Terms of Reference (TOR) for Research Consultancy

Project Title: What are the benefits of a healthy civil society?

Background: The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) is a Quaker organization that promotes lasting peace with justice, as a practical expression of faith in action. Drawing on continuing spiritual insights and working with people of many backgrounds, we nurture the seeds of change and respect for human life that transform social relations and systems. AFSC is building a global program focusing on civic space and intends to undertake research to inform the development of this initiative.

The purpose of this research consultancy is to develop an advocacy tool that encourages civil society to recognize the significance of a healthy civil society. The project aims to explore whether there is a decline in the recognition of civic space's value and, if so, the reasons behind this trend. Through desk research, the consultant will explore the concept of a healthy civil society.

Objectives of the research: The researcher will;

1. Conduct desk research to define and conceptualize the characteristics of a healthy civil society, in alignment with the work and definitions of CIVICUS.
2. Investigate whether there is a decline in the recognition of the value of civic space among various stakeholders.
3. If so, explore reasons behind the declining interest in civic space among the general public and civil society actors.
4. Assess the accessibility and understandability of the language used in discussions related to civic space and offer more accessible terminology if found.
5. AFSC will be identifying specific countries for future work. We may request the consultant to develop case studies demonstrating civic space restrictions in some of these countries.
6. Identify and highlight the benefits of a healthy civil society for communities and mainstream populations.

Methodology: The research will primarily rely on desk research methods, including literature reviews, reports, academic articles, and policy documents. The consultant will critically analyze existing data and evidence to address the research objectives effectively.

Scope: The scope of work for this research consultancy encompasses a comprehensive range of activities and deliverables to fulfill the objectives.

Deliverables:

A 25-page maximum report, excluding appendices, with 1.5-page executive summary. The report should include:

1. Defining and outlining the attributes of a healthy civil society
2. Identifying indicators of a healthy civil society
3. Identifying the benefits to mainstream population of a healthy civil society
4. Assessing whether there is a decline in the recognition of the value of civic space and if so, in-depth exploration of the reasons behind the declining interest in civic space.
5. Assessment of the accessibility and clarity of language used in discussions related to civic space, and a provision of more accessible language and terminology
6. Case study/studies with declining civic space if required
7. Recommendations on how AFSC can promote healthy civil societies
8. Conclusion
**Timeline:** The report is expected to be submitted by 30 September 2023. There may be some back and forth with comments or questions, and a final report will be submitted by 15th October 2023.

**Reporting and Communication:** The consultant will maintain regular communication with the focal contact person from AFSC throughout the research process. Progress updates and draft reports will be submitted for review and feedback as required.

**Consultant profile:**

1. Research expertise
   1.1. Advanced degree in a relevant field such as Political Science, International Relations, Social Science, or a related discipline
   1.2. Proven track record in conducting rigorous research, including experience with mixed methods approaches, data collection, analysis, and interpretation
2. Subject matter knowledge
   2.1. In-depth understanding of civil society, civic freedoms, and the dynamics of social and political engagement.
3. Methodological proficiency
   3.1. Strong skills in both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies.
4. Analytical skills
   4.1. Ability to critically analyze complex data, identify trends, draw meaningful conclusions, and derive actionable recommendations.
5. Communication skills
   5.1. Excellent written communication skills to present findings, insights, and recommendations effectively
   5.2. Experience in creating clear and concise reports
6. Ethical awareness
   6.1. Strong understanding of ethical considerations in research, particularly when dealing with sensitive data and engaging with diverse stakeholder groups.
7. Cultural sensitivity
   7.1. Cultural awareness and sensitivity, especially when working with stakeholders from different regions and backgrounds.
8. Project and time management skills

**Budget:** 4,500 USD total for the consultancy, with the expectation that the time committed will be at least ten days.

**Confidentiality:** All information and data gathered during the research consultancy will be treated with utmost confidentiality and used solely for the intended purposes.

**Rights and Ownership:** Upon completion, all research findings and materials will be the property of American Friends Service Committee and the consultant shall not use or disclose the findings without prior written consent.

**Submission of Proposals:** Interested consultants should submit their research project proposals, including a cover letter, CV, sample of previous work to TOR@afsc.org by Monday 21st August 2023 at 9am BST. Interviews are planned to be held on 23rd and 25th August. For any questions or clarifications please contact the email provided.