

Strategy 2023-2025: Mid-term Update

Together with our grantees and partners, we have made great progress on our [2023 - 2025 strategy](#) so far. Now it's time to aim even higher to meet the moment we are in.

A lot changed in the first 18 months of this strategic period. The launch of ChatGPT transformed the AI debate, accelerating political will for policy action, while also deepening corporate power and market dominance. The funding landscape has evolved too, with strategic shifts among key partners as well as a growing recognition among funders more broadly of the importance of AI.

This update is our way of adjusting our plans to fit the new reality and giving our team, grantees and partners a clear path forward for the next 18 months, from July 2024 to December 2025. It will also form the basis of our strategy development for the next period, 2026-28.

We approach this phase with a deepened commitment to sustain the community we have supported to grow so far. To this we are adding new ambition to grow the field and invest strategically across four new areas. We do so with an expanded and expert team and increased confidence about our role in leading philanthropy to shape AI in the public interest.

- Our Build Initiative will sustain the AI & society ecosystem by extending support to 18 of our current grantees through to December 2025 with a total budget of just under €2m
- We will fundraise to bring an additional €10m into the field from existing and new funders
- We will use the increased funds to deliver our new Breakthrough Initiative and invest strategically across four programmes to leverage new opportunities to shape the AI agenda
- We will grow our internal capacity to generate insights about the AI & society landscape, share these with our communities and galvanise the philanthropic field

Overview of the Build & Breakthrough Initiatives



The Build Initiative

A series of long-term grants and awards designed to build a strong, diverse and resilient civil society able to ensure AI will work for the public good.



The Breakthrough Initiative

The ‘Breakthrough Initiative’ is a series of grants that will support bold, adventurous work and attract new, savvy practitioners into the field, equipped with the skills to seize the moment.

MAKING REGULATION WORK	ESTABLISHING GLOBAL GOVERNANCE	NEW POLITICAL THINKING	WRITING NEW NARRATIVES
A €4m programme to challenge the harmful impacts of AI on society and secure accountability for AI use by supporting the effective implementation and enforcement of legislation in Europe	A €2m programme to put human rights at the heart of how AI is governed globally by building capacity and networks to leverage collective civil society power.	A €3m programme to promote fair, inclusive and sustainable societies by generating a proactive policy agenda around AI and communicating it persuasively to decisionmakers..	A €1m programme to develop new narratives rooted in humanity, care, wellbeing and dignity to counter the dominance of the tech industry agenda.

Who we are and why we are here

The European AI & Society Fund works to shape Artificial Intelligence to serve people and society, now and into the future.

We want AI technologies to be built and used accountably, so they are of benefit to the public and in service of our shared democratic values. We are working towards AI policy and governance that secures fundamental rights, challenges social injustice and promotes fair, inclusive and sustainable societies. Getting there takes well-resourced and diverse public interest expertise that can challenge corporate and state power in the debates shaping our futures.

The Fund pools resources from funders and uses these to create strong, sustainable and strategic networks of experts and advocates. We use a mixture of flexible grantmaking to build the field, and more strategic investing aimed at maximising impact and creating opportunities for change. We provide thought leadership within philanthropy, and advocate for greater investment in public interest AI work in Europe.

The Fund is supported by 14 philanthropic foundations and hosted by the Network for European Foundations (NEF). Partner foundations make up our Steering Committee which is currently co-chaired by Carla Hustedt (Mercator) and Guillermo Beltrà (Luminate).

A fast-moving landscape

Artificial Intelligence is rapidly becoming embedded in the fabric of our societies: from decision making over our livelihoods and our borders, to how we access information or how we receive our healthcare and education. In the past 18 months consumer-ready generative AI products have supercharged the adoption of AI in business, government and everyday life, and prompted a race among tech giants to roll out new applications at ever greater speed.

This AI hype has created an investment gold rush, concentrating power among a few corporate actors. The tech industry is capturing vast resources, market dominance and public narratives. Meanwhile state institutions are deploying technologies without sufficient safeguards and often in ways that harm the most vulnerable in society. This puts control over AI technologies in the hands of a powerful and unaccountable few,

with little concern for the individuals and communities that are affected. It exacerbates social injustice and structural inequalities, infringes people's rights and undermines democracy.

But there is now an opportunity to intervene and reshape this paradigm in the public interest. Policy makers are increasingly aware of - and concerned about - AI and primed to act. And there are mechanisms to make change happen: newly adopted legislation in Europe has opened routes to challenge harmful practices, global forums are actively engaged in creating a new architecture for AI governance and political leaders are eager to put their stamp on the future direction of this era-defining technological change.

