

GLOBAL

# Annual Report

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2025

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# Vision, Mission and Values

## 2025 OVERVIEW

2025 may have been a disruptive year for NGOs from a funding and operational perspective but it also proved to be defining in a number of ways. One particularly poignant lesson for Accountability Lab was around the role of people as connectors rather than resources. Choosing to work together, rather than apart, and prioritizing support - whether micro or macro - to the broader civil society ecosystem proved to be stabilizing factors. When formal support systems weakened, our work shows it was trust, solidarity, and active citizenship that sustained critical governance and accountability work. Small acts of support, collaboration, and shared problem-solving had more immediate impact than trying to sustain stand-alone projects.

The global team prioritized research and advice around recovery and support, launching the [Global Aid Freeze](#) tracker with Humentum and Global Voices early in 2025. It began as a snapshot survey for our community, evolving into a comprehensive data collection effort that extended to more than 1,400 organizations worldwide.

Insights from from our tracker revealed a global need for pro-bono or low-cost help to organizations in transition. [Civic Strength Partners \(CSP\)](#), which we rapidly established with Development Gateway: An IREX Venture and Digital Public, functions as a partnership-matching and support network for civil society and social change organizations navigating major transitions. These include restructuring,

mergers, or, in some cases, winding down. Our work on CSP is showing that the CSO ecosystem needs funders willing to support foundational capacities before the next crisis, not in response to it.

The Lab also worked hard to formally connect funders with proximate accountability organizations through our [Civil Society Wayfinder campaign](#) in 2025. It shines a light on groups operating on small budgets and without close ties to large Western NGOs, amplifying the work they are doing on the frontlines. The campaign is complementary to AL's intermediary objectives, combining technical services such as fiscal sponsorship, regranteeing, and full service back-office support with ecosystem support, and development services such as training, convening, connecting, and advocating.

As part of our work supporting the accountability and anti-corruption ecosystem, the Lab also launched our Senior Non-Resident Fellowship Program in 2025. It engages global thought leaders, advocates and practitioners in advancing innovative approaches to accountability and governance. We're proud to be working with them and look forward to amplifying their critical work even further this year. Related to this work, we were excited to contribute a chapter to a new [Routledge volume](#), *Anti-Corruption in a Discordant World*, on the inherent value of translocal approaches. Aware of how corruption intersects with disinformation, shrinking

civic space, and shifts in political power, we show that trans-local approaches help us understand how power, trust and social norms shape corruption and anti-corruption work.

On the team front, we were sad to say goodbye to our AL Mali Country Director, Doussouba Konate, who left the organization after several years at the helm diversifying its partnerships and enhancing efforts greatly to promote citizen participation. She handed the reins to Deputy Director Habibou Diaou in November. During 2025, the AL global team also benefited from the contributions of two consultants, Juan Pane and Corina Rebegea, as well as two interns, Otsemaye Harriman and Yamone Aye. We're grateful for their creative collaboration.

**- AL Co-CEOs Cheri-Leigh Erasmus, Blair Glencorse, and Jean Scrimgeour.**

## VISION AND MISSION

We envision a world in which resources are used wisely, decisions benefit everyone fairly, and people lead secure lives. Our mission is to make governance work for people through supporting active citizens, responsible leaders and accountable institutions. We focus on building “unlikely networks” and insider-outsider coalitions to create change; and “naming and faming” the people, ideas and processes working collectively towards dynamic accountability goals.

## VALUES

These values guide all our thinking and programs, and are exemplified by and expected of our directors, officers, employees, and volunteers. We continually hold ourselves accountable to them and encourage others to hold us accountable as well.

### Integrity

**We set an example of honesty and transparency in all that we do and how we do it.**

We are accountable to all our stakeholders—including project beneficiaries, accountpreneurs (accountability entrepreneurs), donors, peer organizations, and government officials - and we continually evaluate our impact.

### Innovation

**We foster creativity and forward-thinking at all levels of our work.**

We are open to trying new ideas and taking risks to further our mission; we acknowledge and learn from our failures; and we adapt to changing circumstances.

### Humility

**We recognize that local people know best how to create change in their community.**

We understand that building trust, changing mindsets, and setting up systems of accountability ultimately must be done from within, and can take years to show their full impact.

### Practicality

**We emphasize the creation of useful tools that are sustainable and scalable over time.**

We are cost-effective and use resources efficiently in all our operations, and encourage our accountpreneurs to do the same with our small grants.

### Collaboration

**We strive to listen to, learn from, and find positive ways to collaborate with everyone we can.**

We believe in the power of community, and seek to build solidarity and cooperation in the local communities in which we work and in the international development field more broadly.

# Impact & Program Highlights

## ECOSYSTEM BUILDING

### Data for Collective Action

Amid the uncertainty of multilateral and bilateral aid cuts in 2025, Accountability Lab responded with #SharedStrength-Collective, an initiative launched in [Kathmandu by Accountability Lab Nepal](#). It began as a simple act of solidarity: opening the Lab's doors to other CSOs and NGOs to strategize, share information, and support one another through the fallout of the aid disruptions.

In Washington DC, the same spirit took shape through weekly gatherings of partners to exchange updates and tactics. The Lab also deployed a global aid-freeze tracking survey to measure the real-world effects of the crisis. Local Labs in Pakistan, Mali, and Nepal ran complementary projects to gather and share context-specific data.

