

White Paper

# European Civic Tech Hub

Strategic Framework and Implementation Roadmap

## Executive Summary

The European Civic Tech Hub is a strategic initiative to **strengthen Europe's civic tech ecosystem** and support democratic resilience as well as technological sovereignty. As the sector matures, the priority is to move **beyond experimentation** toward sustained adoption, interoperability, and measurable impact in the EU and across Member States. The hub can help to a great extent to highlight, support and cherish the democratic contributions of civic tech start-ups, scale-ups and established actors. An **innovative civic tech sector** is in need of **solid and reliable structures** that ensures **security, user-centricism** and **top-nudge technology**.

We suggest that the Hub should act as a central operational platform connecting civic tech organisations, public administrations, researchers, and European institutions. Its core role should be to translate policy into practice by providing structured support to public actors - as well as the civic tech ecosystem. This includes **implementation** support, **procurement** templates, **interoperability** specifications, and a shared **measurement** framework to ensure **repeatable delivery** and comparable outcomes.

By **supporting public administrations** with guidance, training, and advisory services, the Hub should facilitate the effective adoption and integration of civic tech solutions. At the same time, it should enable **cumulative learning** across Europe through common standards and evaluation methods.

In a context of increasing technological dependencies and market concentration, the Hub should help foster **independent, trustworthy, and values-based civic technologies** aligned with European **democratic principles**. It should support the emergence and scaling of European civic tech solutions, reinforcing Europe's global leadership in this field.

The **governance structure** of the hub should bring together European Commission services, a Stakeholder Group, and the civic tech ecosystem, ensuring co-design, transparency, and accountability.

By bridging policy and implementation, the European Civic Tech Hub must position Europe as a **global reference for civic technology** in the public interest.

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## 1. Introduction

Organisations developing civic- and citizen-oriented technological solutions, commonly referred to as “civic tech”, now constitute a fully-fledged economic and democratic sector in Europe. **Civic tech solutions support democratic participation, transparency, deliberation, accountability, and the effective delivery of public services.**

At a time when digital dependencies are becoming increasingly critical and problematic, Europe faces a strategic challenge: ensuring that the technologies underpinning democratic processes are independent, trustworthy, top-nudge, interoperable, and aligned with European democratic values. **European civic tech stands for state-of-the-art technology developed for democratic purposes, by and for the public interest.**

As outlined in the **European Democracy Shield** Communication (November 2025), the European Commission plans to establish a **European Civic Tech Hub**. The Association Civic Tech Europe (ACTE) warmly welcomes this timely, important, and much-needed initiative.

In this context, we are pleased to present this White Paper, which outlines **how such a Hub could function in practice**, how it could operate, its purpose and responsibilities and which actors could be involved. The document is intended to serve as a source of inspiration, a potential template, and a concrete contribution from the civic tech ecosystem to the ongoing institutional workstream.

Crucially, the Hub should operate as a practical implementation layer. Its core outputs should be deployment support, procurement guidance, interoperability standards, shared measurement framework, as well as development guidelines. The goal is not to only work in pilots, but ensure sustained adoption of civic tech solutions across Member States; and supporting the emergence and scaling of European Civic Tech.

We believe that a Hub can only be successfully established **in close collaboration with the civic tech ecosystem** itself. Accordingly, ACTE takes a proactive stance and is ready to act as a sounding board, supporting the design, establishment, and operationalisation of the Hub by channeling insights, feedback, and experiences from the European civic tech community.

## 2. Key Topics and Areas of Work

The Hub will focus on the following thematic areas:

- Digital **participatory democracy**
- **Artificial intelligence** and democracy
- Support to counter **misinformation** and strengthen democratic integrity

- Tech-enhanced **deliberative democracy**
- Data exchange and **interoperability**
- **Safety & security** of civic tech systems
- The **state of civic tech** in Europe
- Agility & **state of the art** technology
- **Scaling** and sustainability

### 3. Purpose and Objectives

The main objective of the European Civic Tech Hub is to enable top-nudge digital democracy tools for Europeans and to help the sector thrive. The Hub will act as a single point of reference for understanding the needs, capacities, and challenges of the civic tech ecosystem, while supporting its long-term sustainability, agility and independence.

