



CIVIL SOCIETY

WHO WE ARE

The Global Network Initiative (GNI) is a multistakeholder organization that brings together individual experts (including academics joining in their personal capacity) and academic institutions, **civil society organizations**, information and communications technology (ICT) companies, and investors from around the world to protect and advance freedom of expression and privacy rights in the ICT sector. GNI facilitates this collaborative work by setting a global standard for responsible company decision making, conducting independent assessments of company commitments, fostering confidential dialogue among members, and serving as a multistakeholder voice in the face of government restrictions and demands. [See a full list of members and observers.](#)

WHY GNI MATTERS

Governments around the world are increasingly involved in Internet governance and policy as they face evolving challenges in relation to law enforcement, national security, and the protection of human rights in the digital age, leading to greater scrutiny of ICT companies, which provide the platforms, networks, and services for online engagement.

Every day, ICT companies make important decisions about data storage, selling or licensing technology, and responding to government requests to access data or restrict access to information. These decisions have implications for the rights to freedom of expression and privacy of billions of users. GNI provides guidance based on international human rights law to ICT companies on how to evaluate and respond to these scenarios.

GNI plays a critical role in the ICT ecosystem, providing inclusive solutions for challenging issues and increasing the collective ability to protect and advance the right to privacy and freedom of expression.

HOW GNI IMPLEMENTS ITS MISSION

GNI implements its mission through shared learning, policy engagement, a framework for responsible company decision making, and a unique accountability mechanism in the ICT sector. More specifically, we:

- > **SET** a global standard for free expression and privacy in the ICT sector through the [GNI Principles on Freedom of Expression and Privacy](#)
- > **HELP** ICT companies establish rights-respecting policies and procedures, particularly in relation to privacy and freedom of expression
- > **PROMOTE** accountability and continuous improvement of member companies' policies and procedures through periodic assessment by independent experts
- > **FOSTER** a unique, multistakeholder, safe space for shared learning and sensitive discussions
- > **RAISE** our collective voice to advocate for rights-protecting laws and policies, from fighting network disruptions to responding to extremist content without harming human rights



HOW GNI MEMBERS WORK TOGETHER

GNI strives to reflect global diversity within its four constituencies, which drive change by promoting the GNI Principles and working together on freedom of expression and privacy rights, while maintaining distinct roles.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS, including human rights and media freedom groups, bring their in-depth expertise on human rights along with direct connection to people on the ground around the world.

COMPANIES undertake independent assessments on their implementation of the GNI Principles within their organizations and publicly report on their progress over time. These assessments provide valuable insights into how companies put their GNI commitments into practice, including how law enforcement mechanisms work and the challenges companies and their staff may face on the ground.

INDIVIDUAL EXPERTS (INCLUDING ACADEMICS) AND ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS inform GNI's learning and policy activities with research and analysis on current digital rights issues.

INVESTORS recognize that meaningful commitments to human rights can help companies in which they invest avoid risks and build trust, leading to more productive and sustainable user engagement. They promote the GNI Principles through their wider engagement in the ICT sector.

BENEFITS OF GNI MEMBERSHIP FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

- > Increase the engagement of currently underrepresented stakeholders in current digital rights debates
- > Connect with a diverse group of actors to help set global standards to promote and protect freedom of expression and privacy rights
- > First-hand opportunities to interact with companies and learn about their policies and procedures to protect users' rights and inform companies' on-the-ground operations
- > Leverage GNI's spaces for international advocacy engagement to promote the rights to freedom of expression and privacy in a specific country or region

BECOME A GNI CIVIL SOCIETY MEMBER

The civil society constituency is open to research or advocacy-oriented civil society organizations working on digital rights issues at global, regional, national, or local level.

WHAT WE EXPECT FROM OUR MEMBERS

- > Adopt the GNI Principles and GNI Core Documents.
- > Support the GNI Principles and GNI **mission** through the academic constituency.
- > Contribute to shared learning, accountability, and collective action among GNI members.
- > Actively participate in GNI meetings and activities.
- > Civil society organizations pay nominal annual dues of at least \$100 USD

APPLICATION PROCESS

To apply for GNI membership as a civil society organization, here is the information that we need from you.

1

A Statement of Intent

Send a statement of intent (1-2 pages long) to info@globalnetworkinitiative.org, following these requirements:

- > State your intent to join the civil society constituency.
- > A brief description of your organization including an institutional link, your areas of expertise and focus, the location where you are registered/incorporated, and the geographic areas where you operate. Please also state your mission and goals and specify which communities you serve.
- > Your interest in joining GNI, more specifically:
 - How does GNI's work relate to the work of your organization?
 - Linked examples of your organization's work as it relates to the **GNI Principles**.
 - Has your organization ever participated in GNI events/activities or worked with other digital rights organizations, including any **GNI members**? If yes, please explain
- > Your expectations and commitments, more specifically:
 - How will GNI membership benefit your organization?
 - Was your intention to join GNI informed by a specific experience your organization had regarding human/digital rights? If yes, please explain.
 - What does your organization plan to contribute to GNI?
 - Do you commit to implement and advance the GNI Principles and Implementation Guidelines, and contribute to shared learning and collective action on GNI-related issues?
 - Do you commit to abide by the confidential nature of the discussions within GNI?

2

Follow Up

Once we have received your SOI, GNI staff may contact you to discuss membership in more detail, if your application is viable.

3

Consultation with existing GNI participants

We will talk with members of the constituency that you plan to join, in this case the civil society constituency. As a next step, your application materials will be reviewed by our multistakeholder Membership Committee.

4

Decision by the GNI Board

As a final step, the Executive Director will make a recommendation to the GNI Board members who will then vote on your application.

5

Notification of the GNI Board's Decision

You will be contacted by the Executive Director who will inform you of the GNI Board's decision.