaire established their “aligned giving strategies” to coordinate the impact of a series of grants Solidaire plans to make over a long time horizon, with a special focus investing in the infrastructure of social movements. Solidaire’s first aligned giving strategy is in support of the Movement for Black Lives, partnering with black-led organizations over the next five years to ensure they have the financial resources necessary to address structural racism and discrimination in the United States.³¹
- **Support NGOs that act as brokers; help them to access info, raise awareness, advocate, and connect (Funder):** An organization’s model of civic engagement is rooted in its cultural and political context. The “new” activism described in the introduction does not always replace or absorb civil society. In fact, it can be a rival. In all eight countries examined in Carnegie’s *Global Civic Activism in Flux*, new activists explicitly sought to counter “elitist” NGOs as frequently as the state.³² This illustrates why there is no substitute for coordination and information sharing on a local level. [The Human Rights Funders Network's](#) Cross-Border Philanthropy Group uses information exchange, advocacy, and collaboration. Its end goal aims to create an enabling environment that expands local organizations’ access to resources and networks. Numerous organizations and initiatives encourage connectivity and information sharing among NGOs. The [Funders' Initiative for Civil Society](#) and the [Donor Working Group on Cross-Border Philanthropy](#) are coordination platforms that bring together funders. In terms of region-specific groups, [Human Rights and Democracy Network](#) feature a community of only European NGOs and the [Africa Platform](#) has created a network of more than 20 civil society organizations and focuses specifically on state-society relations in post-conflict countries throughout the continent.

Actor	Responses	Examples/Explanations	Key Resources (Reports or Organizations)
Funder	Support the creation of regional resource centers, pooled giving, and NGO platforms	USAID and SIDA installed regional hubs to support civil society with knowledge provision, research, and convening	Co-creating the Civil Society Innovation Initiative: Process Journey from Idea to Design , by SIDA, USAID, Aga Khan Foundation, and Open Society Foundations, implemented by CIVICUS and Reboot
		International Forum of National NGO (IFP) Platforms, 2008	IFP Secretariat: Magda Elena Toma and Sanaa Nadir
		WINGSForum: an event that brings together private funders and leaders in philanthropy to share knowledge, network, and advance philanthropy worldwide	WINGSForum

		<p>Solidaire model: pooled fund aligned giving strategies, and sharing on behalf of grantees</p>	<p>Solidaire</p>
		<p>Technology and Innovation Labs, a platform established by Prague Civil Society Center, seek out new technology and leading experts, and engage activists to help NGOs with products and campaigns</p>	<p>Technology and Innovation Labs program of Prague Civil Society Center</p>
Funder	<p>Support NGOs that act as brokers; help them to access info, raise awareness, advocate, and connect</p>	<p>Human Rights Funders Network Cross-Border Philanthropy Group uses information exchange, advocacy, and collaboration to create an enabling environment</p>	<p>Human Rights Funders Network</p>

CIVICUS and Reboot's Civil Society Innovation Initiative supports CSOs through regional support hubs

[Co-creating the Civil Society Innovation Initiative: Process Journey from Idea to Design](#), by SIDA, USAID, Aga Khan Foundation, and Open Society Foundations, implemented by CIVICUS and Reboot

Funders' Initiative for Civil Society brings together private philanthropy to ensure civic space, citizen participation, and freedom from government restriction

[Funder's Initiative for Civil Society](#)

Donor Working Group on Cross-Border Philanthropy enables human rights donors to respond to jurisdiction restriction on funding of CSOs

[Donor Working Group on Cross-Border Philanthropy](#)

Human Rights
and Democracy
Network:
coordinating
platform only for
European CSOs

Human Rights
and Democracy
Network

Africa Platform:
network of more
than 20 CSOs
focusing on
state-society
relations in
post-conflict
African countries

Africa Platform

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