Within a week of USAID's Stop Work Order on 27 January 2025, our first [global survey](#) was live, capturing the human dimension of the shock. What began as a quick snapshot for our community evolved into a comprehensive survey including more than 1,400 organizations worldwide. In the first three weeks, the data told a stark story: sixty percent of organizations would likely close within six months. As the aid freeze hardened into the closure of over 80 percent of USAID programs, the cascading effects forced civil-society actors to rethink how the sector could survive.

The survey also showed that a quarter of organizations had only a one-month financial runway; another quarter had three

months. Many foresaw erosion of trust with participants, disruption to governance ecosystems, job losses, and policy regressions in democracy and human rights. More than 60% of respondents had not found alternate revenue sources by the third survey in May. In addition, more than 60% had furloughed staff. By survey 4 in October, those organizations still standing felt the volatility of the sector constantly, and possible risk of closure. Many reported providing services for alternative revenue, and 64% were either actively seeking or considering mergers or other partnerships.

Those findings galvanized a shared mission - to prevent knowledge, people, and hard-won civic gains from disappearing. A key outtake was that weakening civil society and independent media wasn't a side effect of funding cuts. Rather, it's a core impact with long-term consequences for stability and development. Democracy support must be reframed not as "nice to have" after meeting basic needs, but as one of the basics itself.

Our data shows that direct, flexible, multi-year support is critical. We need to prioritize a non-duplicative, "elbows down" system that values collaboration among doers, thinkers, and those able to manage complex financial systems. We also need organizations that weave together language, skills, evidence, and peer-learning models between these groups. Abrupt, politicized cuts are not just morally costly but also deeply inefficient. Reinvesting in democratic governance, accountability, and civic space is one of the most cost-effective approaches for long-term peace and development.



**Civic Strength Partners**

Critical data insights from [AL's Global Aid Flows Tracker](#) revealed a widespread need for pro-bono or low-cost help to organizations in transition. [Civic Strength Partners \(CSP\)](#) functions as a partnership-matching and support network for civil society and social change organizations navigating major transitions - whether restructuring, mergers, or, in some cases, winding down. AL co-founded the organization in April 2025 with Development Gateway: An IREX Venture and Digital Public.

Each of the partner organizations brings complementary expertise to this work: AL has the translocal networks and relationships to drive data and learning, as well as the shared experience of designing and fiscally sponsoring complex organizations for many years. Development Gateway has a global footprint, substantial operating infrastructure and significant experience building, sustaining, and transitioning public interest digital and data systems. Digital Public builds public interest digital governance systems, products, and institutions, using a range of legal, technical, and organizational tools.

CSP provides resources, professional services, and infrastructure to help organizations protect what matters most: their people, their data and intellectual property, and their relationships and legacy. This includes triage support for managing abrupt funding loss, or exploring mergers with like-minded organizations rather than closing. CSP also provides expert guidance to safely archive sensitive digital assets when programs must end.





Our practice is majority-world-anchored by design. About 75% of the organizations we support are based in Africa, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe. That shapes who is in our advisor circle, how we think about power and context, what good processes look like across different organizational cultures, and what equity requires in practice.

We remain free of charge to the vast majority of organizations we support because we believe that transition support should not be available only to organizations with resources

to pay for it. The organizations that most need accompaniment are often the ones least able to access it. Equity-based access is built into our model, funded through pooled resources, and it shapes who we can reach and how.

Our work shows that the CSO ecosystem needs funders willing to support foundational capacities before the next crisis, not in response to it. The sector also needs transition support that is accessible, contextual, and human, not just technically competent.

### EMERGING LESSONS FROM CIVIC STRENGTH PARTNERS

CSP's early observations offer a practical framework for donors and partners to reimagine support for organizations in transition:

1. **Start early** - accompaniment matters upstream. Engaging at the first signs of change helps preserve clarity of purpose and trust before crisis hits.
2. **Balance structure and emergence.** Provide scaffolding but leave room for creativity; flexible funding makes this possible.
3. **Clarity and care over pressure.** Deliberate, values-based decision-making leads to sustainable outcomes, not just short-term fixes.
4. **Trust over over-consultation.** Investing in aligned relationships moves work faster and deeper than endless consensus-building.
5. **Transitions aren't always loss.** Funding dignified closure can safeguard legacy and signal maturity, not failure.
6. **The space in-between is fertile.** Periods of uncertainty are opportunities for imagination and partnership if resourced properly.
7. **Collective leadership is key.** Successful transitions are carried by teams and boards, not individual heroes.
8. **Nature as a guide.** Growth and renewal follow cyclical patterns; pauses are part of resilience, not interruptions to it.



“Sustaining civil society...requires changes in how donors fund, engage with, and partner alongside locally-led organizations”.

## Civil Society Wayfinder

While big funders and field leaders are working to re-strategize, too little money and too little attention is going to the smaller organizations that have been quietly doing the daily work of holding governments to account and creating spaces for citizens to act. These groups often operate on small budgets and without the close ties to large Western NGOs.

As new reports and recommendations are being shared across the sector, we’re matching them with organizations around the world that can corroborate those recommendations with lived experience and evidence from their work. This campaign, [Civil Society Wayfinder](#), is an effort to shine a light on some of the good work already happening, learn a little from those at the frontlines, and help speed up the thinking so we can move more quickly to the doing.

