Luminate

Building stronger societies

Civic Empowerment
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Strategic Plan
2018–2022

Civic Empowerment

During the last strategy period (May 2014 – October 2018):

$65M
investment capital deployed

52
organisations supported

18
for-profit investments (35%)

What has changed?

Increased civic engagement presents an opportunity for new solutions, but we recognise that technology is not a panacea for engagement or service delivery. Confronted with constricting civic space and a growing backlash against tech, we broadened the frame of this impact area from what we used to call 'Civic Technology' to 'Civic Empowerment.' We have learned that technologies must be coupled with organising strategies (such as campaigning techniques), as well as capacity building and process improvements, to help communities engage government and to help government use technology to deliver services more effectively and equitably.

What will we do about it?

Observation	New strategy
Governments curtailing space for participation, rendering tech tools irrelevant	Support complementary offline, real-world organising and campaigning
Tech alone has proven insufficient to affect sustained change	
Under-represented voices are not being heard or are being actively silenced	Support groups/initiatives prioritising those voices
Tech tools and data have been misused to curtail individual rights	Shift strategic focus; prioritise safeguards over new innovations
More needs to be done to prove business models for civic engagement and to grow the limited funder landscape	Support experimentation with business models; work to crowd in new funders
Earned income models for service delivery getting traction; investor landscape growing	Participate in funds; catalyse more hybrid for-profit investment with new vehicles
Demand for GovTech solutions shifting in some cases from national to local level	Engage with organisations providing tools and capacity building at the municipal level
Civic tech increasingly politicised; tools can be misused, co-opted to cause harm	Ensure values alignment; avoid investment in 'neutral platforms' that could be used to organise for harmful causes

What's next?[1]

Our goal

We will support civic empowerment to enable people to participate in governance, receive the services they need, and hold the powerful to account.

Hypothesis	Investing in civic tech and digital services which disrupt government IT systems and processes will contribute to improvements in responsiveness, so long as we also put increased attention on protecting individual rights.	Providing support to organisations that build tech and offline processes which empower people to engage in governance will drive higher rates of more meaningful participation.	Supporting ecosystem-building activities will create and sustain sector learning and experimentation (e.g., with business models, policy interventions, and combinations of digital and analogue approaches).
Success	E.g., governments change policy and practice to enable tech-driven service delivery while protecting rights.	E.g., channels and tools provided or inspired by our portfolio allow more voices to be heard in decision-making.	E.g., new ideas and solutions come out of a diverse, vibrant community of technologists, entrepreneurs, and policymakers.
Disconfirm	E.g., governments increasingly use tech in ways that violate individual rights in service of efficiency or a 'greater' public cause.	E.g., individuals choose not to engage despite access to better tools and channels; governments disregard or ignore inputs.	E.g., ecosystem growth leads to increased supply of tools and strategies but without sufficient corresponding demand or funding.

1 For each impact area, we have listed our working hypotheses, which inform our investment decisions, as well as examples of what evidence might lead us to believe our theory of change is on track ("success") and examples of what evidence or occurrences might lead us to believe we were wrong and should change course ("disconfirmation").