The key objectives of the Hub are to:

- **Support the development** of an independent and thriving European civic tech sector (including public procurement, funding coordination and initiatives, targeted resources).
- Allow for an **experimentation space** that would allow European civic tech providers to test their new tools without having to run them in real-world scenarios.
- Provide a **structured overview** of the European civic tech ecosystem (mapping, cross-border information sharing, best practices).
- Serve as a **multilingual focal point for information, resources and tools** on civic tech and a **single point of reference** for needs assessment related to civic tech adoption as well as development (knowledge sharing and information exchange between civic tech providers to encourage cross-organisational learning, bridge between civic tech providers, practitioners, and academics/researchers, new innovation and standards information).
- Help public administrations and other actors be **trained** in implementing civic tech projects. It would help them to **identify suitable civic tech solutions. Such training could include programmes for development and capacity building initiatives, and clarify government/public sector civic tech adoption strategies.**
- Promote **interoperability and data exchange** between civic tech tools and platforms including data format standardisation for cross-border information sharing, security best practices development for sensitive democratic data, anonymization protocols for public data sharing and research, common measurement frameworks for impact assessment.
- **Strengthen links** between the civic tech ecosystem and relevant European Commission services in the spirit of cooperation between European civic tech actors.
- Set up **quality guidelines on ethical innovation in civic tech**, European value and mitigate systemic risks, showing how values and technology can align.

Besides, the European Civic Tech Hub will provide **structured input and evidence-based insights** to the work of European Union institutions. This includes analytical contributions on the relationship between democracy and technology, policy-relevant findings from the civic tech ecosystem, and practical recommendations informed by real-world implementation.

The Hub's work directly supports several key European Commission priorities:

- **European Democracy Shield:** the Hub operationalises the Shield's call for a civic tech hub and contributes to democratic resilience through practical tools and infrastructure.
- **Interoperable Europe Act:** the proposed interoperability label and data standards work contribute to the cross-border interoperability agenda.
- **AI Act:** the Hub's work on AI and democracy provides practical guidance for responsible AI use in high-stakes democratic contexts.
- **Digital Services Act:** civic tech solutions for platform transparency, democratic integrity, and citizen empowerment align with DSA objectives.
- **EU funding programmes** (e.g. Horizon, CERV - future AGORA): the Hub supports active citizenship, participation, and democratic engagement.
- **GDPR:** the hub can help to have a sounding board on the GDPR implementation for civic tech organisations in Europe.

## 4. Key Outputs

The Hub will deliver the following core outputs:

The Hub's primary outputs are practical tools that help administrations adopt civic tech and help the sector learn from its own experience.

### For EU Institutions

- Policy input
- Important addition to the competence centered on participatory and deliberative democracy
- Tech world leaders in EU
- Best practices sharing with civic tech and between institutions

### For national, regional & local Public Administrations

- Adoption pack: procurement templates, implementation playbooks, and training modules.
- Interoperability package: shared specifications and the European Civic Tech Interoperability Label.
- Field support: helpdesk and advisory service for administrations deploying civic tech.

## For the Ecosystem

- Common measurement framework: shared indicators and evaluation templates. All Hub-supported initiatives report using this framework, making outcomes comparable.
- Annual report: state of European civic tech — ecosystem mapping, adoption trends, and policy recommendations.
- Quality guidelines on ethical innovation in civic tech. Key principles could include: primacy of citizen interest over technical logic, priority to robustness and security of participation processes, full traceability between participation and decision, clear governance and accountability structures.
- Evidence library: case studies documenting what works, what doesn't, and why.
- Convenings: three thematic webinars per year and one annual in-person meeting.
- Annual report on the state of European Civic Tech

## 5. Governance

Effective governance of the European Civic Tech Hub requires **explicit safeguards from the outset**: neutrality, conflict of interest rules, transparent participation criteria, a preference for open standards, and a requirement that all funded or featured initiatives report using a common measurement framework. Governance performance should be reviewed annually with published findings, to protect trust and prevent institutional capture.

The Hub could be governed by a Steering Board bringing together key European Commission bodies (DG JUST, DG CONNECT, the European AI Office, DG COMM, with a key role played by the Joint Research Centre (JRC)).

**ACTE offers to contribute to the governance as a practitioner and expert member** of the Steering Board, bringing its pan-European network and deep knowledge of civic tech to ensure the Hub's work remains grounded, relevant, and connected to the organisations and administrations it aims to serve.