Philanthropy has a unique role to play to capitalise on this short window of possibility. By resourcing a strategy to support and amplify the case for public interest AI, we can ensure technologies are harnessed to serve people and society. If we fail to act, we will cede the future of AI to well-funded corporate interests.

Our vision:

Artificial Intelligence that serves people and society, now and into the future.

Our mission:

We want to create a public interest ecosystem that drives the agenda on AI in Europe and enable a funding landscape that can sustain this work.

What we do:

We galvanise resources from funders and use these to empower public interest advocates across Europe with the capacity and skills to shape AI narratives, policy and governance.

We are guided by our values and ways of working as we pursue our mission:

We listen. We put our grantees in the driving seat and respect their needs and realities.

We are aware of the power imbalance in the relationship between funders and grantees and try consciously to address this. We are open and transparent in our work.

We enable. We design our grantmaking and other support for our grantees to empower them to make the change they want to see.

We learn. We are a new organisation in an emerging field. We evaluate what has worked well and what hasn't and share our findings. We welcome both support and challenge.

We collaborate. We are a collective initiative and believe more can be achieved together – we work cooperatively with our funding partners and others in the field. We encourage our grantees to collaborate to achieve more than the sum of their parts.

We uplift. We use the power of our position to challenge structural oppression, learn from and work collectively with others who do so and elevate the voices of those who have been marginalised.

What we want to achieve

Our three high level objectives to achieve our vision are:

1. A powerful, skilled and diverse ecosystem is shaping narratives, policy and governance around AI in Europe in the public interest and is ready to leverage opportunities for impact.
NEW Our Build Initiative will sustain a strong, diverse and resilient civil society ecosystem working on policy around AI, our Breakthrough Initiative will invest strategically across four new programmes to seize specific opportunities.
2. A greater number and more diverse range of funders are growing their support to promote a public interest agenda for AI in Europe and the resource available to the field is increasing
NEW We will bring an additional €10m into the field to resource our additional Breakthrough Initiative.
3. The European AI & Society Fund plays a leadership role in shaping a funding landscape where public interest work on AI can thrive

January 2023 – June 2024: Our work so far

Objective 1: A well supported ecosystem

Grantmaking:

- We funded 38 grantees with €1.8m to work on AI policy and advocacy in Europe
- We supported 7 groups with a total of €200k in small grants through the Ecosystem Programme

Communications & Knowledge Sharing:

- We held 2 annual convenings of grantees and funders in collaboration with Civitates
- Offered peer learning and expert led workshops to grow our community's skills and expertise
- Offered leadership and fundraising training to support sustainability in our community
- Established a fortnightly community update newsletter to help grantees stay in touch
- Amplified our grantees' work through improved communications infrastructure

Objective 2: Growth in funding to the field

Partnerships:

- Our existing partners renewed or increased commitments, with the exception of Bertelsmann and Isocrates.
- Adessium and MacArthur Foundations joined the Fund
- We fostered relationships between grantees and funding partners, leading to several grantees receiving further support from our partners

Communications and thought leadership:

- We published 2 funder-focused reports, "[Who's funding AI & Society work in Europe](#)", and "[Making the AI Act work](#)"
- We hosted 12 Funders' Learning Lunch events, covering topics from the basics of ChatGPT, to dominant AI narratives, to migration and predictive policing
- We participated in events and networks, including the Philea and Ariadne forums, co-hosted a MozFest funder track and gave bespoke presentations to a number of foundations.

Objective 3: Organisational leadership

- We changed our name to the European AI & Society Fund and updated our website, social media and other communications material to articulate our mission and work more clearly
- Increased our capacity with the appointment of
 - Communications & Networks Manager (March 2023)
 - Senior Partnerships Manager (April 2024)
 - Senior Programme Manager (May 2024)
- Developed and began to implement our approach to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
- Updated and applied our monitoring and evaluation framework and published [Grantee Insights](#).
- Practised modern grantmaking; sharing insights and getting support for our renewals process.
- Worked collaboratively as part of NEF to learn from partners

What we will do from June 2024 – December 2025

Objective 1:

A powerful, skilled and diverse ecosystem is shaping narratives, policy and governance around AI in Europe in the public interest and is ready to leverage opportunities for impact.

