Why TAI Created This Toolkit

The members of the Transparency and Accountability Initiative (TAI) are committed to strengthening civic space around the world. In the spirit of "connecting the dots" across this expansive topic, we sought to collate existing resources, tools, and strategies that can be used by both donors and grantees to mitigate some of the challenges that accompany increased restrictions on civic engagement.

As the civic space challenge grows in reach and complexity, stakeholders will need to adapt these approaches to purpose and context. Thus, the strategies below consider both the funder and the grantee perspective (noted in parentheses next to the strategy) and also address how external actors and partners can support nongovernmental organizations' responses.

Purpose and Approach

This tool is not meant to be an exhaustive review, but a practical, living resource. Examples of approaches, tools, and strategies were drawn from existing cross-disciplinary literature on the transparency, accountability, and civic participation space; from political science, history, and psychology literature; and directly from funders and grantees themselves. The approaches outlined vary from funder-assisted shifts in grantee organizational strategy, to leadership training or mentorship programs, to support for accessing local partnerships, to name a few. We're eager to learn from like-minded organizations working around the world on this important issue, and to share their experience, knowledge, and insights through this tool.

Organization

This toolkit features approaches organized by the problem or challenge faced by either the funder or grantee. Where possible, the target actor (funder or grantee) is identified. With each problem or challenge, the toolkit presents the following potential responses:

- Strategies: fresh ideas, modalities, and ways of working to inform how stakeholders think about the shrinking space trend and how to adapt their strategies accordingly.
- Tools: organizations, individuals, and resources that can be used tactically to address a specific problem.
- Country example: lessons from different country contexts where a manifestation of shrinking space occurred and was addressed.

Since the civic space problem is embedded in relationships and systems, responses often address multiple challenges. For example, fostering grassroots partnerships likely has numerous positive externalities, such as increasing access to information and strengthening CSO credibility within a given community.

Numerous actors and organizations have committed to supporting robust civic engagement. A subsection of them are particularly focused on the search for practical solutions, including:

- International Network of Civil Liberties Organizations
- Protection International
- TechSoup
- CIVICUS
- Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
- The International Human Rights Funders Group
- United States Institute of Peace
- Funders' Initiative for Civil Society
- Emergency Assistance to Frontline Activists
- Lifeline Embattled CSO Assistance Fund
- Open Government Partnership

Other initiatives and organizations are listed in relevant sections of the toolkit.
Beyond this toolkit, there are more resources available on how to combat shrinking civic space:
- An Overview of Global Initiatives on Countering Closing Space for Civil Society, from the Center for Strategic and International Studies, provides a comprehensive review of existing approaches to the challenge.
- Gaining Ground: A Framework for Developing Strategies and Tactics in Response to Governmental Attacks on NGOs: The International Network of Civil Liberties Organizations' manual directly addresses closing civic space issues from the perspective of NGOs or grantees. It serves as a useful complement to the funder perspectives represented in the toolkit.