

# Our Strategy

## 2026 - 2030

# Our vision

Artificial Intelligence that serves people, society & planet

# Who we are & what we do

The European AI & Society Fund mobilises a powerful public interest community in Europe to fight for Artificial Intelligence that serves people, society and planet. We award grants, build the field, fundraise and forge collective strategies.

## The problem we address

**A few powerful corporations have captured the direction of Artificial Intelligence to serve their own interests. People, society and the planet are paying the price.**

AI is being adopted across all areas of our lives at an unprecedented speed, reshaping our economies, politics and societies. If harnessed with care and accountable to the public, AI technologies could help meet people's needs and build the fair, democratic and sustainable societies we all want to live in.

Instead, a small number of tech giants have set the trajectory of AI to prioritise blanket adoption of large scale AI, and so amass vast wealth and entrench their own power. They have established the idea of AI as a cure-all for Europe's economic, demographic and national security challenges, and a geopolitical race that Europe is losing. Too often policymakers accept and amplify this agenda, promoting ill-considered AI adoption and failing to establish and enforce sufficient safeguards for the public.

People, society and the planet pay the price – with the impacts felt most acutely by the young and by marginalised communities – exacerbating existing inequalities and injustice.

## Our answer

**We want to reclaim the direction of Artificial Intelligence so that it benefits everyone, not just the powerful few.**

AI must be developed and deployed to serve the needs of the public, and in line with our societies' democratic values. This requires policies that systemically safeguard people's rights and interests in the long term, and open opportunities for an alternative path for AI to flourish. To make this happen, there needs to be an effective debate around the AI that we want. There needs to be actionable ideas of how to build policy solutions that achieve this. And there needs to be political will to see policies implemented and enforced.

Despite headwinds, there is potential to achieve this in Europe. The EU has advanced AI regulation that could – if properly implemented and enforced – protect the interests of people, society and planet. There's growing awareness among decision makers of the political, economic and societal risks of the current AI path. And there are public interest groups that can be nurtured to become a counterweight to corporate and state power over AI's direction.

# Our mission

**We mobilise a powerful public interest community in Europe to fight for Artificial Intelligence that serves people, society and planet.**

The European AI & Society Fund serves a unique role by pooling resources from our diverse funding partners to deliver a collective strategy.

We use our deep knowledge of the field to direct money quickly, efficiently and transparently to support carefully chosen actors with diverse, complementary skills and expertise. This maximises the impact of our partners' contributions. We leverage that investment further through dedicated field building that responds rapidly to our grantees' needs, and nurtures the community to be greater than the sum of its parts. We enable funders to invest in shaping AI in the company of their peers and with the guidance of our expert team, spreading risk in an emergent and fast-changing field. By growing the diversity of donors and increasing available funding, we also help insure the field against shifts in priority by any single funder.

And to make sure we can deliver our mission as effectively as possible, we share our expertise and insights, identify opportunities to shift power, and support our philanthropic and civil society networks to collaborate.

# Our objectives

## 1. A stronger public interest community:

A skilled, co-ordinated and independently-funded community of tech and social justice experts and advocates is working strategically to redirect AI to serve people, society and planet, by shaping debate, setting the policy agenda and securing accountability.

## 2. More funding to the field

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

## 3. A more strategic approach

The public interest community and the funders that support them have the insights and infrastructure to work strategically and effectively together to turn the tide on AI.

# How we work towards change

## 1. A stronger public interest community

To redirect AI to serve people, society and planet, we **award grants** to technology and social justice experts and advocates across Europe and **support them to build their collective power**.

We balance sustaining core capacity in the field through ongoing flexible funding, and using strategic grantmaking to seize opportunities in areas with the greatest potential for impact. We support collaboration so that public interest groups can punch above their weight, help them build the skills they need, and make sure their organisations are well managed and sustainable.

Through this grantmaking and fieldbuilding we foster three approaches to making change happen:

