Call for proposals

Civil society advocacy for rights-based digital governance

The Council for Responsible Social Media (CRSM), working with Civic Compass, invites civil society organisations working in Kenya's digital space to apply for the POLIS Kenya 2027 cohort. The pilot will bring together about organisations and up to 28 participants to develop practical advocacy strategies that shape how digital technologies are designed, governed and used in Kenya.

Digital technologies are reshaping how people in Kenya access public services, participate in public life and hold institutions to account. Digital public infrastructure, including digital identity and systems that allow public agencies to exchange data, can simplify access to services through portals such as eCitizen. In elections, technology supports voter registration and identification, as well as the transmission and tallying of results. Digital platforms also widen access to voter education, help communities organise and engage candidates, and enable citizens and observers to document and report irregularities.

These benefits depend on how systems are designed, who can use them and what safeguards are in place. An inaccessible interface, an error in an identity record or unaffordable internet access can put essential services and information out of reach. Weak safeguards can expose personal data to misuse or breaches. Online platforms can amplify false claims about voting procedures and inflammatory content, while harassment and gendered disinformation can push women candidates and other targeted groups out of public debate.

As public institutions and technology companies collect, use, share and store more personal data, and as they increasingly use AI in public services and other areas of public life, civil society has a role in shaping the rules and demanding accountability. Some of the critical concerns that civil society must engage with include what data is collected, how is it obtained and why is it needed? Who can access it, how long is it kept and what control do people have over its use? Who is accountable when a system excludes someone, an automated decision causes harm or a platform fails to address abuse? What remedies can affected people access?

Ahead of Kenya's 2027 elections, POLIS Kenya will support 10 civil society organisations to develop evidence-based advocacy strategies to engage government agencies, regulators and other public institutions, as well as technology companies and digital platforms, to protect digital rights, widen participation and secure accountability across Kenya's digital ecosystem.

What the support will entail

- A virtual orientation workshop in January to introduce the participants to the course
- Attend a two-day in-person workshop in March 2027.
- Be a member of a community of practice post the workshop
- About five organisations will receive tailored follow-up support to apply their advocacy strategies.

Who should apply

Kenyan civil society organisations, community-based organisations, networks and collectives with current work or a clear track record on advocacy in digital rights, civic technology, information integrity, media freedom, inclusion or electoral accountability are encouraged to apply. Applicants should show a clear connection between their proposed advocacy issue and rights, inclusion or public accountability in Kenya's digital environment.

We welcome applicants from across Kenya, particularly groups led by or working with women, young people and persons with disabilities. Nominate up to three team members who with decision making and/advocacy responsibilities in the organizations and can participate throughout and help carry the work forward. Final team sizes will depend on cohort capacity.

How to apply

Submit one proposal per organisation or coalition. For a joint proposal, identify one lead organisation and contact person. Use the prompts below and keep your response to a maximum of five pages.

1. Organisation and proposed team

Give your organisation's name, county or counties of operation, relevant work, and the names and roles of your nominees. Provide a brief on each of the nominees including relevant experience. Include a contact person's email and telephone number.

2. Digital rights issue

Describe the problem, who is affected and why it matters for digital rights, inclusion or public accountability in Kenya. Include one example or source if available.

3. Proposed advocacy change

State what you want to change and who has the authority to act. Name likely allies or stakeholders whose support will matter.

4. Initial action and community participation

Describe two or three steps you could take within 90 days after the in-person workshop. Explain how affected communities would shape the work and how you would manage any safety or privacy risks.

5. Learning needs and commitment

Tell us what support, besides funding would help you advance the proposal and confirm your team's availability for the orientation, workshop and follow-up. You may indicate any accessibility or participation support you need.

How proposals will be assessed

- Relevance to digital governance and a clear connection to rights, inclusion or public accountability in Kenya.

- Clarity of the problem, the proposed change and the institution or company that can act.
- Connection to affected communities and a credible plan to involve them safely and meaningfully.
- Feasibility of taking initial advocacy steps within 90 days.
- Organisational commitment to participate, collaborate and apply the learning.

In forming the cohort, the selection team will also consider geographic and thematic diversity and the representation of women, young people and persons with disabilities.

Submission and enquiries

Application deadline • [Date and time, East Africa Time]
Submission channel • [Application link or email]
Enquiries and accessibility requests • [Contact email]
Selection notification • [Date]