Our selection criteria focuses on four themes:

- **Youth and new champions.** Groups led by youth or elevating leaders outside electoral politics, such as artists, academics, technologists and faith leaders.
- **Narrative power.** Groups that use storytelling, music, spoken word, digital platforms and other live or broadcast media to leverage narrative power for community outreach, public accountability and participation.
- **Healthy information ecosystems:** Groups promoting more functional media and information systems through community journalism, media literacy, digital literacy, or other online and offline tools to combat disinformation.
- **Decentralized funding:** Groups that rely on diversified or decentralized funding models, by turning to local donors over international funders, for example, or through local outreach and mutual aid.

Private philanthropy is being forced to ask big questions about its role. Foundations and donors are reassessing who should be supported and how their limited dollars can have the most effect. They are weighing up whether to keep funding larger, often US-based organizations (that have traditionally held the ecosystem together) or refocus resources to direct grants to smaller, locally rooted groups.

This is a healthy debate, but it takes time, and time is scarce when programs are ending and people need help now. Quick, flexible grants and trust-based partnerships can help organizations keep operating while the larger field shifts. And while there are legitimate questions about “bridge funds” and what future these might bridge to – but unless we keep local organizations alive, there will be no future at all for civil society.

**Accountability Lab's Senior Non-Resident Fellowship**

AL's Senior Non-Resident Fellowship Program engages global thought leaders, advocates and practitioners in advancing innovative approaches to accountability and governance. Fellows are formally affiliated with the Lab's international network, contributing their expertise and leadership to drive systemic change. By providing resources, collaboration opportunities, and a global platform, the Fellowship enables changemakers to amplify their work, influence policy, and strengthen governance ecosystems.

Our approach is rooted in trust, collaboration, and mutual benefit. We work with Fellows whose values align with the Lab's mission, offering them space to pursue independent projects while contributing to shared learning and advocacy efforts. Through access to our global network, digital tools, and event platforms, Fellows are able to expand their reach and impact. We prioritize partnerships that uphold the highest standards of integrity, inclusion, and transparency.

**MEET THE FELLOWS**



**Karin Alexander**

A political economist and development professional with 19 years of experience working on governance issues, Karin is an experienced team leader and political economy adviser. Her strengths lie in analysis, the development of adaptive strategic frameworks, and establishing and growing politically smart research and implementation teams.



**Soheila Comninos**

Soheila Comninos is a human rights expert with over 20 years of international experience advancing accountability, civil society resilience, and rights-based approaches across philanthropy, academia, and humanitarian field operations.



**Andrea Currie-Edwards**

Andrea Currie-Edwards is a senior policy advisor with more than 15 years of results-based experiences in global regulatory compliance in anti-money laundering, illicit finance and anti-corruption for the financial, private and public sectors and with multilateral development Banks.



**Morgane Dussud**

Morgane Dussud is a governance and civic engagement specialist focused on transparency, accountability, and youth participation. She has held advocacy, strategy, and program leadership roles with international NGOs, universities, and public institutions across Europe, the United States, Southeast Asia, and West and Central Africa.



**David Riveros García**

David is an experienced Executive Director with a demonstrated history of working in the civic and social organization industry. He's skilled in international relations, research, policy analysis, data analysis and visualization, public speaking, and writing.



**Florencia Guerzovich**

With over 20 years of experience, Florencia helps organizations navigate complex challenges in development and philanthropy. Her expertise lies in bridging diverse perspectives to deliver sharp, rigorous assessments for action, and in operationalizing and applying politically informed, theory based and systems lenses to Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL).



**Jed Miller**

Jed has spent more than 20 years at the intersection of accountability and digital transformation. His work promotes the critical roles of culture, organizational capacity, and narrative in the effective governance of technology.



**Corina Rebegea**

Corina is driven by a belief that democracy, human rights, and justice aren't just ideals – they're the foundation of safe and fulfilled lives. Over the past 15+ years, she's helped governments become more transparent, supported legal and policy reforms that fight corruption and provide equal rights to all, and defended civic space and democratic resilience.



**Tara Thwing**

Tara brings over 17 years of experience in international development, foreign policy, and democratic governance, with a particular interest in how technology intersects with civic engagement and accountability.



**Tom Wein**

Tom Wein works to understand and build dignity in development. He leads the Dignity Initiative at IDinsight, co-authored the book 'Marketplace Dignity', and has given testimony to the UK Parliament's International Development Committee.

**THE IMPACT WE CREATED**

**Proximity - To People**

**HACKCORRUPTION**

[HackCorruption](#) is an initiative that aims to combat corruption globally by stimulating the innovative use of technology to address accountability gaps and build systemic integrity. With our partners, Development Gateway and the Center for Private Enterprise, we work with diverse stakeholders to develop, track, refine and apply new and existing technological solutions to systemic challenges of corruption.

In 2025, one of our flagship achievements was the creation of **Specus**, a unified anti-corruption platform born from a [three-day learning event](#) in Mexico City in October. Four high-performing teams from different regional cohorts - representing Mexico, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Paraguay - pooled their expertise to develop this digital solution targeting corruption in public procurement processes.

Specus focuses on four key objectives: automated detection of red flags through data analytics, promoting transparency and fairness in public resource allocation, ensuring market integrity for international companies, and preventing corruption through early risk identification. The platform will initially be piloted in Indonesia and Paraguay.

