Call for applications – Digital Rights Exchange Program

Global North-Global South country collaboration for applied learning, strategic networking, and joint policy-advocacy action in internet governance and digital rights

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1. Why this program

Across regions, digital realities are shaped by shifting politics, concentrated market power, and uneven infrastructure —creating different risks, constraints, and opportunities for communities and the civil society that stands with them. Both Global North (GN) and Global South (GS) organizations, however, confront converging challenges in a globalized digital ecosystem where the value of data, platform concentration, and surveillance pressures transcend borders.

GN–GS collaboration is essential to advance a human-centric, diverse, inclusive, and meaningful internet governance agenda, and to challenge structural power imbalances that shape how digital policies, standards, and technologies are developed and applied. Yet, persistent barriers — including finance and capacity gaps, fragmented engagement, and limited time and bandwidth — often prevent deep joint learning, trust-building, and sustained collaboration.

The *Digital Rights Exchange Program* is a CADE initiative designed to address these barriers through a focused, resourced, and practical GN–GS exchange model that supports pairs of organisations to:

- learn from one another's contexts and strategies;
- jointly analyse a shared digital governance/digital rights challenge; and
- define concrete follow-up steps and policy-advocacy actions that are relevant in both contexts.

2. About CADE

This call for submissions is an initiative of Forus and the European Center for Not-For-Profit Law under the Civil Society Alliances for Digital Empowerment (CADE) framework.

CADE is an EU co-funded initiative that aims to enhance the capacity of civil society organizations for effective advocacy in multilateral and multistakeholder internet governance processes. It fosters inclusive participation, particularly from the Global South, strengthens cross-regional engagement and collaboration, and promotes a human-centric policy approach in shaping digital policies and standards.

3. About the program: Digital Rights Exchange Program

The program offers a unique opportunity for three pairs of organizations (each pair composed of one GN and one GS civil society organizations) working on digital rights and/or internet governance to:

- jointly define and explore a shared digital challenge relevant to both contexts.
- meet in person for a focused three –day exchange (excluding travel time) - the meeting duration may be adjusted depending on final costs.
- develop a joint policy-advocacy strategy linked to a concrete policy window/process; and
- share the lessons learned with other civil society actors facing similar challenges.

Terminology and conceptual framing note:

The program recognizes and values the work of activists and civil society organizations that have advanced a decolonial language shift toward the terms Global Minority and Global Majority to highlight structural inequalities that are not limited to geographic boundaries. For administrative purposes only, the program uses the abbreviations GN–GS; these should be understood respectively as Global Minority (GN) and Global Majority (GS).

Objectives of the program:

1. Facilitate GN–GS pairings and country visits focused on a specific, clearly defined digital rights challenge shared by both organizations, and a concrete policyadvocacy opportunity (e.g., consultation processes, legislative debates, standard-setting discussions, national/ regional IG spaces, or relevant global forums). Possible umbrella topics include AI, digital inclusion, encryption, freedom of expression, gender online rights, privacy and data protection. For more information, please check: https://cadeproject.org/topics/
2. Strengthen CSO capacity to jointly analyze national contexts, compare approaches, and adapt best practices through participantled activities (e.g., workshops, reflection sessions, peer mentoring, or other agreed formats).
3. Produce a strategic postexchange report that:
    a. synthesizes lessons learned from the exchanges;
    b. distills clear, actionable policy-advocacy strategies and recommendations for civil society actors facing similar challenges; and
    c. defines concrete followup steps for the involved GN-GS organizations.

What the program offers:

For each selected GN–GS pair, the program supports:

- Round-trip airfare, accommodation, and a per-person per diem for up to two participants per GN-GS pair for the duration of the three-day exchange. The per diem amount will be determined by country using the internal grid.
- Venue rental for the exchange. If a pair chooses to host the exchange at the facilities of one of their organizations, that is acceptable and in that case venue rental will not be covered.
- Coordination support from Forus/ECNL, including check-ins and guidance on required administrative documentation.

What the program does not cover:

- Visa fees. (pairs should assess visa feasibility early and factor it into their location/dates).
- Medical, work, or travel insurance.
- Unplanned travel-related costs (e.g., missed flights, lost or damaged luggage).
- Any other costs not explicitly listed in the "What the program offers" section.

Who can participate:

This call is open to pairs of civil society organizations worldwide (one GN organization and one GS organization) working on digital rights and internet governance —whether as a primary focus or part of broader agendas— with demonstrated experience in policy and/or advocacy approaches.

Organizations must demonstrate relevant experience on the proposed topic, capacity to collaborate across diverse contexts, commitment to preparing, attending and reporting on the GN-GS exchange, and willingness to translate learning into concrete policy-advocacy follow-up.

