



## Request for Proposals (RFP) – RFP Ref: MENA-AIDR-2026-MSG

MENA AI & Digital Resilience Program for MENA CSOs – Micro sub-grants

**Funding Amount: USD 2,000 – 4,500**

By Stichting Innovation For Change MENA Incorporation (I4C MENA Hub)

Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis, and Micro Sub-grants will be awarded to eligible proposals as they are approved, up to a maximum of four (4) awards. The call may close earlier than the stated deadline if all four (4) Micro Sub-grants have been awarded or the available funding has been fully committed.

### I. Background and Context

#### 1. About Innovation for Change MENA Hub:

Innovation for Change (I4C) is a global decentralized network of CSOs, Activists, Technologists, and Journalists, running through seven Innovation Hubs around the world, inspired by ideas, methods, and technologies from across sectors, to create solutions that drive positive social change.

As part of the Innovation for Change (I4C) global network, The Stichting Innovation for Change Middle East and North Africa Incorporation (I4C MENA Hub) was established in 2017 as a network of people and organizations who connect, collaborate, interchange ideas, innovations, and resources, and learn together for a conjoint purpose of opening the Civic Space and overcome restrictions to civil freedoms of assembly, association, and speech in the MENA region. ([Read more about the Hub](#)).

I4C MENA Hub's mission is to build a dynamic, member-led innovation Hub dedicated to achieving an inclusive and safe open civic space in the MENA region through innovative collaboration and human-centred co-creation methodologies. The Hub's 2024–2028 Strategic Framework is structured around three core objectives:

1. **Championing the opening of civic spaces** and developing evidence-based tools (such as mapping reports and policy briefs) for impactful advocacy and campaigning.
2. **Cultivating a multi-sector civic innovation and collaboration hub** that brings together CSOs, technologists, academia, and the private sector to solve pressing issues through innovation labs and hackathons.
3. **Supporting civil society actors** through the production and the curation of tailored, localized resources and the establishment of the Hub's thematic Communities of Practice (CoP).

#### 2. About the MENA AI & Digital Resilience Program for CSOs:

##### Problem Statement & Context

Civil society organizations (CSOs) in the MENA region are fundamental to shaping policy and governance frameworks, yet they operate within an increasingly closed civic space. This restrictive environment is further compounded by emerging technological threats, specifically AI-driven cyber threats that enable the faster, more scalable, and harder-to-detect spread of false narratives targeting CSOs, activists, journalists, and Women/Human Rights Defenders (W/HRDs).

Most MENA CSOs operate with limited budgets and lack in-house technical expertise, making it difficult to:

- Establish internal AI use and governance policies.
- Develop and implement robust cybersecurity policies.
- Strengthen their digital infrastructures.
- Safely experiment with and integrate emerging AI tools.

Despite this challenging regional landscape, AI tools and technologies are rising as powerful potential allies for MENA CSOs, amplifying positive narratives and catalyzing collective civil society actions.

### **Initiative**

The "MENA AI & Digital Resilience Program for CSOs" directly addresses this gap by equipping MENA CSOs to adopt Responsible AI, Drive Social Innovation, and Build Policy Leadership & Advocacy Capacity.

The "MENA AI & Digital Resilience Program for CSOs" is a 7-month regional initiative designed and implemented by the I4C MENA Hub. The program aims to strengthen the technological capacities and organizational technology resilience of civil society organizations in the Middle East & North Africa region.

### **Overall Objective & Desired Impact**

The overall objective of the MENA AI & Digital Resilience Program for CSOs is to strengthen the AI technological capacity and organizational technology resilience of civil society organizations across the MENA region. By the end of the program (December 2026), I4C MENA Hub aims to have equipped a cohort of MENA CSOs with the financial resources, technical skills, and internal policies necessary to:

- Protect their operations against threats and risks associated with emerging AI technologies.
- Benefit from and safely integrate AI technologies in their operations and initiatives.
- Lead AI policy advocacy and actively shape the region's digital rights landscape.