Following the Mexico event, weekly mentorship calls commenced, covering budgeting, marketing, and technical development. The team attended CoSP11 in Qatar, expanding their network of potential partners. Currently, they're finalizing legal registration decisions and creating founders' agreements, with Accountability Lab serving as fiscal sponsor until the creation of a legal entity for the teams.





**Balkans Regional Progress**

Meanwhile three of five selected Balkans teams actively continued development with bi-weekly mentorship. Despite some delays, **Balkan Corruption Insider** has created a Figma prototype and are integrating Open Sanctions data. **Green Funds Transparency** successfully launched their platform, adding over 50,000 procedures and gathering stakeholder feedback. They're developing dedicated tabs for public procurement data with green funds subtabs, exploring AI tools for climate project tagging, and standardizing English translations. The **Judiciary Intelligence Platform** completed their initial website with case and judiciary data, offering dashboard visualizations, filtering capabilities, and English/ North Macedonian translations. They're finalizing naming decisions before domain selection and user testing.

**Technical Innovation**

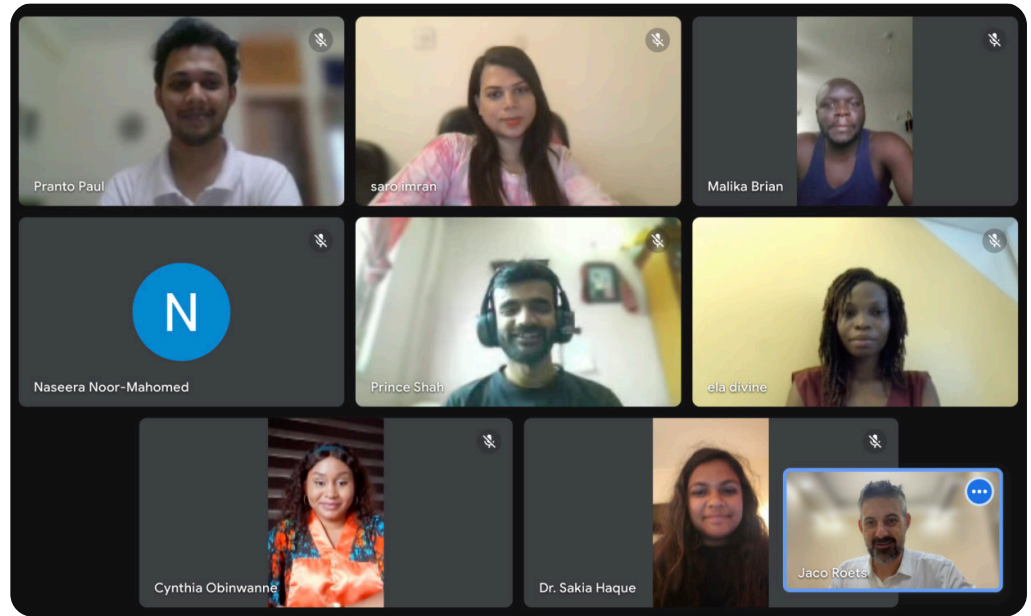
Another significant development was the [HackCorruption AI Tool](#), created with Development Gateway to address contract data accessibility challenges. Despite producing millions of pages of procurement data every year, governments make the vast majority of this information either inaccessible to the public or available in formats that make it hard to extract meaningful insights on government spending.

Powered by a large language model (LLM) to extract important information from lengthy government contracts, our open-source solution summarizes contract data from disparate formats, enabling rapid red flag identification. Submitted for Digital Public Good registration, it provides a free alternative to proprietary software, with code and documentation available on [GitHub](#).

**Key Outcomes**

HackCorruption's evolution from individual team efforts to collaborative platform development has been a key objective for the Lab, along with the international recognition and technical innovation that's accompanied the journey. The Specus platform represents a milestone in cross-regional cooperation, while the AI tool addresses practical challenges faced by transparency initiatives globally. International workshop participation elevated the program's profile and facilitated knowledge sharing on technology's role in combating corruption.

These developments position HackCorruption for expanded impact in 2026, with established platforms, proven collaboration models, and growing international partnerships supporting anti-corruption efforts globally.



**CIVIC CHARGE - BUILDING COMMUNITIES OF ACCOUNTABILITY**

Civic Charge brings together emerging civic leaders from across the globe to strengthen accountability, transparency, and public participation. The 2025 cohort marked a strategic shift in approach, moving away from an individual project focus toward building a shared ecosystem of practice, centred on peer learning, collective growth and community impact.

Rather than imposing rigid structures, Civic Charge was designed to be accessible, flexible, and responsive to participant needs. Formal training sessions on fundraising and resilience were included, but the uncertainties of 2025 resulting in greater adaptability in how the program unfolded. Training and Incubation Manager, Jaco Roets, explained that the goal was to lower barriers to engagement while maintaining clear purpose and direction.

Within the shared online space created, participants

exchanged progress updates, challenges, and emerging insights. This normalised the uncertainty inherent in civic innovation and reduced the isolation that many early-stage reformers experience. People were able to ask practical questions, test assumptions, and receive feedback from peers working in different contexts but facing similar systemic challenges. This created a dynamic form of peer learning that complemented more formal inputs.

Civic work frequently involves navigating institutional resistance, limited resources, and personal risk. The cohort space offered solidarity and encouragement, allowing members to acknowledge both setbacks and milestones, ultimately strengthening resilience and sustained engagement throughout the programme.