A broader **Stakeholder Group**, open to civic tech organisations, academia and civil society, admitted by the Steering Board, should be created to feed grassroots perspectives into the Hub's work.

### Potential engagement with ACTE

Given its unique position as the only association grouping European civic tech organisations and representing a substantial portion of the European civic tech sector, we believe that a **special role for ACTE within the Hub's governance** structure is not only justified, but beneficial for all actors involved.

This special role does not imply that non-ACTE members will have limited access. Civic tech organisations outside ACTE will continue to be fully represented and engaged through the Stakeholder Group.

To ensure **transparency and avoid any perception of privileged access**, we propose that ACTE's role in the Steering Board be reviewed annually by the other Steering Board members. This review would assess whether ACTE continues to be the most relevant actor to represent the European civic tech community in this context.

ACTE's objective is to **actively support the Hub**, contribute insights from across the ecosystem, and help shape its development, while maintaining an open, inclusive, and accountable governance framework.

It is important to note that **ACTE and the Hub serve complementary but distinct functions within the European civic tech ecosystem**. ACTE operates as a coalition or network of civic tech actors, providing an informal, member-driven space for internal coordination, exchange, and mutual support, without any formal institutional framework. In contrast, **the Hub should function as a platform where institutions and civic tech organisations converge**, acting as a bridge between the worlds of policy and practice. While ACTE focuses on fostering collaboration and insight-sharing within the civic tech community, the Hub should create structured opportunities for engagement with external stakeholders and decision-makers.

## 6. Proposed Next Steps

To ensure the effective establishment and long-term impact of the European Civic Tech Hub, a phased and inclusive approach is recommended.

### Short-term (set-up phase)

- **Formalise the mandate**, scope, and objectives of the European Civic Tech Hub, building on the priorities outlined in the European Democracy Shield.
- **Establish the proposed governance structure**, including the Steering Board and Stakeholder Group, and define clear roles and responsibilities.
- **Launch an initial mapping** and stock-taking exercise of the European civic tech ecosystem to identify key actors, solutions, gaps, and needs.
- **Initiate structured dialogue** between European Commission services and civic tech stakeholders to align expectations and priorities.
- **Initiate the co-design process** for the European Civic Tech Interoperability Label with sector stakeholders and the JRC. - shield reference on interoperability
- **Initiate editing process** and consultative measures on quality guidelines on ethical innovation in civic tech

### Medium-term (operational phase)

- **Operationalise the Hub** as a single point of reference for civic tech expertise, needs assessment, and ecosystem insights.
- **Deliver the first annual report** on the state of European civic tech, providing evidence-based analysis and policy-relevant recommendations.
- **Organise thematic webinars** and workshops to foster knowledge exchange, peer learning, and collaboration across sectors and Member States.
- **Support interoperability efforts** and promote best practices for data exchange, reuse, and integration of civic tech solutions.
- Publish the first version of the **guidelines on ethical innovation in civic tech**

### Long-term (consolidation and scaling phase)

- **Strengthen the role of the Hub** as a trusted interface between the civic tech ecosystem and European institutions.
- **Full rollout of the interoperability label**, with integration into public procurement frameworks.
- **Support the emergence and scaling** of European civic tech champions, contributing to Europe's digital sovereignty and democratic resilience.
- **Ensure the sustainability of the Hub** through stable governance, continuous stakeholder engagement, and regular evaluation of impact.
- **Position the European Civic Tech Hub** as a reference point at global level for technology developed in the public interest and for democratic purposes.

## About ACTE

ACTE members and partners represent the diversity of the civic tech sector. As civic tech professionals, we firmly believe that civic engagement in all forms must be encouraged. Our civic tech platforms designed for institutions, civil society actors and active citizens directly address this challenge:

- By developing citizen participation
- By supporting activism
- By creating innovative citizen-centric public services

Acte's members and partners are independent of any political movements.

### **President of ACTE**

Evelien Nieuwenburg, Dembrane

### **Vice-Presidents of ACTE**

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**ACTE members list (alphabetical order):** Citipo, Civocracy, DeliberAlde, Dembrane, Go Vocal, Involved, Logiq.media, Make.org, Osoigo, Participation Factory, Qela, Qomon, Stateless, Tectonica