### **Specific Objectives & Key Outputs**

#### **Objective 1: Identify Priority Digital-Capacity Gaps**

Engage 20–30 MENA CSOs through an Arabic Online Co-Design Lab (2 interactive online workshops) to co-define the technological capacity-strengthening priorities guiding the subgranting phase. (Program's Open Call for expression of interest is available [here](#)).

#### **Objective 2: Fund Locally-Led AI & Digital Resilience Initiatives**

Award 8 targeted subgrants to 8 MENA CSOs to pilot locally-led digital resilience and AI adoption actions:

- **4 Small SubGrants** (\$7,000–\$10,000): Supporting local pilot actions such as Civic Tech MVPs or AI-powered awareness campaigns.
- **4 Micro SubGrants** (\$2,000–\$4,500): Specifically for internal digital resilience actions such as cybersecurity audits and AI governance policy development.

### **Objective 3: Strengthen CSO Skills & Internal Policies**

Deliver a hybrid training and mentorship model targeting at least 200 CSO staff members across 3 thematic tracks:

1. Cybersecurity Frameworks and Organizational Data Privacy.
2. Responsible AI Adoption and AI Ethical Governance.
3. AI Policy Advocacy and Digital Rights Tactics.

### **Objective 4: Establish a Regional Community of Practice (CoP)**

Launch and facilitate a sustainable regional thematic CoP on AI & Digital Resilience for MENA CSOs, convening 5 monthly online exchange sessions for peer-to-peer learning, case study sharing, and joint actions throughout the implementation phase. (Program's Open Call for expression of interest is available [here](#)).

## **II. Purpose of the MENA AI & Digital Resilience Sub-grants**

As a core component of the "MENA AI & Digital Resilience Program for CSOs" Program, the I4C MENA Hub will deploy a sub-granting mechanism to directly support and resource MENA Civil Society Organizations addressing their organizational AI & Digital resilience, and the safe and responsible use and integration of technology and AI.

The aim is to support practical and locally relevant initiatives that aim at strengthening AI and Digital resilience of registered civil society organizations (CSOs), advancing the overarching goals of the AI and Digital Resilience Program. Specifically:

- Strengthen the technological capacity and organizational digital resilience of CSOs across the MENA region;
- Support CSOs in identifying and addressing cybersecurity, data privacy, digital infrastructure, digital safety, and responsible AI governance needs;
- Enable CSOs to develop or strengthen internal policies, practices, protocols, and systems that help protect their operations against digital and AI-related risks; and
- Support CSOs in safely exploring and integrating emerging AI technologies into their organizational operations and initiatives.

These sub-grants will not function as standalone funding instruments. They are embedded within a broader support framework that combines financial resources with non-financial technical support, including online training workshops, access to a series of I4C MENA Hub's self-paced MOOCs via the I4C MENA Hub e-Learning platform, mentorship, and invitation to join and participate in a regional Community of Practice (CoP) on AI and Digital Resilience. This integrated approach ensures that supported initiatives contribute meaningfully to the



sustainability and the long-term goals of the program while reinforcing accountability, learning, and impact.

### **III. Scope of the Micro Sub-grants (USD 2,000–4,500)**

#### **1. Call for proposal period**

This call for proposals is open from **August 7 to August 30, 2026**. Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis, and sub-grants will be awarded as suitable proposals are approved. Up to a maximum of four (4) Micro-sub-grants. **The call may close early once the four (4) Micro-sub-grants have been awarded or the available funding has been fully committed. Applicants are therefore encouraged to submit their proposals as early as possible.**

#### **2. Thematic focus areas**

To be eligible for funding under the Micro Sub-grants funding mechanism, proposals must address at least one of the following priority areas:

- **Artificial Intelligence (AI) adoption and organizational digital transformation.**
- **Digital resilience and cybersecurity.**
- **Responsible AI, data governance and digital governance.**
- **AI-enabled organizational effectiveness and innovation.**
- **Digital rights, privacy and safe use of AI.**
- **Organizational knowledge management, digital learning and Arabic knowledge resources.**

#### **3. Types of initiatives supported**

Under this RFP, the Micro-sub-grants will support targeted internal organizational initiatives that strengthen the AI and digital resilience of individual CSOs.