Learning was also continuous and distributed. Resources and opportunities were shared in real time, meaning participants could access relevant information when they needed

it most. Each member contributed their own expertise, reinforcing the idea that everyone was both a learner and a resource. Networking developed organically through repeated engagement rather than formal events, fostering trust and opening pathways for partnership that extended beyond the programme itself.

The 2025 global cohort was intentionally kept small, with seven participants completing the programme, drawn from Nigeria, Kenya, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Civic Charge demonstrates that intentionally designed informal spaces can generate outsized impact - turning a cohort into a genuine community of practice that is equipped equally to advance individual initiatives and contribute to a broader culture of accountability.



**SOMALILAND’S GOOD GOVERNANCE HEROES**

The Good Governance Heroes Campaign in Somaliland reached a few pivotal milestones in 2025, evolving from a public recognition initiative into a platform for institutional learning and civic dialogue. The program has resulted in an engaged network of citizens and change-makers, alongside an institutional partner in the form of the country’s Good Governance Commission that was supported to translate governance principles into practice. The campaign celebrates public servants, social change-makers and community leaders, using short films to inspire good governance and service delivery outcomes. We worked with five film fellows in partnership with local media development organization, Media Ink, whose narrative-based approaches managed to humanise technical governance concepts in creative ways.

In June last year, the Good Governance Summit in Hargeisa brought together more than 150 people over two days, including representatives of the public institutions, private sector, civil society, academia, youth organizations and university students. It created a safe space for dialogue, reflection, and shared learning which lessened political sensitivities while deepening substantive engagement around governance challenges.

The team also focused on consolidating the program’s institutional impact. Activities included capacity assessments, strategic planning workshops, and training sessions with the Good Governance Commission. Heroes’ stories and campaign materials were integrated into learning and reflection processes, marking a key shift from public campaigning toward institutional learning and sustainability. Program co-ordinator, Deeq Osman, was also invited to teach at Hargeisa University last year, which also enabled the incorporation of our heroes’ stories into the curriculum on ethics at the School of Governance.



A final awards summit in December last year celebrated 20 incredible Good Governance Heroes (see their stories [here](#)) working across sectors including mental health, midwifery, and education.

The campaign's diverse volunteer network leaves Somaliland with a group of young people that think differently about governance and the civil service. Meanwhile, the Film Fellowship training involved 13 young people over the past 5 years. The Good Governance Commission has expressed interest in implementing a similar impact process within government agencies. They shared that traditional performance appraisals often focus on metrics like hours worked. In contrast, this campaign highlights individuals who genuinely contribute to public value and good governance, shifting the focus from time spent at work to the quality and impact of one's contributions.

**KEY LESSONS FROM THE WORK IN 2025 INCLUDE:**

- Positive storytelling can open civic space where formal accountability mechanisms struggle;
- Youth-led approaches increase legitimacy and reach;
- Independence must be actively protected, not assumed;
- Institutional engagement is most effective when framed as learning rather than control.





### INTEGRITY ICON PHILADELPHIA

Integrity Icon is a citizen-powered campaign to “name and fame” the world’s most honest public servants. Through a widespread public nomination process from citizens, the campaign elevates positive voices in the public service who are going beyond the call of duty to embed transparent and accountable practices in their departments. Since our first campaign in Nepal in 2014, we’ve recognized more than 300 Icons across our network, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Mali, Mexico, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Ukraine, the United States, and Zimbabwe, amplifying the role of public servants who work with integrity.

Now in its fifth year, our Integrity Icon Philadelphia winners were celebrated at a reception hosted by our partner, The Philadelphia Citizen. Helmed by former mayor Michael Nutter, the awards evening recognized the incredible impact of five winning Integrity Icon working in diverse fields from violence prevention to mental health services.

Winners included [Nathan Sallard](#), Client Services Manager at Group Violence Intervention (GVI), a division of the Office of Safe Neighborhoods. He has significantly improved the results of the office, helping to save lives and secure quality jobs for Philadelphians. [Yu-Shan Chou](#) is a Language Access and Engagement Specialist for the City Commissioners Office, who made the cut for working tirelessly to ensure that immigrant communities have access to the polls.

[Rorng Sorn](#) was awarded for her role in helping immigrants receive critical mental health services as the Language Access Coordinator for the City of Philadelphia’s Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbility Services. [Omar Crowder](#) was crowned for his impact as the much-loved principal of Northeast High School, which proudly boasts a high staff retention rate for staff and excellent student graduation rates.

Rounding up the winners for 2025 was [Charlene Samuels](#), Constituent Services Representative for City Council Minority Leader Kendra Brooks. She was awarded for consistent service to residents with finding solutions to their needs, whether keeping them in their homes or connecting them with a health services.

“I’m so glad for this opportunity that has been afforded to me,” [Samuels told guests](#). “I don’t take it lightly, because I don’t believe in mediocrity. You have to set the bar high and have a high standard.”



**Proximity - To Power**

**Global Convenings**

**1. WORLD JUSTICE FORUM 2025**

*June - Warsaw, Poland*

The World Justice Project, in partnership with the Ministry of Justice of Poland, convened the 2025 World Justice Forum with an ambitious agenda to reverse the recession of the global rule of law and collaborate on a counteroffensive to authoritarian expansion.

