

# Lifeline's Response to COVID-19:

## Flexible Grants Respond to Civic Space Threats

May 2020



In the midst of the humanitarian and health crisis of COVID-19, many authoritarian governments and non-state actors are taking advantage of the new context to silence critics calling for accountability, criminalize free expression, and restrict access to information. Lifeline's flexible grantmaking is well-positioned to provide urgent support to civil society organizations (CSOs) responding to COVID-19 related attacks on civic space, and in response to the changing landscape, Lifeline has also temporarily broadened current criteria for its advocacy grants. The Lifeline consortium is supported by 19 governments and includes Freedom House, Front Line Defenders, CIVICUS, FORUM-ASIA, People in Need, Swedish International Liberal Center and the International Center for Not-For-Profit Law. For more information, please visit [www.csolifeline.org](http://www.csolifeline.org).

*\*Unfortunately, **these grants cannot be used** to support general operating expenses, staff salaries, or other humanitarian needs due to budget shortfalls. In addition, Lifeline grants **cannot support initiatives** that seek to address public health, access to services, or equitable distribution of health services or aid.*

### EMERGENCY / PROTECTION GRANTS:

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Through [Freedom House](#) and [Front Line Defenders](#), Lifeline provides **small, short-term protection grants** to CSOs (including unregistered groups, movements, journalist collectives, networks, and formal NGOs) threatened because of their human rights work. If a CSO is threatened because of their work related to COVID-19, Lifeline grants can provide added security, legal representation, medical expenses directly related to the threat, temporary relocation, equipment replacement, and other urgently needed expenses. For more information or to apply, please email [info@csolifeline.org](mailto:info@csolifeline.org) or visit <https://frontlinedefenders.org/secure/grant.php>.

### ADVOCACY GRANTS:

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Lifeline's advocacy grants support CSOs to push back against civic space restrictions. In **response to COVID-19 threats, Lifeline is temporarily broadening the criteria to address civic space concerns beyond freedom of association and assembly (FOAA)**. Projects could now monitor, document, and advocate on a broad range of violations or impact on civic space due to the COVID19 response. All advocacy grants must still have a clear and central focus on closing civic space, rather than violations against individual citizens, and should not exceed 6 months. Advocacy grants can analyze and push back against draft legislation, engage the general public on civil society issues, build CSO coalitions across sector, or strategically engage with the media for push for improved civic space coverage. In the COVID-19 context, projects could address:

- Misuse or expansive use of **surveillance techniques and technologies** to track and monitor CSOs, HRDs, media;
- Restrictions regarding **internet access, access to information, and freedom of expression** that impact civic space;
- **Abuse of power and executive overreach**, such as targeted application of laws to restrict CSOs and HRDs, police brutality that target civil society organizations, activists, journalists, etc.

### RESILIENCY GRANTS:

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Resiliency grants provide support to high-risk CSOs to pro-actively mitigate threats they face or address operational challenges (i.e., legal, regulatory). If **CSOs face operational obstacles because of the pandemic**, resiliency grants could:

- Renew or update **security protocols** given the need for remote work, as well as public health restrictions;
- Train CSO members on **digital security and campaigning** and secure methods for organizing online;
- Support for **well-being or psychosocial interventions** that would help sustain a CSO given increased targeting;
- Providing **tech support, software, and equipment** in order to enable CSOs to sustain remote operations;
- Creating an **online or virtual protection network** that will trigger immediate response to threats experienced.