### I) Shape the AI debate

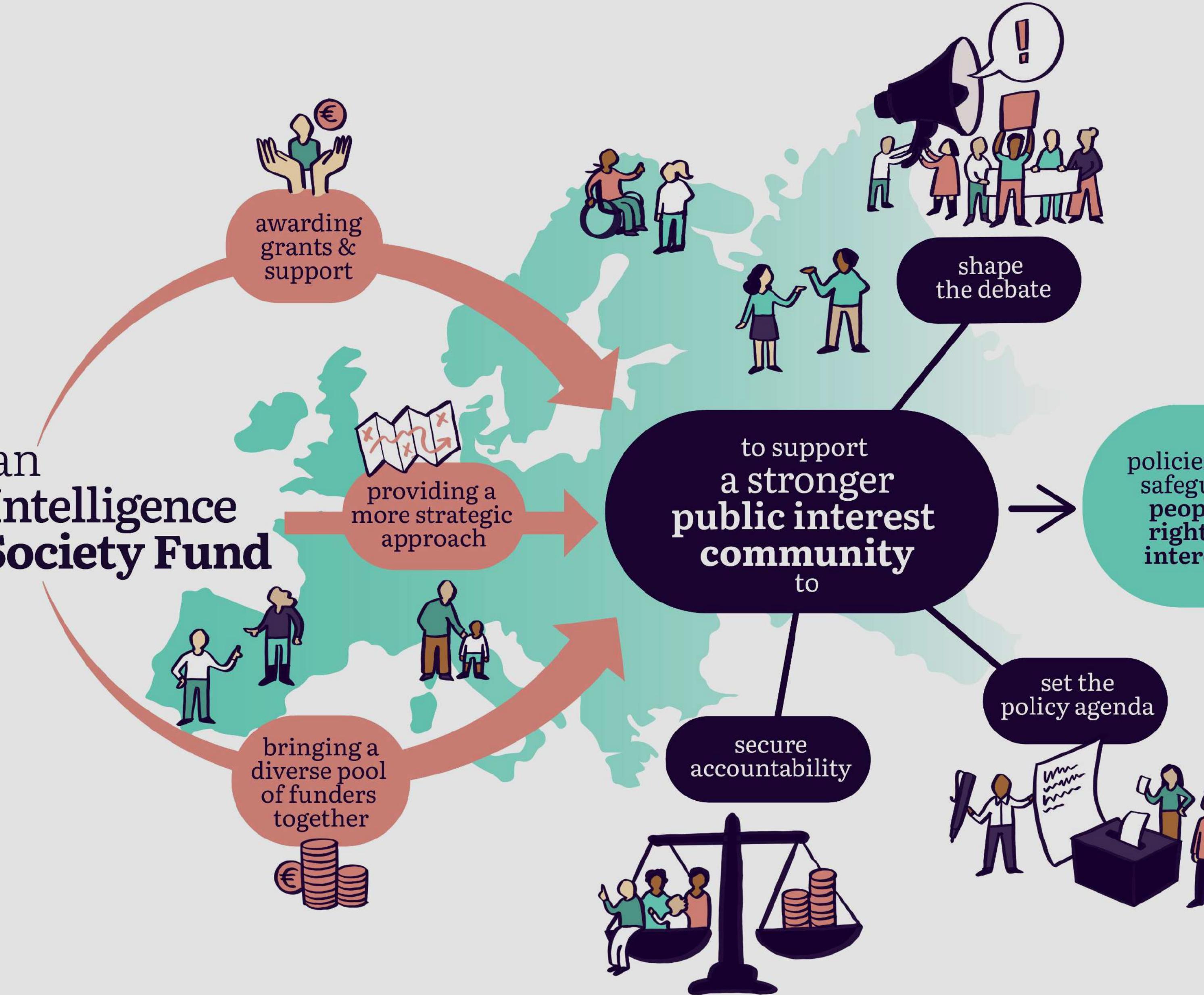
The AI debate is framed in terms that serve powerful interests: an unstoppable, inevitable force, an AI race to be won, a choice between innovation or regulation, utopia or apocalypse. This has made it hard to persuade decision makers to take up positions that challenge the current trajectory. But a pressing need to cut Europe's dependence on foreign tech infrastructure presents an opening to offer an alternative.

By building the public interest community's power to tell a different story of how AI could serve people, society and planet, we can use the current moment of realignment to open space for a new direction for AI to flourish.

#### What success will look like

The public interest community is **shaping debate** with new framing and vocabulary that offers an alternative to the dominant agenda on AI. There are effective communicators that can reach relevant audiences and there is infrastructure to coordinate their messages.

# European Artificial Intelligence & Society Fund



## II) Set the policy agenda

AI policy in Europe is locked in a paradigm where AI is sold as a one stop solution for competitiveness, creaking public services and security. To redirect AI, we cannot only react to these industry positions but need to proactively create public interest driven alternatives.

As geopolitical shifts force Europe to seek a new approach to AI, the public interest community can offer actionable and salient ideas that promote an AI trajectory that serves people, society and planet.

### What success will look like

The public interest community is **informing policy** by generating proactive, agenda-setting and salient solutions to offer an alternative direction for AI. These ideas are reaching relevant decision makers and there is momentum for their adoption.

## III) Secure accountability

Tech giants have been able to act with impunity, and the harmful deployment of AI systems has gone unpunished because regulation either did not exist, was ill-matched to technology developments and business practices, or has simply been ignored and not enforced.