**Lessons that stood out**

- The World Justice Project’s Rule of Law Index reveals that constraints on government power have declined every year since 2017. In the latest report, 59% of countries saw a decline in constraints on government powers overall, while 68% of countries declined checks on government powers from non-government actors.
- Institutions can retain legitimacy in the face of political pressure through the power of “insider–outsider coalitions”, collaborations between oversight entities and civil society that improve feedback loops and public trust.

**2. MO IBRAHIM FOUNDATION 2025 IBRAHIM GOVERNANCE WEEKEND (IGW)**

*June - Marrakech, Morocco*

The event focused on the theme “Financing The Africa We Want,” exploring strategies for the continent to move from aid dependency to ownership and mobilizing its domestic resources.

**Lessons that stood out**

- There are structural barriers to participation maintained by the generation in power. In Africa, the age gap between the population and national leaders, on average, is 42 years; and only 14% of parliamentarians are under 40. There has to be a wholesale shift in pathways into decision-making.



- Africa’s external debt has almost doubled in the past decade - the debt to GDP ratio is now 24% and debt service is on average 14% of government spending. Change is simply not possible until we collectively solve this issue.

**3. INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRACY DAY (IDD) CONFERENCE**

*September - Brussels, Belgium*

The IDD Brussels Conference, hosted by the European Partnership for Democracy (EPD), Global Democracy Coalition, European Commission, Open Government Partnership and others, convened global thought leaders, organisations and decision-makers in Brussels for high-level dialogue on defending and advancing democracy.

**What stood out**

- In order to finance the democracy architecture globally, a new pooled fund from governments, philanthropies and citizens would go a long way in funding critical, proximate democracy oriented groups in regional hubs.
- Other key priorities include convening activists, journalists, and reformers, and conducting commission independent polling and civic research.
- Pooled funds are also needed to support digital and physical protection, trauma care, legal defense, and emergency relocation for activists and election monitors at risk. It also needs to focus on electoral integrity and civil rights.



**4. PEACECONNECT**

*October - Nairobi, Kenya*

More than 300 people gathered to reimagine the material base for civil society. Focused on facilitating collaborative action, the gathering embraced an agenda that met the moment with courage and pragmatism.

**What stood out**

- Many community organizations pushed back against the ‘post-ODA’ narrative of crisis, saying they’d long been dealing with a scarcity of institutional funding. Local resource mobilization and creative philanthropy efforts were key parts of the sustainability strategies that some were implementing.
- Arising out of a restructuring effort led by the West Africa

Civil Society Institute (WACSI), Reverse Calls for Proposals offer a different approach to grant funding. This involved shifting from a donor-recipient relationship to a co-investment arrangement, something the Zambian Governance Foundation (ZGF) managed successfully to implement.

- The evidence of local organizations raising sizeable endowments was varied but strong. Examples of investments included property assets and pooled community funds.

**5. WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM'S GOOD GOVERNANCE COMMUNITIES**

*October - Geneva, Switzerland*

We participated in a panel on Public–Private Action for Inte-

grity in a Complex World, speaking about trust and credibility, sparking innovation, and ultimately creating value.

**Lessons that stood out**

- As practitioners in governance and civil society, we need to rapidly deepen our understanding of how AI and cryptocurrencies are reshaping the corruption landscape. And, unfortunately, we are not widely known for our speed.
- While policymakers and regulators move cautiously and fall behind, malign actors are innovating rapidly, and the few global frameworks we have in place are far from sufficient to address this ever-evolving problem.



**6. OPEN GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP'S (OGP) GLOBAL SUMMIT**

*October - Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain*

The summit brought together more than 2,000 representatives of governments, civil society leaders, and policy-makers from around the world to exchange best practices and progress on open government implementation on key issues.

**Questions that stood out**

- Trust between levels of government is as important as trust between governments and citizens. How can we better support the various levels of government to build trust?
- People with little power can only exercise it through coalitions.

tions. How we can turn people's movements into coalitions that can govern effectively?

- The decline in aid is not about the financial resources as much as the erosion of empathy. Aid money isn't coming back for open governance, but how do we re-find our empathy for others?

**7. CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES TO THE UN CONVENTION AGAINST CORRUPTION (THE UN ANTI-CORRUPTION CONFERENCE, COSP 11)**

*December - Doha, Qatar*

As the largest global anti-corruption gathering, CoSP11 brought together over 2 500 participants from more than

170 countries to advance anti-corruption efforts, focusing on AI in anti-corruption, asset recovery, and strengthening integrity.

**What stood out**

- Scaling AI anti-corruption solutions depends on trust-by-design principles, prioritizing impact over complexity, and demystifying AI tools for broader accessibility.
- Civil society, journalists and whistle-blowers play critical roles in anti-corruption. Any restrictions on these groups directly undermine UNCAC implementation along with access to information.

# AL in the News



**Volunteers are now tracking what's already been lost in the USAID freeze**

StanfordSOCIAL  
INNOVATION<sup>Review</sup>

**Development in Retreat?**

Inside Philanthropy

**The Future of International Development Is Mutual Aid, Not Donor Aid**

**Candid.**

**How co-leadership helps us navigate a sector-wide crisis**

**DIPLOMATIC  
COURIER**

**GOVERNANCE HAS BEEN, WILL REMAIN, DRIVEN BY PEOPLE**

## Protecting the governance ecosystem

During the first quarter of 2025, AL started surveying organizations affected by the US government's aid cuts. Within the first few weeks, half of respondents had told us they had less than 3 months of operating reserves. We worked hard to amplify news about the cuts and their impact on the governance sector, working with media outlets including [Associated Press](#), [DEVEX](#) and the [Stanford Social Innovation Review](#). As Co-CEO Blair Glencorse shared at the time, the Lab also hosted a number of discussions with global foundations to help them determine where their support could be most strategic.

