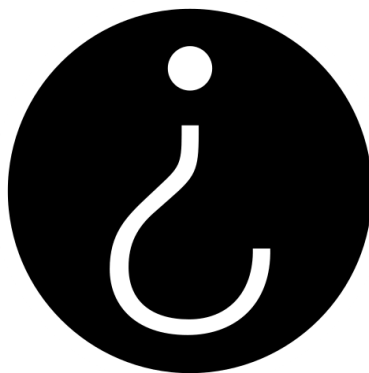




Bellingcat Policy Plan 2025-2027

This document presents the Policy Plan for the years 2025-2027 of Bellingcat Foundation (Stichting Bellingcat, established on 11 July 2018 in Amsterdam with Chamber of Commerce KvK registration number 72136030, RSIN number 859000515).

The purpose of this policy is to describe our organisation and its structure (including management, financing and governance), its ambition and the strategies we employ to achieve our goals and amplify the effects and impact of our work. The policy also states broadly our principles and vision, and more specifically how our activities are implemented and supervised.

Introduction

Bellingcat is an international non-profit organization at the forefront of open-source investigation. We apply cutting-edge investigative methods to events of public interest, uncovering wrongdoing and providing verified facts to inform public discourse. With over 30 staff and contributors in more than 20 countries, we operate in a unique field where advanced technology, forensic research, journalism, transparency and accountability come together. We design and share verifiable methods of ethical digital investigation. By publishing walkthroughs to open source research methods and holding tailored training sessions on their use for journalists, human rights activists and members of the public, we're broadening the scope and application of open source research.

The foundation's objectives

This the three-fold purpose of the foundation:

- 1) the foundation has the ambition to become the global hub for training and research in open source research and aims to centralize (and professionalize) all activities run by Bellingcat internationally
- 2) to intensify and grow the international network of partners and contributors
- 3) to increase collaboration and cooperation with local and international donors

Bellingcat has grown significantly as an organisation both in relation to its organisational structure, and its reputation in a wide range of fields. Much of this sustained success has been

enabled by taking the time to establish a solid foundation for future growth and development of the organisation from 2018 onward. This has allowed Bellingcat to take advantage of the many opportunities for growth, development and partnerships presented to the organisation.

Mission, Vision and Objectives

Bellingcat is an independent international collective of researchers, investigators and citizen journalists using open source and social media investigation to probe a variety of subjects – from environmental damage and crimes against humanity, to tracking the use of chemical weapons and conflicts worldwide. With staff and contributors in more than 20 countries around the world, we operate in a unique field where advanced technology, forensic research, journalism, investigations, transparency and accountability come together.

Bellingcat's vision is to play a trend-setting and pivotal role in the developing field of online open source investigations into crime, conflict or corruption by inspiring and supporting a global community to conduct high-quality, responsible and transparent open source investigations anywhere in the world.

- Our mission is to hold power (for instance corporate, government, and transnational) to account to advance transparency and justice.
- Our strategy is to become the leader in the field by providing top-quality investigations and training, and establishing recognized standards.

The core principles and objectives of our work are based on:

- Passion - be the pioneer in the conduct of open source and social media investigations in a variety of topics and geographies
- Dedication - to contribute to building the field of open source investigation in terms of governance, standards, community, process and distribution
- Innovation – to develop tools and methodologies transferable to different topics and regions of investigation
- Allegiance to Truth – we pledge allegiance to truth and evidence and abide by the principles of transparency and accountability

Strategy & Methodology

To achieve our objectives, we produce and publish high quality investigations, train stakeholders and seek cooperation with diverse actors (inter-government and non-government, local and

international, media, academia, activists and many others). Bellingcat's strategy to lead the development of open source and social media investigation is built on our unique IVA approach (a three-part process known as “Investigate, Verify, Amplify”) and our distributed, collaborative work model.

We research various topics (including war crimes, conflicts, human rights abuses, corruption, corporate misconduct, environmental crimes) using a variety of platforms to collect data online and from publicly available sources. The data and information collected is then rigorously verified by applying strict standards and principles.

We developed a methodology for verification to ensure that each Bellingcat investigation follows a quality and consistency process and structure: identification, collection & preservation, verification, analysis, review & confirmation (including multiple source corroboration & cross referencing) and finally, presentation (publication).