#### **Examples include but are not limited to:**

- Cybersecurity assessments and implementation of security improvements.
- Development of Responsible AI, cybersecurity, and data governance policies.
- AI integration into internal organizational workflows and operations.
- Development of internal AI assistants and knowledge management systems.
- Strengthening secure cloud infrastructure, backup systems and data protection.
- Organizational digital resilience assessments and digital transformation roadmaps.
- Development of internal organizational templates, SOPs, and implementation guides.
- Small-scale pilots to test AI or digital resilience tools before wider organizational adoption.

### **IV. Eligibility Criteria**

#### **Eligible Applicants:**

Eligible applicants must be registered civil society organizations (CSOs) that meet the following criteria:

- Registered and based in the MENA region; or
- Registered outside the MENA region but primarily work on civic space and civil society in one or multiple MENA countries, including diaspora-led or diaspora-focused organizations and initiatives.
- Applicants must demonstrate a clear and sustained focus on the MENA region, and the proposed initiative must be relevant to the AI resilience and/or digital resilience of the

CSO applicant itself or targeting by the initiative proposed other CSOs, in alignment with the "MENA AI & Digital Resilience Program for CSOs" objectives as stated above and in the concept note available [here](#).

- In line with the program's inclusivity commitment, priority will be given to women-led, youth-led, and LGBTQ-focused organizations.

**Ineligible Countries:** Due to the program's requirements, the following countries are not eligible to apply: Syria, Egypt, or Palestine. (If you are from one of these countries, we invite you to join us on social media at [Fb](#), [IG](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [X](#), to learn more about our other programs and opportunities). However, diaspora organizations from these countries are eligible to apply.

### Eligible Applications:

Proposed projects or initiatives must:

- Clearly address an AI and/or Digital resilience challenge of the applicant CSO or their network of CSOs they plan to target and deliver the initiative to, in alignment with the Thematic Focus Areas (Section III.2).
- Be locally relevant, community-driven, and inclusive of underrepresented or marginalized groups (e.g., women and women-led groups, youth, LGBTQIA+ communities, persons with disabilities, language and religious minorities, refugees, or displaced populations, etc.).
- Demonstrate integration of innovation, creativity, and experimentation approaches and methodologies in the project/initiative idea concept, as well as in the implementation and deployment in the field.
- Be feasible within the available funding (USD 2,000 – USD 4,500) and proposed implementation period of 2 to 2.5 months maximum, with activities to be completed between 20 August and 30 November 2026.
- Align with ethical, rights-based, and do-no-harm principles.
- Demonstrate awareness of potential project management and implementation risks (Political, Digital, Security and Safety, etc.) and propose mitigation measures. (A "Risks & Mitigation Plan" section is mandatory in the application form, with a direct question for CSOs planning in-person activities in conflict-affected countries (Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen)).

### V. Ineligibility Criteria

The following applicants and applications are not eligible under this Call for Proposals:

#### Ineligible Applicants

- International NGOs, or Intergovernmental organizations.
- Government institutions, Public authorities, or Political parties.
- For-profit entities and commercial businesses. (There might be some exceptions, but not guaranteed, for the cases of civil society initiatives that are forced to register as companies in countries like Jordan, Iraq, etc).
- Unregistered or informal civil society groups and collectives.
- Organizations based in Syria, Egypt, Palestine.
- Organizations that do not meet the program's geographic or eligibility requirements.

### **Ineligible applications and activities**

- Activities unrelated to AI & digital resilience and the Thematic Focus Areas outlined in this call for proposals.
- Humanitarian relief or charitable assistance.
- Partisan political activities or electoral campaigning.
- Religious or faith-based proselytizing activities.
- Activities that primarily consist of general institutional support or unrestricted core funding;
- Infrastructure investments or equipment purchases.
- Requests exceeding the maximum sub-grant amount of USD 4,500.
- Requests exceeding the maximum implementation period of 2.5 months.
- Proposals primarily funding salaries or institutional overhead.
- Applications that do not demonstrate minimum administrative and financial accountability arrangements.
- Applicants unwilling or unable to comply with applicable administrative and financial, safeguarding, ethical, and reporting requirements.
- Proposals that may expose participants or communities to harm.
- Initiatives that contradict principles of inclusion, non-discrimination, or ethical engagement.

