



Bridging Borders to Protect Civic Space

KEY FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

May 2025

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1. Civil society actors recognise common threats to civic space across countries and regions (eg surveillance, repression, legal restrictions) and need context specific strategies and localized leadership.
2. Authoritarian tactics are being replicated globally; civil society actors find sharing strategies to resist and protect civic space critical to strengthening responses.
3. Civil society is fragmented but civil society leaders are committed to collaborative and unified efforts through cross-sector strategies. Cross sector collaboration is essential to overcome fragmentation of civil society; civil society actors emphasise the need for resourced, intentionally designed convening spaces that enable national level alliances across movements and issues.
4. Even when civic space is closed and civil society actors are at extreme risk, civil society mobilises through quiet and innovative efforts such as digital and underground platforms.
5. Civil society actors advocate for intergenerational collaboration and mentorship structures to pass down movement wisdom. AFSC and similar actors can create and sustain spaces for youth leadership by integrating young people in convenings and platforming youth voices.
6. Documentation and storytelling as a form of resistance is a key tool for advocacy and truth telling in repressive contexts.
7. Civil society actors deeply value wellbeing and collective care practices, emphasising the importance of integrating practices into organizational cultures as essential to sustaining movements and protecting civic space.
8. Civil society actors recognize the importance of wellbeing and collective care in sustaining civic space efforts, valuing the dedicated space for learning and reflection as meaningful on a personal and organizational-wide level.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ORGANIZING CONVENINGS

1. AFSC and similar actors can play a key role in creating and sustaining in person convening spaces that foster dialogue, exchange and relationship building. These spaces support ongoing cross-sector engagement and collaboration, helping to reduce fragmentation and strengthen solidarity across civil society.
2. Co-creation processes are a necessary aspect of convenings; centering participatory design strengthens participant ownership, engagement and collective outputs and AFSC can integrate this practice into future convening planning.
3. To enable civil society actors to engage deeply, AFSC and similar organisations can incorporate language justice principles into their convening planning. This means providing resources for interpretation to ensure accessibility for all.
4. Wellbeing and collective care are essential for sustaining those working to protect civic space. Organizations like AFSC can play a key role by explicitly prioritizing the creation of healing-centered spaces and integrating wellbeing practices into all convenings and processes they support.
5. Strategic foresight/future planning is highly effective when built into convening agendas to support participants to anticipate political, funding, and civic space shifts and develop proactive responses.
6. Clear shared expectations around outputs and post-convening support are important. They help to build trust and encourage sustainable, participant led action.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPPORTING HEALTHY AND THRIVING CIVIL SOCIETY

1. Funder flexibility increases opportunities in an ever-changing landscape, and adaptable approaches can be advocated for with donors to enable civil society actors to respond to fast shifting realities faced by participants.
2. Advocacy and communications capacity can be strengthened for civil society actors through context specific training opportunities, particularly for civil society actors in highly restrictive contexts.
3. Peer learning networks that emerge from convenings are best supported through intentional resource-sharing and participant-led follow up initiatives.
4. AFSC and similar actors can add value by continuing to create dedicated spaces for civil society and human rights defenders to exchange tools, practices and experiences that promote wellbeing and collective care, supporting their contextual implementation. Creating a safe space in itself and bringing people together is beneficial for wellbeing.