This work led to the founding of Civic Strength Partners which allowed us to start producing advice-oriented content around [legal compliance](#), mission-alignment and [alternative funding](#) streams.

We also shared [leadership and learning principles](#) for a sector in flux, and tried to embed ideas around changing [governance structures](#). From the rise of authoritarian populism to the use of AI and shifting global political alliances, the Lab's key messages have centered on the need for reform at some of our most important institutions. We also looked at the role the [private sector](#) should be playing in transforming development in partnership with civil society.

## Bridging divides between elites and citizens

We contributed to a new [Routledge](#) Books volume, titled "[Anti-Corruption in a Discordant World: Contestation, Abuse and Innovation](#)", sharing our experience of translocal networks. At the Lab, we've learnt that anti-corruption efforts today need to link local realities with broader support structures and learning resources in order to be effective. This requires shifts in how we fund, design and talk about anti-corruption as part of a translocal approach.

Complementing this approach, we were also proud to support the work of our Senior Non-Resident Fellow, Florencia Guertzovich, whose pioneering work on [invisible weavers](#) is pointing to people who function as connective tissue in the sector. Rather than getting stuck in the binary of repair versus reinvention, weavers are persisting and keeping essential governance work ticking over. Invisible weavers also help funding investments go further, by bridging, adapting and translating.

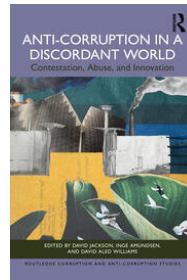
**Demanding civic accountability**

Another key ongoing advocacy objective is around [civic engagement at the World Bank Group](#). As the bank signalled a renewal of its Civic and Citizen Engagement (CCE) framework last year, the Lab worked with a coalition of partners to emphasize a systems and partnership-based approach to the reform of key indicators.

Despite some encouraging discussions, the Bank is yet to publish a revised CCE indicator, curtailing the role of citizen and CSO voices in decision-making and oversight. We believe that it needs to act immediately to ensure accountability both to communities and it's donors. Operational directives and guidance that center citizens and CSOs stand only to improve the Bank's overall performance by ensuring inclusion, transparency, and accountability.



**Why businesses must step up to sustain global civil society**



**Anti-Corruption in a Discordant World  
Contestation, Abuse, and Innovation**

**Inside Philanthropy**

**The Invisible Weaver's Wisdom: Re-Stitching Philanthropy's Approach for Enduring Resilience**



**The World Bank's Legitimacy Is Derived From Citizens, Now More Than Ever**



# Participants' Corner

WE CANVASSED THE VIEWS OF A FEW OF OUR PARTICIPANTS IN 2025



**Muhammad Shahzad Akram (Civic Charge participant, Pakistan)**

Reflecting on Civic Charge, I think its biggest contribution to me has been the shift from thinking purely as a legal practitioner to acting as a civic entrepreneur. It helped me see accountability not just as a legal outcome, but as a behavior

that can be shaped through community engagement, storytelling, and collective action. That mindset continues to influence my work, especially through ACE PAK and my broader governance initiatives.

Being part of the cohort was particularly valuable because of the diversity of perspectives and the safe space to test ideas. Learning alongside peers working in different contexts helped me realise that while the forms of corruption differ, the underlying challenges of trust, incentives, and citizen engagement are often shared. That exchange made my own approach more practical and grounded.

My biggest insight was that accountability movements become sustainable only when they are locally owned and culturally relevant. Legal tools are important, but they need to be complemented with community-driven strategies that make integrity visible, relatable, and actionable.



**Damilola Ifenla Oligbindi (Civic Charge participant, Nigeria)**

I would say that the biggest contribution Civic Charge made to me continues to be access to one-on-one mentorship and community of social change makers. On one hand, ARDEF got project-specific mentoring that was able to guide the trajectory of our initiatives before we began the Civic Charge program.

This helped us to focus on the communities we serve, their needs and not just performative outcomes. This mentoring has even continued after the end of my fellowship, and we have access to referral letters for grant opportunities. Interestingly, one of the star projects we implemented last year at ARDEF was managed by a Civic Charge Fellow, Blessing Agu which I see as one of the benefits of Civic Charge - the opportunity to work with liked minded change makers.

At the time we applied for the fellowship, we were at a point where we needed to launch, but didn't know how to start or where to start from. We were no doubt passionate and committed, but it was obvious we needed structured guidance to help us navigate the shrinking development space.

Civic Charge also helped us map our North Star as an organisation. That 'discovery' has made it easy to make objective decisions about prospective donors, partners and organizations we approach, and our strategies for subsequent projects.



**Ben Wrobel, Proximate (Civic Strength Partners client, United States)**

[Civic Strength Partners](#) is an accompaniment initiative that walks with organizations through the full arc of transition - mergers, affiliations, strategic partnerships, pivots, funding model

shifts, and responsible endings. It holds the emotional, relational, and cultural complexity alongside the strategic and operational.