### **VI. Expectations of Selected Sub-grant Recipients**

Selected sub-grantees will be expected to:

- Implement the proposed initiative within the agreed timeline, and in accordance with the approved proposal and budget.
- Participate in the program's capacity-strengthening activities, including thematic live training workshops and designated MOOCs on the I4C MENA Hub e-Learning platform.
- Engage in the mentorship support activities.
- Engage in relevant learning, peer exchange, and knowledge-sharing activities, including the regional Community of Practice (CoP).
- Complete pre- and post-training assessments.
- Submit narrative reports in accordance with the agreed reporting requirements;
- Maintain appropriate financial records and supporting documentation;
- Comply with applicable donor, ethical, safeguarding, and financial accountability and compliance standards.
- Cooperate with monitoring, evaluation, and learning activities; and
- Document lessons learned and share insights to contribute to the program's Case-Study Consolidation Report.

### **VII. Proposal Requirements**

Proposals must strictly adhere to the structure outlined in [Attachment A](#) (Proposal Template) and include all required sections. Applications that do not follow the prescribed structure may be considered non-responsive.

#### **Applicants must submit:**

- **Completed signed and stamped** Application Form Template ([Attachment A](#)).

- Completed Budget Template (**Attachment B**).
- Proof of legal registration of the organization.
- Proposals must be **submitted electronically in both PDF and DOC formats** for **Attachment A**, and **Excel format** for **Attachment B**.
- Late or incomplete submissions will not be considered.
- Submissions heavily generated by AI will not be considered.
- Questions regarding this RFP may be submitted up to five (5) days before the deadline. (Given the usual requests the Hub receives, we do not guarantee that we will be able to respond to all info requests).

Submissions must be in **English** or **Arabic**, and only complete applications that include all mandatory components will be considered for eligibility screening.

Complete **proposal files must be submitted in accordance with the requirements outlined above to the following email address: MENA@innovationforchange.net**

With **the email subject line formatted as follows: Your CSO Name – MENA-AIDR-2026-MSG**

### **VIII. Evaluation Criteria**

All eligible proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

| <b>Criteria</b>                                       | <b>Description / Guidance</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <b>Max Score</b> |
|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|
| <b>Relevance to AI &amp; digital resilience</b>       | The proposal clearly identifies a specific organizational digital resilience, cybersecurity, data privacy, digital infrastructure, digital safety, or responsible AI governance need. The proposed initiative directly addresses the identified gap or vulnerability.                                                                | 20               |
| <b>Quality and Alignment of the Proposed Approach</b> | The proposed activities are coherent, appropriate, and relevant to the identified need. The proposal demonstrates a clear link between the identified challenge, proposed activities, expected outputs, and intended results. Innovation and creativity are considered where they add meaningful value to the proposed intervention. | 15               |
| <b>Expected Results and Potential Impact</b>          | The proposal presents clear, realistic, and measurable expected results. The proposed intervention has reasonable potential to strengthen the organization's digital resilience and generate meaningful organizational benefits beyond the sub-grant period.                                                                         | 15               |
| <b>Feasibility</b>                                    | The proposed activities, timeline, responsibilities, and implementation approach are realistic and achievable within the 2 to 2.5 months timeframe and the available sub-grant amount.                                                                                                                                               | 15               |
| <b>Budget and Value for Money</b>                     | The budget is clear, realistic, and justified, with costs directly linked to the proposed activities and expected results. The proposed expenditure demonstrates reasonable value for money.                                                                                                                                         | 10               |

