

# European Artificial Intelligence & Society Fund

## European AI & Society Fund Strategy 2023-2025

October 2022

### Who we are and why we are here

The European AI & Society Fund works to shape Artificial Intelligence to better serve people and society.

Too often the development, use and regulation of Artificial Intelligence is driven by the interests of governments and the tech industry without adequate concern for the individuals and communities it affects. This can lead to AI that exacerbates social injustice, amplifies structural inequalities, infringes people's rights, undermines democracy and compromises climate action. It is now a critical time in the development of policies that will set the direction of AI in Europe over the long term. Civil society organisations need to be an active and effective partner in shaping these policies so that AI serves the needs of people and society.

The European AI & Society Fund exists to empower civil society organisations to engage in policy around AI and to galvanise the philanthropic sector to sustain this vital work, so that AI serves the needs of people and society, respects human rights and promotes fair, inclusive and sustainable democracies.

Our vision:

A diverse and resilient ecosystem of civil society organisations is an active and effective participant in shaping policy related to Artificial Intelligence so that it serves the needs of people and society, respects human rights and promotes fair, inclusive, and sustainable democracies.

**Our mission:**

We want to create a community of civil society organisations with the capacity and skills to effectively engage and secure tangible impact on policy around Artificial Intelligence in the public interest and a funding landscape that can sustain them over the long term.

**What we do:**

We offer civil society organisations funding and non-financial support to build their capacity for policy and advocacy on AI and we share our expertise with philanthropic partners to increase understanding and engagement on these issues.

## Background

The European AI & Society Fund was set up in 2020 as the European AI Fund. In 2023 the Fund changed the name to the European AI & Society Fund to better reflect its mission. In our first phase we have quickly established credibility, supported 24 organisations over two funding calls with almost €2.5m and secured contributions from 13 partner foundations. We have commissioned research to map the landscape and understand the range of issues that sit within the Fund's scope and initiated projects to explore the questions raised.

In this second phase of work, we must build on this experience to make strategic choices about where the Fund can be most effective and what can be achieved with the resources available.

## What we want to achieve

We have three high level objectives that will help achieve our vision of a diverse and resilient civil society ecosystem that can shape policy around Artificial Intelligence so that it serves the needs of people and society, respects human rights and promotes fair, inclusive and sustainable democracies.

1. A greater number and more diverse range of civil society organisations have the capacity and skills to effectively engage and secure tangible impact on policy around AI.
2. A greater number and more diverse range of philanthropic institutions are engaged in sustaining civil society work in Europe on policy related to AI.
3. The European AI & Society Fund is a valuable participant in shaping a landscape where civil society work on AI can thrive.

## How we will do it

### Objective 1

A greater number and more diverse range of civil society organisations have the capacity and skills to effectively engage and secure tangible impact on policy around AI.

#### *What success will look like:*

- Funded and participant CSOs report an improvement in policy and advocacy capacity
- Funded and participant CSOs are more visible in debates on AI (media appearances, meetings with policymakers, references by policymakers)
- Policy recommendations of funded and participant organisations are adopted.

#### *What we have achieved so far:*

- Our grantees have helped secure policy wins, such as the European Commission including bans on social scoring or mass biometric surveillance in its AI Act proposal and MEPs tabling amendments they have proposed.
- Grantees without prior expertise in AI have increased their knowledge and are bringing the perspectives of excluded populations such as migrants or sex workers to the debate.
- Collaboration between our grantees and wider civil society has built effective coalitions and amplified campaigns, for example a joint letter signed by 119 organisations demanding the promotion of fundamental rights in the AI Act.
- Policymakers are starting to recognise the value of civil society input on these issues and increasingly turn to our grantees for their views.
- Our Tech and Covid research enabled rapid scrutiny of a vast acceleration in the use of data driven technologies through the pandemic.

<i>What we have learned:</i>	<i>How we can address this:</i>
Building an ecosystem takes time. Grantees need flexibility and core funding.	We continue to offer 2-year grants and activate other funders to create off-ramps to sustain the work beyond our funding.
Our budget only allows us to offer core funding to a small number of organisations which limits the diversity of our ecosystem	Offering small grants as well as core funding can reach a wider community and help grow the ecosystem
It is hard for organisations that are new to the space to build relevant knowledge and orientate themselves.	Improving our communications and better knowledge-sharing can shorten the route to active participation in policy.
Our grantees come to the Fund with varied levels of capacity and expertise and work in different economic, political and social contexts. They need different kinds of support from us.	Improving our communications and capacity to listen to grantees will help us respond to their needs.
Our budget and staff limit the number of projects we can initiate	We focus on the core work of supporting AI policy activities.

### *What we will do next:*

#### Funding - we will:

- Fund 14 new organisations from November 2022 – November 2024 to do policy and advocacy work around the impacts of AI.
- Renew funding of at least 10 of the existing cohort of organisations from April 2023 – June 2024 to do policy and advocacy work around the impacts of AI.
- Support a third cohort of organisations from April 2024 where we will introduce new skills and interests to the ecosystem, building on our learnings from the alternative futures and EU investments research.
- Support a wider community of interested organisations (approx. 30) through small grants (~ €5,000 – 20,000) to enable learning and participation.
- Identify off-ramps for the cohorts to secure long term funding that can sustain the work beyond the scope of EAISF grants and support at least 50% to find follow on funding. We will not initiate new funding programmes without addressing how they can be sustained over the long term.