The public interest community can push back against the current AI trajectory by working to ensure Europe's laws are properly implemented and applied so that people's rights are upheld and there is justice for harms caused by AI.

### What success will look like

The public interest community is **securing accountability** through the implementation and enforcement of Europe's regulation. They are challenging backsliding, identifying the most effective avenues for accountability, and they have the necessary evidence, skillsets and networks to pursue them.

## 2. More funding to the field

To effectively challenge powerful interests, we **fundraise** to secure sustained and independent funding for the public interest community.

We work to grow the pot for the field by increasing both the number of our partners and the size of their contributions to the Fund. We provide a platform for funders to strategically coordinate their investments under the guidance of an expert team. This maximises the impact of their resources, reduces the risk to any single funder and increases the resilience of the funding landscape.

Not only is the tech industry the biggest lobbyist in Europe, it has a grip on large parts of civil society by funding academia, think tanks, conferences and media, stifling alternative visions for how AI could serve people, society and planet.

Independent funding from philanthropy can enable a powerful public interest community to sustain and scale, free from the grip of corporate ties so it can redirect AI to serve people, society and planet.

### What success will look like

The European AI & Society Fund is **increasing available philanthropic resources** and directing them effectively to where they will have the greatest impact. By **engaging a diverse community of partners** the Fund is ensuring a broad funding base for the field, mitigating the risk to the public interest community.

### 3. A more strategic approach

To challenge the vast resources and entrenched power of the tech giants, we provide bold **strategic leadership** to networks across philanthropy and civil society.

Our unique balcony view across public interest groups, funders and decision makers allows us to build a collective strategy for the field by sharing insights, fostering alliances and addressing knowledge gaps.

The public interest community is and will remain outgunned by the limitless resources and relentless lobbying of the tech industry. To build an effective counterweight, advocates and experts – and the funders that support them – need to muster their forces efficiently and strategically.

By sharing insights and building infrastructure, the public interest community and the funders that support them can work strategically and effectively together to turn the tide on AI.

#### What success will look like

By producing research that anticipates new developments, sharing insights that can guide the field and creating spaces for collaboration, the Fund is helping to foster a collective strategy that reclaims the direction of Artificial Intelligence so that it benefits everyone, not just the powerful few.

# The context we're working in

## External shifts in the trajectory of AI

We are working in a volatile political and economic context. Risks and potential mitigations include:

We will balance the need to retain a focused strategy with being responsive to our changing context. We will distinguish between significant shifts that would require a strategic pivot, such as the predicted busting of the AI investments bubble, and smaller developments that can be absorbed within our existing approach.

## Rising populism, a further push towards deregulation and securitisation

We will work collaboratively across adjacent fields to build a shared agenda and generate collective power within and beyond our community. A more strategic approach to grantmaking will enable focused attention to challenge regulatory backsliding and secure accountability, while identifying new allies to promote a proactive public interest policy agenda. We will remain alert to a 'tipping point' in Europe's politics where it is no longer tenable to play an insider game and we need to deploy other tactics.

## Closing of civic space in Europe

We will offer flexible grantmaking to support organisations facing operational threats and make assistance available as needed.

## Reduced funding availability due to philanthropic retrenchment and strategic shifts

We will diversify our partner networks to mitigate potential funding withdrawals and increase focus on strategic grantmaking and maximising the community's impact with the funding we have. We will work collaboratively with other existing and emerging philanthropic initiatives to avoid overlaps and duplication and ensure we continue to add value to the field.

# How we work

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 work 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.

# Our learning questions

**The European AI & Society Fund is doing innovative work in an emerging field.**

We evaluate our work so we can understand how best to achieve our objectives and to share our insights with the wider field. Our learning work is organised under three overarching learning questions which will be operationalised against each of our objectives and workplans:

## 1. Did we do what we set out to do? How has our work contributed to making the change we set out to achieve?

This is about evaluating the outcomes of our work and holding ourselves accountable for delivering what we said we would do.

## 2. What is needed to work strategically and effectively to turn the tide on AI?

This is about building analysis from our grantmaking and wider knowledge of the field that will inform our strategic leadership to our grantees and partners. We focus on two questions:

- What enables public interest advocates to redirect AI to serve people, planet and society?
- What enables funders to commit more resources to the field?

## 3. How can we do our work better?

This is about understanding how we operate as a Fund and ensuring that our ways of working are effective in delivering our mission and aligned with our values.

# Operations & capacity

The European AI & Society Fund is hosted by the Network of European Foundations and run by a small expert team based in Belgium, France and Germany.

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