ICT for Civic Data — Turin University 2025-26

Project Definition and Proposal Outline

Crash Course — Day 1

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Welcome

> The week at a glance

Each day maps to one stage of the data pipeline:

Day	Focus	End-of-day outcome
Day 1	Define	Research questions, horizon table, proposal outline
Day 2	Find, Get	Collected datasets, documented retrieval process
Day 3	Verify, Clean	Verified, clean, consolidated dataset
Day 4	Analyse	Data-informed arguments and visualisations
Day 5	Present, Plan	Final proposal with data evidence

Your guiding thread: respond to a **Request for Proposals** with a proposal backed by data, not just words.

> What you need this week

- A **computer** with a modern browser (Chrome or Firefox)
- A **GitHub account** and familiarity with Codespaces
- An **agentic CLI tool** of your choice: Gemini CLI (free), Claude Code, or OpenAI Codex
- A reliable **internet connection**

Today's afternoon includes setup time for anyone who needs it.

Analysing the RFP

> What is an RFP?

A **Request for Proposals** is a document issued by an organisation that wants to fund a project but does not want to design it themselves.

- The funder describes **the problem** and **what they value**
- Respondents propose **an approach** and **a team** to solve it
- The funder evaluates proposals against **stated criteria**

RFPs are work of interpretation: some method, some artistry.

> Two types of RFP

Technical RFP

The funder knows exactly what they want. Specific technology, specific framing, little room for variance.

Your job: deliver expertise within their box.

Strategic RFP

The funder knows they have a problem. They think data and AI are important, but **they don't know what that means concretely**.

Your job: help them think through what they actually need.

Our practice RFP is the second type. Most RFPs in the data and AI space are.

> Read the RFP

Take **5 minutes** to read the full RFP carefully.

civicliteraci.es/rfp/disaster-preparedness/

As you read, note:

- What stands out to you
- What surprises you
- What you don't fully understand

We will work through it together using the **analysis questions**.

> How to read an RFP (1/2)

1. What is the funder's **core problem**?
2. What does the funder **already know**?
3. What capacity is the funder **missing**?
4. What does the funder **explicitly ask for**?
5. What do they **signal but not prescribe**?
6. What is **NOT** in the RFP?

> How to read an RFP (2/2)

1. How will proposals be **evaluated**?
2. What would a **weak response** look like?
3. What would a **strong response** look like?
4. How can **data** strengthen this response?
5. What is **your angle**?
6. What are the **risks**?

Questions 1-6 are about **understanding the funder**. Questions 7-12 are about **designing your response**.

> What is the funder's core problem?

> "Climate-related disasters disproportionately affect communities with limited access to health facilities, emergency shelters, and transport infrastructure."

In your own words: what problem is CLI trying to solve?

Not "they want a disaster preparedness methodology." That is what they are asking for. The problem is why they are asking.

> What does the funder already know?

> "CLI's field staff possess deep expertise in the regions where they operate."

The funder is **not** starting from zero. Their field staff already know the regions, the communities, and the risks.

What they lack is the **technical capacity** to systematically complement that expertise with data.

> What capacity are they missing?

They say they need:

- A preparedness assessment using data
- A methodology
- AI integration
- Adaptability to other regions

But remember: **the way the funder expresses their need is not necessarily the correct framing.**

They may need a **strategy** for integrating data into their work before they need any tools or methodology. If there is no strategy, jumping to tools is a mistake.

> What do they signal but not prescribe?

Some phrases are **signals**, not requirements:

- *"data-driven approaches"* — they want data, but they don't say which data or how
- *"AI tools could inform the work"* — they are open to AI, but they don't know what that means concretely
- *"improve efficiency and scalability"* — they want something reusable, not a one-off study
- *"confirm and enrich existing local knowledge"* — they are not asking you to replace their field staff

Your proposal should translate these signals into something concrete that **aligns with what they already do**.

> What is NOT in the RFP?

- No specific **data sources** named
- No **tools or software** prescribed
- No **geographic region** specified
- No **budget ceiling** mentioned

Every absence is a decision the funder left to you. These are your degrees of freedom.

> How will proposals be evaluated?

Five criteria, in the RFP's order:

1. **Relevance and innovation** — does the approach fit the problem?
2. **Data-driven approach** — how effectively does the proposal use data?
3. **Use of technology** — how clear and realistic is the AI integration?
4. **Feasibility and impact** — can this actually be done?
5. **Scalability and adaptability** — can it be applied elsewhere?

Which criterion do you think carries the most weight? Why?

> What would a weak response look like?

A proposal that:

- Restates the problem without adding anything the funder doesn't already know
- Takes the RFP's framing at face value without questioning whether it's the right approach
- Treats AI as a magic solution: "we will use AI to analyse the data"
- Proposes advanced tools when a strategy and simple tools would be more appropriate
- Describes a methodology but provides no evidence it would work

A weak response tells. It does not show.

> What would a strong response look like?

A proposal that:

- **Challenges the framing** where needed: maybe they need a strategy before they need tools
- Chooses a **specific region and hazard** and explains why
- Proposes something that **fits their existing processes**, not something they can't use
- Explains how **AI is used at specific steps** with safeguards, not as a blanket solution
- Acknowledges **risks and limitations** honestly

And the strongest responses do one more thing.

> How can data strengthen this response?

There are two ways to respond to this RFP:

Describe your approach	Demonstrate your approach
"We will use geospatial data to identify vulnerable communities and map infrastructure gaps."	"We analysed flood events and health facility coverage in Region X. Here is what we found, and here is what it means for preparedness planning."
The funder reads a plan. They hope it works.	The funder sees evidence. They trust the team.

> The "show don't tell" advantage

The RFP asks you to **describe** how you would use data and AI.

It does **not** ask you to demonstrate it.

But a proposal that backs up its arguments with actual data analysis does two things at once:

1. It answers the RFP's question about methodology
2. It **proves your team can do the work**

This is what we will build across the five days.

> An RFP response is a story

Everyone in the process knows that a proposal is a **narrative**. The delivery is often very different from the story told. Funders know this too.

What makes a story compelling is not promises. It is **knowledge and clarity of thought**.

- Past work, recommendations, and credentials are signals of trust
- Data analysis is a signal of **competence and rigour**
- The story is how you connect the data to the funder's problem and show it serves a clear goal

This week is not just about learning data and AI skills. It is about learning to **tell the story** of how those skills make sense within a project.

> What we covered this morning

- What an RFP is and how to read one strategically
- The difference between what a funder asks for and what they actually need
- Why data makes a proposal credible, and why storytelling makes it compelling

This afternoon: choose your angle, form teams, set up your tools, and start exploring what data exists.