Communications and knowledge sharing – we will:

- Appoint a networks and communications manager to draw insights from our cohort activities, understand where there are points of connection and opportunities for policy and advocacy engagement and to facilitate access to decision makers and influencers.
- Support grantees to regularly share their skills and knowledge within the cohort so they can learn from one another (show and tell, action learning)
- Support grantees to address gaps in skills and knowledge through learning opportunities and additional small grants (policy skills workshops, Funding + grants)
- Coordinate with our sister Funds (Civitates, EPIM) to foster collaboration between the cohorts.
- Share insights from the cohort through regular and accessible blogposts and brief reports
- Amplify our grantees’ activities through our communications channels.

## Objective 2

A greater number and more diverse range of philanthropic institutions are engaged in sustaining civil society work in Europe on policy related to AI.

### *What success will look like:*

- We have at least 14 active partners in the European AI & Society Fund and we increase our income to €2.675m annually.
- There are clear routes for potential post-EAISF funding for the existing cohorts. We support at least 50% of our grantee partners to secure follow on funding.
- More foundations in Europe have strategies that aim to support civil society in shaping AI in the interests of people and society.
- EAISF partners have initiated at least two additional collaborations in the 2023-25 period.
- We have established communications channels to a wider range of philanthropic organisations and are active participants in philanthropic networks.

### *What we have achieved so far:*

- Thirteen foundations have joined the Fund and contributed a total of almost €5.5m since the Fund's inception.
- All our partners plan to recommit to the Fund, with the exception of Luminate which is undergoing a strategic pivot.
- Our partners are active participants in the Fund and engage thoughtfully in our governance as well as activities such as planning and selection processes.
- The Fund's expertise is recognised in the philanthropic sector, e.g. we are invited to participate in networks like Ariadne, events like RightsCon.

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### *What we have learned:*

There is an appetite among foundations to better understand Artificial Intelligence and its societal impacts, but funders have limited time and resource to dedicate to it.

Foundations engage with the issue from a wide range of stand points, shaped by their pre-existing interests and missions.

### *How we can address this:*

We improve our communications and knowledge sharing among current and potential partners so that they have relevant and accessible information.

We improve our communications to clearly articulate how our work relates to the missions of our current and potential partners.

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Our partners are keen to understand one another's work and where they are aligned.	We improve our communications to share updates from our partners and the wider community of funders and identify opportunities to collaborate.
Our partners particularly value contact with grantees and understanding more about their work.	We improve our communications to better share our grantees work with funders and offer opportunities for meetings between funders and grantees.
Interest in AI among European foundations has not yet translated into widespread action and opportunities for post-European AI & Society Fund grants are limited.	We work with partners and the wider funding sector to create pathways for European AI & Society Fund alumni to get follow on funding.

*What we will do next:*

Partnership – we will:

- Grow the number of participating foundations in the Fund, adding at least 2 new members for the period 2023-25 and increase contributions by at least 20%.
- Work with partner foundations and the wider philanthropic sector to foster the work incubated in the Fund by supporting our alumni organisations (off-ramp).
- Support collaborations between partner foundations to initiate sub-funds or other ad hoc initiatives.

Communications and knowledge sharing – we will:

- Share insights from the cohorts through regular and accessible blogposts and brief reports.
- Organise meetings where funders and grantees can connect and share information outside the context of grant applications.
- Use our position in the landscape to understand funders' priorities, share information and identify opportunities for funders to engage with one another.
- Engage in networks and events from the philanthropic sector and share our insights (e.g. RightsCon, Philea).



### Objective 3

The European AI & Society Fund is a valuable participant in shaping a landscape where civil society work on AI can thrive.

#### *What success will look like:*

- The European AI & Society Fund is recognised for its expertise on the AI landscape and is useful to both civil society organisations and funders.
- The European AI & Society Fund can clearly articulate its approach to structural oppression, has practical ways to implement it and shares its learning with the field.
- The European AI & Society Fund practises and models modern grantmaking that serves the needs of grantee and funder partners and shares its learning with the field.

#### *What we have achieved so far:*

- We have commissioned and published research to map the ecosystem and identify needs.
- We have used our Annual Reviews to share our learnings and identify challenges.
- We have taken a flexible, transparent and open approach to our grantees and funding calls.

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#### *What we have learned:*

The European AI & Society Fund fills a unique gap in the landscape but people can't immediately grasp who we are and what we do

Our research is valued but it is not always accessible

We work across diverse geographies and cultures. Structural oppression manifests differently in different contexts and there is no single understanding of what this means.

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#### *How we can address this:*

We will change our name to better reflect our mission and update our website and other materials to articulate our mission more clearly

We will improve our communications to make sure our information is concise and relevant.

We will analyse the responses from our Open Call to understand how our communities understand and tackle structural oppression and build our approach from there.

We are learning by doing, there isn't a playbook for what we are trying to achieve

We will seek feedback to know what works well and what doesn't and share our practices within NEF and more widely among funders.

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*What we will do next:*

- Change our name to the European AI & Society Fund and update our website, social media and other communications material to articulate our mission and work more clearly.
- Use our unique perspective on AI policy, civil society and philanthropy to reflect and share insights on opportunities and gaps in the landscape and share these in clear and readable formats to build a body of knowledge.
- Use our position and expertise to enhance the credibility of new organisations and showcase a diversity of perspectives through our publications and communications.
- Analyse the responses from our Open Call applicants to understand approaches to diversity, equity and inclusion among civil society organisations in Europe and participate in the Decolonising Digital Rights conversations, Racial Justice & Philanthropy workshops, NEF diversity, equity and inclusion workshops and other opportunities to build our understanding of structural oppression.
- Develop an approach to implement these learnings in our work with our grantee partners and communicate this openly and clearly.
- Seek feedback on our practices through anonymous grantee and applicant surveys and by listening to our funding partners.
- Share our practices within NEF and more widely among funders.