

SEEK Initiative

What Is The Seek Initiative?

Citizens around the world today are redefining how stories are published and how wrongdoing is exposed. Many are no longer just content receivers and consumers, but investigators and evidence-driven content creators in their own right. Real stories are being told from the ground up by the people and communities involved.

The Seek Initiative is a platform that empowers people and communities to find and tell these stories – effectively, factually, ethically and safely. Rather than doing its own investigations, Seek works to create a network that helps citizen investigators support, learn from, and collaborate with one another.

What Do We Do?

The Seek Initiative proposes to build the first-ever comprehensive curriculum of citizen investigation, grounded in tactics already widely deployed and working in the field – from social-media and geolocation work (think Bellingcat), to the documentation of physical events (think Witness), to deep-dive exposes (think Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project).

While a host of actors across journalism, human rights and advocacy have developed a range of tools and tactics to empower their constituents to dig into wrongdoing, this piecemeal, tool-by-tool approach has severe limitations. By bringing together investigative methods from across the NGO spectrum – including from our four member non-profits' expertise in investigative reporting, information technology and NGO investigations – we have built a menu of investigative options that help anyone identify, dig into, and address local problems – regardless of geography, security concern, or technical ability.

Functionally, the **Seek Initiative** will provide these resources through:

- *A robust website hosting guides, tutorials, podcasts and webinars on topics ranging from basic research techniques to finding and verifying open source information, effective storytelling, efficient use of tools in context, and more;*
- *A training and support methodology helping NGOs, local leaders and mentors to initiate and maintain local groups and initiatives that can connect to each other;*
- *An online and offline community that engages citizen investigators with each other and the broader network, and an environment for citizen investigators to feel that they are part of an emerging movement;*
- *A global summit that enables citizen investigators to have rich interactions in a physical meeting place (as that becomes possible).*

Who Are We?

The Seek Initiative works as a consortium to provide these resources and to build the community of citizen investigators who will use them to identify problems, seek solutions, and catalyze change. Our founding partners are:

- **CORRECTIV**, *the first nonprofit newsroom in Germany, investigates injustice and abuses of power and implements educational programs that help citizens to actively participate in journalism;*
- **Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN)**, *an international association of journalism organizations that supports the training of investigative and data journalists;*
- **Tactical Tech**, *an international NGO that engages with citizens and civil-society organisations to explore and mitigate the impacts of technology on society;*
- **DigLab Foundation** *trains and mentors NGOs and teams of citizen investigators to dig where they stand.*

Combined, our organizations have almost five decades of experience in supporting impactful investigations by civil society and a network of hundreds of organizations and thousands of journalists, citizen investigators, advocates, experts, and organizers.

What's Next?

The Seek Initiative grew out of an international workshop for citizen investigators at the 2019 Global Investigative Journalism Conference, organized by the four founding members of this initiative. We documented a list of fourteen common challenges experienced by participants from all over the world. They told us that citizen groups lack a comprehensive, secure, collaborative and sustainable methodology to conduct investigations that produce the robust evidence and momentum needed to address critical problems in their societies.

As our four non-profits discussed joining forces to build a citizen-investigation movement, we realized that combining our complementary skills, experiences, and networks would enable us to leverage each others' strengths and amplify our impact.

Our goal in 2021 is to grow our consortium and move from concept to implementation – to build the destination for the knowledge, support and training that citizen investigators need; to recruit partners across the NGO and philanthropic sectors who can use our resources to advance their work; and to organize opportunities for them to connect and learn. This means to:

- *Identify and build relationships with additional consortium partners. (For example, we are currently planning with TechSoup to create a course in citizen investigation for their HiveMind online learning platform); Organize two generalist virtual workshops to promote widely to the NGO/philanthropic community to introduce our approach and services;*
- *Populate a beta website/online platform with resources and training materials aggregated and adapted from member organizations;*
- *Create a list of the consortium's contacts, trainees, and allies to create a way to surface questions and needs among citizen investigators that can inform our plans and the resources we offer;*
- *Recruit partnerships manager and content manager position(s) to manage this workflow and coordinate the staff time and in-kind resources partner organizations contribute to this mission.*

The Seek Initiative aims to raise \$500,000 to pilot these activities in several areas around the world and launch Seek's virtual destination for citizen investigation know-how and tools. This will seed our community with connected and engaged participants and generate awareness and impact that will help us better understand how to shape the Initiative's future and grow to scale.

How Can You Help?

There is an enormous opportunity to bring together and strengthen the emerging, yet still disconnected, initiatives of citizen, community and civil society investigators around the world, and enable them to safely and ethically collect, verify and expose important matters affecting their communities. And as the events of the earliest days of 2021 have shown us, there is an urgent need to build the capacity of fact-gatherers and truth-tellers to combat the rising challenges of mis-/dis-information.

By weaving together investigative threads from across the journalism, citizen investigation, advocacy, and broader civil society spaces, the Seek Initiative is a force multiplier – enabling investigative techniques and tactics to reach more people, in order to identify and address more problems where they occur, and ultimately catalyze greater change. But to capitalize on these opportunities and meet these challenges, we need committed partners who share our vision. Are you one of them?