To further amplify investigations, we conduct demand-driven and tailor-made training & capacity building to different stakeholders, and seek cooperation and collaboration with a wide and diverse public, parties and actors with the ultimate aim to service transparency, seek solutions and use hard evidence as basis for forming opinions and making decisions.

Impact & Recognition

Bellingcat’s innovative approach continues to have significant impact on a range of fields, particularly those focused on accountability, and a continued influence on the use of open source investigation by the media. Our process was tested and refined, and is now a cornerstone for our ongoing justice and accountability efforts in countries with war crimes.

We have continued to produce award-winning work on a number of topics, and in collaboration with a variety of partners. We received the European Press Prize, London Press Club award, the Nannen Prize, and two Emmys for our work on Russia’s assassinations. Our podcast, examining the downing of Malaysian airlines flight 17 and extrajudicial executions in Cameroon won the Political Studies Association Award for Political Podcast of the Year, the British Podcast Awards Bronze Award for Best True Crime Podcast, ARIAS Bronze for Best Factual Series, ARIAS Silver for Best Independent Podcast in 2020 and the Amnesty Media Award for Radio and Best Independent Podcast of the Year at the UK ARIAS awards the following year. Our partnership with Newsy, producing video content based on our investigation, won The Scripps Howard Award for Innovation, and was nominated for a News Emmy. We also won the Machiavelli Award for public communication.

Bellingcat also continues to have its work covered by a wide range of national and international media, including features on CBS 60 Minutes, and heavy coverage in Japanese media that has greatly increased the knowledge and understanding of open source investigation in Japan. The book *We Are Bellingcat* by Bellingcat founder Eliot Higgins was a Sunday Times bestseller and

has been published in multiple markets and languages, including the UK, US, Netherlands, Japan, Finland, Germany, Poland, and Ukraine.

Ambition

We pledge allegiance to facts, completeness and transparency. We consider this essential in the current realities of fact-free politics and fake news, which are increasingly on the march around the globe. In many countries, an era of post-truth is gaining ground with an all-out war on transparency and an armed conflict against accountability, where justice & solidarity are pushed to the margins and in the corner.

Drawing on our unique approach and collaborative global community model, our ambition is to make open source investigation a mainstream discipline that can be employed by educators, politicians, law makers and law enforcers, media and the general public to advance transparency, accountability and justice.

To achieve our ambition, we will work on three main areas in the upcoming years:

1) Organisation scale up & professionalisation

The historic background and strength of Bellingcat lies partly in its closely connected virtual network of online-based contributors and volunteers and its lean management and administrative structure. However, the increased demand for our expertise and the broadening of the size and scope of our activities (including conducting high-end investigations) necessitates professionalisation and formalisation of the organisation. This process has already started in the last years and will continue in the future (expanding and hiring of key management, financial and research/training staff, setting up of procedures and processes, improved structure and physical infrastructure, defining policies on grant acceptance, HR, safety protocols, financial guidelines etc). Additionally, efforts and investment are needed to strengthen the business management, fundraising, compliance, technology, as well as monitoring and evaluation.

The objective is to continue building a strong core team without losing the strength and uniqueness of the wide community of contributors, volunteer and content providers.

2) Strategic focus & alliances

Bellingcat has built strong credibility with the quality, depth and transparency of its investigations. To maintain our leadership position in an increasingly competitive environment, we need to define a sharper focus and engage in strategic alliances to advance our products and expertise and further legitimise the field of open source investigation. We will revisit both the topic and geographical scope of our work (i.e. currently focused mainly on conflict and humanitarian issues in the Middle East), as well as the balance between providing training/ capacity building and efforts in setting (international) standards for conducting evidentiary open source investigations (for use in judicial litigation, for example). But as these specific foci and

subjects might change, common and constant is Bellingcat's commitment to open source investigation's potential to pursue justice for those affected by conflict or human rights abuses, and to lift up the voices of those underserved by more conventional investigative methods.

In terms of strategic alliances, partnerships will be sought not only in the investigative activity area of Bellingcat, but especially in setting standards and advancing open source investigations from a marginal field to mainstream discipline, and that can maximize the potential of this work for real-world impact.