- Existing relationship: Each GN-GS pair should demonstrate an existing relationship or prior collaboration/coordination (e.g., joint research, cofacilitated workshops, coauthored recommendations, shared coalition work, or other evidence of coordinated engagement).
- Participant eligibility: Each proposed participant must have at least one year of affiliation with their respective organizations. Exceptions may be considered with a supporting letter from the organization explaining the candidate's role and demonstrated commitment.

Commitments of selected pairs:

Selected pairs commit to:

Preparation and coordination

- Complete structured preparatory work with the pair partner organization before the in-person exchange, which may include calls, emails, and sharing resources.
- Participate in monthly check-in calls with the Program Coordinators during the preparation phase, respond to any requests for additional information or clarifications about the status of the process, and a final debrief call after the exchange.
- Finalize the joint 3-day agenda details at least one month prior to the exchange date.
- Submit travel/venue/accommodation proposals and required documentation at least 6 weeks in advance for approval before booking.

Implementation

- Ensure the in-person exchange takes place before the end of 2026.
- Participate fully in the focused 3-day in-person exchange (excluding travel time).
- Maintain respectful and collaborative behavior at all times: listen actively, participate constructively, respect confidentiality and diversity.
- Comply with Forus' code of conduct and any additional safeguarding or participation guidance shared by the Programme Coordinators.

Outputs and reporting

- Deliver a joint GN-GS exchange report no later than one month after the visit. The report must include:
    - Exchange overview:
        - Shared challenge and policy/advocacy opportunity: what concrete process/ window you are targeting.
        - Context snapshots: what is similar/different across contexts; what power dynamics or constraints matter.
        - Key lessons learned: what each organization learned from the other.
    - Next steps:
        - Joint policy-advocacy strategy (targets, entry points, tactics, and messaging).
        - Concrete followup steps for the participating GN–GS organizations. This should include a timeline of activities indicating who will do what over the next 3-6 months, and the mechanisms that will be implemented to ensure execution.
        - Links to any public-facing outputs produced (if applicable and safe to share).
    - Recommendations:
        - Actionable recommendations for civil society actors facing similar challenges.
- Deliver one light share-out activity (e.g., a short webinar, blog, or resource) within two months after the exchange to help spread learning to other CSOs — taking into account safety and consent.
- Provide all requested administrative documentation related to travel, accommodation, venue, and stipends.

9. How to apply

Submissions must be sent jointly on behalf of the GN and GS organizations forming each pair and must be signed by the proposed participants and by the director (or authorized representative) of each organization.

Total submission length must not exceed 5 pages (excluding CVs). The submission must include:

- Rationale: Explain the shared digital challenge and why the pair wants to address it together.
- Objectives and expected outcomes: including the concrete policy/advocacy opportunity.
- Propose a 3-day agenda that includes activities, duration, involvement of both of the GN-GS organizations and estimation of costs. Other related details can be finalized later.
- Proposed location (city, country) and dates for the exchange, with justification addressing administrative, political, security, logistical, infrastructure, staffing, and other relevant considerations. There are two possible arrangements for the location (choose one):
    - Option A: One or two people from the same organization travel to the partner organization’s country.

    - Option B: One person from each organization travels to a third country to coincide with a relevant digital rights or internet governance event in which both organizations participate (e.g., IGF, ICANN, ITU, IETF, or others). The three-day encounter may take place immediately before or after the event. (Note: The program does not cover event registration or related fees.)
- Background of each GN-GS organization, including relevant experience on the proposed topic.
- Evidence of prior relevant collaboration/coordination between the partner GN–GS organizations, including links or references to supporting documentation.
- Primary contact details for both of the GN and GS organizations. The contact must be the person who will travel or receive the visitors.
- CVs of the primary contacts (maximum 1 page per CV).

Submit your proposal to angela@forus-international.org with the subject line "Application – Digital Rights Exchange Program" no later than August 2, 2026

Deadline Extended to August 9, 2026

10. Selection process and criteria

Applications will be reviewed by Forus and ECNL. Shortlisted pairs may be invited to a brief interview. Final selection will aim to ensure balance across regions and topics, and will prioritise proposals that are actionable and likely to generate follow-up.

Selection criteria include:

- Strategic relevance of the shared challenge and clarity of the policy/advocacy opportunity;
- Strength and feasibility of the proposed 3-day agenda;
- Potential for joint follow-up work;
- Attention to inclusion and equity, and awareness of power dynamics and affected communities;
- Practical feasibility (security/visa/logistics) and responsible budgeting.

If you have questions about this call, send them to the same email address at least one week before the deadline.

CADE, Forus and ECNL reserve the right to amend the call without prior notice.