Through CSP's accompaniment model, we engaged with Ben Wrobel from Proximate, an independent media outlet covering movements for participatory problem-solving that was facing limitations in garnering support for flexible general operating funds. Through a series of conversations that included potential partners, CSP's Sean McDonald supported Ben and others through the serious questions that everyone involved needed to work through before any decisions were made. "It's one thing to merge", said Ben, "but does it make strategic sense, financial sense, and cultural sense."

As Ben noted, one of the most helpful parts of the process was knowing that Sean was there, often just an email away, supporting as a champion and when needed, as a calm and grounding presence during a stressful time. "Knowing that Sean is a guy that has our back, but asks the tough questions" gave him peace of mind, said Ben.

Another advantage to working with CSP was the access to technical expertise. Although Ben was experienced with fundraising, as a non-profit person, Sean helped him work through questions surrounding his business model, something he was less familiar with. CSP was also able to help him access legal support, something that would otherwise be difficult for a smaller organization to access without paying for a large retainer. Ben considered that it is possible that without CSP, his organization might have reached the same result. However, he believes the process would have been unpleasant. The thoughtfulness of CSP's approach provided clarity that "helped preserve relationships, and helped us not rush into such a big decision".

# Staff Updates

## TEAM CORNER

We asked our team members what their highlights were for 2025. See all our responses below!



**BLAIR GLENCORSE**

**Founder & Co-CEO  
Chief Networks & Partnerships Officer**

“The enduring lesson of 2025 for me is that everything is about people- and caring for each other. It was a torrid year for many, but the organizations (and individuals) who seem to have

emerged best are those that centered relationships and duty of care. If we place our people at the heart of everything we do this allows them to adapt and thrive; and makes our organizations better at what they do too.”



**JEAN SCRIMGEOUR**

**Co-CEO  
Chief Innovation & Operations Officer**

“In a year that started with unprecedented instability and uncertainty I am so proud of the lab and its ability to make a plan! We prioritized supporting the ecosystem with the same urgency as

we placed on stabilizing our own organization, coming out the other side with a whole new (hopefully stronger) community that will forever change the way we look and do our work.”



**CHERI-LEIGH ERASMUS**

**Co-CEO  
Chief Learning & Agility Officer**

“What sticks with me is the fact that we saw team resilience and agility in action during deeply stressful times. We often talk about these traits in organizations, but I was immensely proud and

comforted to see that we actually had those muscles.”



**LEAH SHEARMAN**

**Global Director of Business Development**

“Amid the turbulence, loss, and historic change in 2025, we continued to see that the most effective response was people choosing to work together rather than apart. As we build what comes

next for the aid sector, we can't forget this. Rather it must be the foundation.”



**JACO ROETS**

**Programs & Learning Manager**

“When formal support systems weakened, it was trust, solidarity, and active citizenship that sustained important work. Small (often individual) acts of support, collaboration, and shared problem-solving had more immediate impact

than trying to sustain stand-alone projects. Accountability is not only built through systems, but through people who are connected, engaged, and willing to act together.”



**ALEJANDRA ONA**

**Finance Manager**

“I'd say 2025 was a masterclass in adjustment and change. It was very chaotic, but we kept iterating and adjusting, which helped us stay ahead. Careers, organizations, and identities shifted; we became

experts in reinvention to survive.”



**SHEENA ADAMS**

**Global Director of Communications**

“An enduring lesson that has stayed with me from 2025 is that working in uncertainty is not necessarily a weakness of a threat. The disruption and subsequent problem solving that we were invested in as the AL network

proved that uncertainty can also be a striking catalyst for innovation, growth and adaptability.”



**RAHMAT SHAH ZADRAN**

**Finance Officer**

“My biggest lesson from 2025 is that discipline leads to success. Completing my MBA within one year showed me that with focus, consistency, and strong time management, goals can be achieved efficiently.”



**SAMINA ANWARY**

**Advocacy & Public Affairs Manager**

“My takeaway from 2025 was around the value of building the plane while flying. That it is worth creating something with good enough information even if the destination is unclear.”



**KHADIJAH CHANG**  
Senior Program Officer

"An enduring lesson 2025 left me with is learning to embrace change rather than fighting or planning

around it, learning to be adaptable. For me, this meant getting comfortable with not always having full clarity or a complete picture and trusting myself to act anyway. It also meant reminding myself that I don't have to move through any of it alone; I have a team around me that can fill in the gaps and help me course-correct."



**SHALLY BALOCH**  
Junior Networks & Partnerships Officer

"I think I learned a lot about how even when times are hard, it is so vital that we are able to come together

as a community and think creatively about how we can best support one another whether that is within our Global team, across the AL Network, or the entire ecosystem as a whole (and that a sweet treat can only ever help!)"



**NASEERA NOOR-MAHOMED**  
Communications & Marketing Manager

"For me, 2025 reinforced the importance of resilience, teamwork, and being willing to

step into new responsibilities and broader areas of contribution. It was also a year that highlighted innovation, as the sector was moving through significant change and challenge. Through it all, I learned that growth often comes from adapting together, staying committed through uncertainty, and keeping perspective on the impact of our work."



**SHREEMANJARI TAMRAKAR**  
Junior Communications Specialist

"In 2025, I found some clarity within myself, which helped me approach life

and my relationships with more intention and lightness."

# Budget Highlights

**\$10,167,020**

Total Revenue for 2025

**\$5,241,296**

Total Expenses for 2025

**\$1,293,553**

Total Salaries

**\$3,022,468**

Total Program

**\$925,275**

Total Admin