Grantmaking: Build Initiative

From June 2024 - December 2025 we will extend funding totalling €1,890,000 to 18 organisations within our existing community so that a core CSO infrastructure has sustained capacity and expertise to identify and leverage opportunities. We will know this succeeds when:

- Grantees are deploying their increased capacity and expertise on policy, narratives and governance around AI to achieve their missions
- Grantees are more visible in debates on AI
- Policy recommendations of grantees are adopted.

Grantmaking: Breakthrough Initiative

From June 2024 - December 2025 we will develop four additional grantmaking programmes with a total budget of €10m that address specific opportunities around AI policy to achieve change in the public interest.

We will roll these out as funding is secured and according to the urgency of the opportunity.

1. Making Regulation Work to challenge harmful impacts of AI on society and secure accountability for AI use by supporting the effective implementation and enforcement of new legislation: proposed budget €4m. We will know this succeeds when:
 - Grantees have the capacity and skills to influence the implementation of new European regulation related to AI
 - Implementation recommendations of grantees are adopted
 - Grantees have secured ongoing civil society engagement in regulatory structures
 - Grantees have developed complaints that can be brought using new and existing regulations

2. Establishing Global Governance to put human rights at the heart of how AI is governed globally by building capacity and networks to leverage collective civil society power: Proposed budget €2m. We will know this succeeds when:
 - Credible and expert individuals and organisations have the capacity to advocate for the public interest in global forums
 - Credible and expert individuals and organisations that promote public interest AI are well networked across different global initiatives and understand the roles they play in the ecosystem
 - There is a research and knowledge sharing infrastructure in place to support public interest advocates to collaborate on global governance
3. New Political Thinking to promote fair, inclusive and sustainable societies by generating a proactive policy agenda around AI and communicating it persuasively to decisionmakers: Proposed budget €3m. We will know this succeeds when:
 - The Global Fellowship on AI & Market Power has created new insights that are useful to relevant audiences
 - AI & Market Power fellows' work has been enriched by participation in the cohort and they have forged connections to the wider ecosystem's work
 - Short term interventions have been piloted and we have drawn insights that inform future grantmaking
 - New actors have begun forming and communicating a new political agenda in the public interest
4. Writing New Narratives to develop new narratives rooted in humanity, care, wellbeing and dignity to counter the dominance of the tech industry agenda: Proposed budget €1m. We will know this succeeds when:
 - Capacity for strategic communications in the field has begun to grow
 - New frames for public interest AI have been developed and started to be deployed

Communications & Knowledge Sharing

We will continue to:

- Foster connections among grantees through our community newsletter and direct outreach
- Support grantees to address gaps in skills and knowledge through learning opportunities and additional small grants (policy skills workshops, organisational strengthening, Learning & Development grants)
- Coordinate with our sister Funds (Civitates, EPIM) to foster collaboration between the cohorts.
- Share insights from the cohort through regular and accessible blog posts and brief reports.
- Amplify our grantees' activities through our communications channels

Objective 2

A greater number and more diverse range of funders are growing their support to promote a public interest agenda for AI in Europe and the resource available to the field is increasing

Partnerships

From June 2024 to December 2025, we will fundraise to execute our updated strategy through direct contributions to the Fund and aligned grantmaking. We will know this succeeds when:

- We have reached our target of an additional €10m in the field by December 2025 (€4m secured as of June 2024)
- We have secured funding from new donors from geographies and sectors that are not so far represented in the Fund
- We have created mechanisms that enable different kinds of donors to contribute to the Fund's work, according to their strategies and structures
- We have supported funders to invest directly in the field through building connections with our communities
- We have clear approaches to different sources of funding including individual donors, corporate foundations and public funding
- More foundations have strategies that aim to support civil society in Europe to shape AI in the interests of people and society ensuring sustainable, long-term funding to grantees

Communications and thought leadership

We will continue to

- Share insights from our work through regular and accessible blog posts 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 (eg RightsCon, Philea)

Objective 3

The European AI & Society Fund plays a leadership role in shaping a funding landscape where public interest work on AI can thrive

From June 2024 to December 2025, we will continue to build the Fund's role in shaping the funding landscape.

We will

- Use our increased team capacity to generate greater strategic insight about the needs and opportunities in the field and share these with our communities
- Scope new governance arrangements that are appropriate to the new scale and ambition of our work
- Use our increased capacity to improve our financial and operational processes
- Further develop and monitor our approach to diversity equity and inclusion and continue to seek feedback on how to improve this
- Update our monitoring and evaluation framework to reflect the amended strategic objectives
- Continue to seek feedback on our work from our grantee and funder partners and from the wider community.