|                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |            |
|-----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Innovation and creativity</b>                    | The initiative demonstrates new, experimental, or creative approaches. Proposals that explore innovative methods, tools, or interventions in the local context are prioritized.                                                                                  | 10         |
| <b>Community engagement &amp; inclusivity</b>       | The proposal shows meaningful involvement of the target community in design and implementation. Priority is given to initiatives led by or serving marginalized or underrepresented groups, in particular women-led, youth-led, and LGBTQ-focused organizations. | 5          |
| <b>Capacity and organizational readiness</b>        | The applicant demonstrates sufficient organizational, administrative, financial, and technical capacity to implement the initiative and comply with sub-grant management, reporting, and accountability requirements.                                            | 5          |
| <b>Ethical considerations &amp; risk mitigation</b> | The proposal appropriately identifies potential political, digital, or safety risks and includes measures to minimize harm. Adherence to ethical, do-no-harm, and inclusion principles is demonstrated.                                                          | 5          |
| <b>Total score</b>                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <b>100</b> |

## IX. Selection Process

The selection process for sub-grants and program participation is designed to be transparent, inclusive, and adaptive. It will take place in multiple stages:

- **Initial Screening:** Applications will undergo an initial eligibility check to ensure alignment with the eligibility criteria outlined in this call. Ineligible applications will be excluded from further consideration, and applicants will be informed.
- **Evaluation and pre-selection:** Eligible applications will be assessed by an evaluation committee composed of program staff and external experts against the selection criteria outlined above. Each proposal will be ranked based on total score and strategic fit with program priorities, with particular attention to thematic expertise, geographic diversity, inclusion of underrepresented groups, and relevance to AI & digital resilience challenges in the MENA region.
- **Due Diligence:** Pre-selected applications will undergo a due diligence process, proportionate to the nature and size of the proposed sub-grant, which may include organizational, financial, ethical, safeguarding, and compliance checks. Due diligence will be conducted directly with the applicant organization.
- **Shortlisting confirmation:** Following due diligence, a confirmed shortlist will be established. Shortlisted applicants may be invited to clarification interviews or requested to provide additional information, where necessary.
- **Refinement & finalization phase:** Confirmed shortlisted applicants will participate in a short refinement phase, during which the Evaluation Committee's recommendations will be addressed with the support of the I4C MENA Hub to strengthen the initiative, refine



the project approach, and enhance its potential impact before contracting. Participation in this phase is mandatory but does not guarantee receipt of a sub-grant.

- **Final Selection and Contracting:** Final selection will be based on successful completion of due diligence and the outcome of the refinement and finalization phase, including satisfactory responses to the Evaluation Committee's recommendations, continued alignment with program objectives and priorities, and fulfillment of all applicable eligibility and compliance requirements.

Selected applicants will enter into a sub-grant agreement with the I4C MENA Hub. Awards may be made on a rolling basis during the implementation period, subject to the availability of funds.

## **X. Reporting and Compliance**

Selected Sub-grantees will be required to:

- Submit periodic narrative reports in accordance with the agreed reporting schedule;
- Maintain complete and accurate financial records and supporting documentation;
- Comply with safeguarding, anti-corruption, and conflict-of-interest policies.
- Cooperate with monitoring, evaluation, and learning activities.
- Provide relevant information and documentation required for donor and program accountability purposes.

## **XII. Data Protection and Privacy**

Data collected through the RFP and application processes will be used exclusively within the framework of the MENA AI & Digital Resilience Program for CSOs, implemented by the I4C MENA Hub.

Personal data will be handled in accordance with applicable data protection standards and will be collected and retained only to the extent necessary for program administration, due diligence, communication, monitoring, reporting, reporting to our donors (which might include sharing CSOs' names, countries, etc), and accountability purposes. Where appropriate, personal data may be anonymized for statistical, monitoring, evaluation, and programmatic purposes.

## **XIII. Disclaimer**

Issuance of this RFP does not constitute a commitment to award a sub-grant. I4C MENA reserves the right to accept or reject any application, request additional information, amend the process, or cancel the call at any stage, subject to applicable requirements.