

Terms of Reference: Research Project

Strengthening technical expertise in civil society in Europe: learnings, challenges and opportunities.

The [European AI & Society Fund](#) (EASF) and [Civitates](#) are inviting proposals for research to understand how increased access to tech skills could support Europe's tech justice community to achieve their goals.

Deadline for submissions: 3 February 2025

Available budget: up to €13,500 for around 20 days of work

Delivery February – July 2025

1. Background

- There is a perceived need for civil society groups working on tech justice in Europe to have access to tech skills to be able to do their work effectively. With this we do not mean internal IT infrastructure for NGOs but rather the knowledge and understanding to interrogate the technologies and technology products that organisations are addressing in their work and to make use of regulation and other mechanisms that could achieve accountability over them. However, the specific interventions where tech expertise is required, and the exact skill sets that would be beneficial have not been clearly identified and articulated.
- We are aware of some examples within our communities¹ where groups have been able to effectively use tech skills to advance their policy and accountability goals. Meanwhile adjacent fields like spyware accountability and digital security have integrated tech skills into their ecosystems. We would like to understand what lessons can be drawn from these experiences.
- We are also aware of some perceived blockers to integrating tech expertise into civil society work. These include lack of resources, institutional structures and team practices in civil society, uninteresting project scopes and lack of opportunities and career advancement for technologists, active recruitment by tech companies, diverging priorities and work methods between technologists and advocacy/strategic litigation professionals and fast evolving changes in the tech landscape. We would like to understand more about these and other potential barriers and how to overcome them.

¹ These include AI forensics, Algorithm Audit, AlgorithmWatch, Amnesty International, Bits of Freedom, CDT Global, Democracy Reporting International, Eticas, ICCL, Interface, La Quadrature du Net, Mnemonic, the Recommender Systems Taskforce led by Panoptikon, Reversing.Works, and Worker Info Exchange.

- While there has been some exploration of these areas, we are not aware of a focused piece of research that systematically understands the needs of the field, the challenges and opportunities of building and retaining tech skills in the field, and the approaches different stakeholders could adopt to address these questions.

2. Goals for the research:

Our goal is to create a baseline of common understanding with actionable recommendations that will allow civil society, technologists and funders to collectively address the tech skills challenge.

1. Identify in what contexts tech skills could benefit civil society's work on tech justice in Europe and what specific skillsets are required
2. Identify and draw lessons from examples where this has been done well both in our field and in adjacent communities
3. Understand what barriers to integrating tech skills exist from the side of civil society groups
4. Understand what barriers prevent technologists from working in civil society contexts
5. Understand what previous attempts funders have made to resource tech skills in this and adjacent fields and what lessons can be drawn from this
6. Present clearly communicated findings and actionable recommendations to each of the stakeholder groups to address the challenges identified in the research

3. The audience

- EAISF & Civitates teams and partner foundations
- The wider tech, democracy and social justice philanthropic community (eg participants at the Ariadne Tech & Society funders group, EAISF funders' learning lunches, FABI)
- Our grantees & European civil society whose work needs technical expertise
- Technologist communities that are aligned with our work

4. Tasks

The research is initially conceptualised as a four-step process: evidence gathering, analysing, testing the findings and presenting the findings. If the researcher wishes to take a different approach, they should explain this in their response to the ToR.

Step 1: information gathering

We anticipate this will be a combination of desk research and structured interviews with participants from the stakeholder groups: civil society, technologists, funders, regulators, policymakers. Civitates and the European AI & Society Fund will support the researcher in making contact with relevant interview partners within their networks.

Step 2: Analysis:

Based on the findings, draw insights that address the goals of the research project. We anticipate these will include learnings from setbacks and successful collaborations as well as

creating a taxonomy of contexts where tech skills could be beneficial to civil society and categories of specific skillsets that are needed. Develop draft recommendations targeted to each of the stakeholder groups.

Step 3: Testing and review

Share analysis and draft recommendations with a group of relevant stakeholders to test and refine them. Ensure that recommendations are actionable for each group within the contexts they operate in.

Step 4: Synthesize and communicate findings

The findings should be summarised in a clearly written, accessible report of no more than 20 pages (excluding notes and annexes) that will be designed and published jointly by EAISF and Civitates. The researcher should also be prepared to present their findings at up to 3 meetings of relevant stakeholders organised by EAISF and Civitates.

5. Outputs

We require a clear, accessibly written report which summarizes the points above and provides actionable recommendations for civil society organizations, new and existing public interest technologists and funders, which we will share with the target audiences identified above and publish on our and our partner's website (strategic insights should be redacted from a public version, such as strategic litigation).

Recommendations should recognize the contextual limitations of the challenge, such as limited resources, and ensure that they are actionable within these constraints.

Further relevant information (overview of key stakeholders and their functions) should be shared as an annex and be made available as a practical resource for the EAISF team and wider community.

6. Timeline & Budget:

- First draft April 2025
- Testing & review May 2025
- Completed by June 2025
- Editing by Civitates and AI fund July 2025

Available budget: 13,500 EUR for around 20 days

7. Expression of Interest

We are looking for a researcher or team of researchers with:

- Technical background or track record of working on technical topics
- Experience in or with the non-profit/charity/policy sector in Europe
- The ability to translate technical topics to different non-technical audiences
- Understanding of organisational challenges faced by interdisciplinary teams or cross-sectoral collaborations
- Track record of conducting research using qualitative methods
- Excellent written and spoken English
- Ability to write clear and concise research outputs
- Previous experience in engaging with the philanthropic sector is an added value

How to apply?

If you wish to be considered for this research role, we would be grateful if you could provide us with a CV, budget and project proposal of max 5 pages including:

- A short outline of how you would plan to undertake the research, including any challenges and risks and how you would mitigate them.
- A timeline for the work
- Short bios of the people who would undertake this work and their relevant skills
- Examples of comparable work you've done
- A budget (high level ie day rate/ number of days)

Please upload a project proposal, including a budget and CV in one PDF file of max 5 pages to our application platform [Optimy via this link](#) until **until 3 February 23:59 CET**.

If you have any questions or experience any technical difficulties, please contact info@europeanaifund.org and secretariat@civitates-eu.org

About Civitates

[Civitates](#) is a philanthropic pooled fund that was established in 2018 to defend and promote democracy and civic space in Europe. Since its inception, it has supported more than 60 organisations in 18 countries with a total amount of € 15 million.

About the European AI & Society Fund

The [European AI & Society Fund](#) is a collaborative philanthropic initiative that exists to empower public interest advocates to shape AI to better serve people and society. We resource public interest organisations to shape policies around AI that promote fair, inclusive and sustainable societies. We do it through funding public interest work on AI and social justice, nurturing public interest ecosystem and galvanizing philanthropy to grow resources for the field.