3) Growing & sustaining our audience

The audience is the lifeline of Bellingcat. We depend on it to maintain the high-standards in our investigations, to stay independent from corporate or government influence, yet to be able to monetize certain products and expertise to be able to run a professional organisation and increasingly large network. In the coming period, we will work to create a membership system (creating more added value to readers and users of our output), while reaching out to expand both the current end-user community (media, journalists, governments, investigative committees, courts, lawyers, academic institutions) and the wider audience (general public, academia, educators, certain media and government entities, etc).

Methods generating income

The foundation has two types of income:

Grants and donations

The major institutional donations come mostly from longer-term partners of Bellingcat, with whom we have developed and cultivated relations already several years ago. These donations are primarily unrestricted (core funding) and are used to support investigations and organizational development.

We use our website and social media platforms to generate (smaller) individual donations. After each publication we place a call for individual support to fund our research and investigations.

Bellingcat raises funds also through partnerships and specific projects (e.g. research on far-right ideologies, developing specific tools for open source research etc), and through fees for providing training workshops and keynote presentations. Bellingcat has continued to train a wide variety of individuals and organisations, spreading the use of open source investigation to an ever-growing community applying Bellingcat's open source investigative techniques to their own work. Our partnerships have also continued, including organisations like Der Spiegel, The Insider, 070, Forensic Architecture, CNN, NBC, the BBC, Newsy, Lighthouse Reports, and many more.

Training fees

As part of Bellingcat's vision to inspire and build a global community to conduct high-quality open source investigations, we conduct extensive capacity building and training with partners, stakeholders and interested individuals and groups. Our training is offered both in a public and private format, with open workshops taking screened applicants from public announcements, and tailor-made workshops for specific organizations.

The participants of both public and private workshops come from a diverse set of professions: legacy & online media outlets, corporate security and intelligence departments, human rights organizations, university students and professors, tech companies, law firms, think tanks, and more. In the past three years, the demand for our expertise in the IVA approach and the "*Bellingcat Method*" has increased significantly, with demand far outstripping our available capacity. The open application training courses (announced on our Patreon, newsletter, and website) usually sell out within days of publication, resulting in lengthy waiting lists.

Bellingcat's training courses consist of modules ranging from one to five days, conducted by our own trainers and investigators. These workshops range in length between a single four-hour day to a full week, conducted either in-person or through a webinar. The income received is invested back into the organisation to cover operational costs (including salaries of researchers around the world) and fund various initiatives to advance transparency and accountability. In the last year, we have offered training courses in five different languages (English, Dutch, Arabic, Spanish and Russian) and the workshops are generally divided into profit (the income of which we reinvest in the organisation) and non-profit (costs for which are covered by grants). For the training course we partner with a wide range of organisations, including the UC Berkeley School of Law, University of Toronto, University of Amsterdam, Agence France Presse, The New York Times, Süddeutsche Zeitung and numerous others.

Spending on foundation's objectives

Grant income amounts are allocated based on the realized direct and indirect spending on the organization's objective. These expenses comprise salary costs and other expenses chargeable to the year..

The Supervisory Board members do not receive remuneration for their positions. The remuneration of the Executive Board falls within the scope of the Dutch Standardization of Top Incomes Act (Wet Normering Topinkomens), which came into force on 1 January 2013. The remuneration of Bellingcat's Executive Board is below the maximum applicable remuneration for the type of organization and within the no-profit (development aid) sector in The Netherlands. Although we are not obliged to comply with this income act, we have chosen to do so, as we consider it good practice in the charity and non-profit environment in the Netherlands.

Managing the foundation's assets and reserves

Unspent budgets and grants in advance are recognized as deferred revenue. The related bank accounts consist of the balance on the ABN-AMRO bank and the Triodos bank held in the Netherlands. The foundation does not invest unused amounts, as the current bank accounts will be spent on a short term.

The balance of income and expenses is calculated as the income that can be allocated to the relevant financial year, minus the expenses required to realize this income. If positive, a part of the annual result will be added to the continuity reserve. The Supervisory Board and the Executive (Management) Board have agreed to a reserve policy to ensure the sustainability and continuity of the Foundation. The reserves required are set to equal one year of operating costs. The aim is to set up a reserve equal to one year of operating costs within 10 years. In the next 3 years the goal is to reach this desired reserve.