PHILANTHROPY AND
DIGITAL CIVIL SOCIETY

BLUEPRINT

THE ANNUAL INDUSTRY FORECAST

by Lucy Bernholz

2021

ISBN **978-1-7341875-5-7**

Copies available for free download at
https://pacscenter.stanford.edu/resources/blueprints.

Special thanks to Anne Focke, editor, Susan Joanis, contributor, and Kathyrn Mazie Davis, project manager. Illustrations are by Tom Worth; layout is by Mahyar Kazempour; copy editing is by Elissa Rabellino. Special thanks to draft readers, especially Tamzin Ractliffe, Gerry Salole, Jara Dean Coffey, and Julie Felner. I am responsible for all mistakes.

lucybernholz.com
philanthropy2173.com

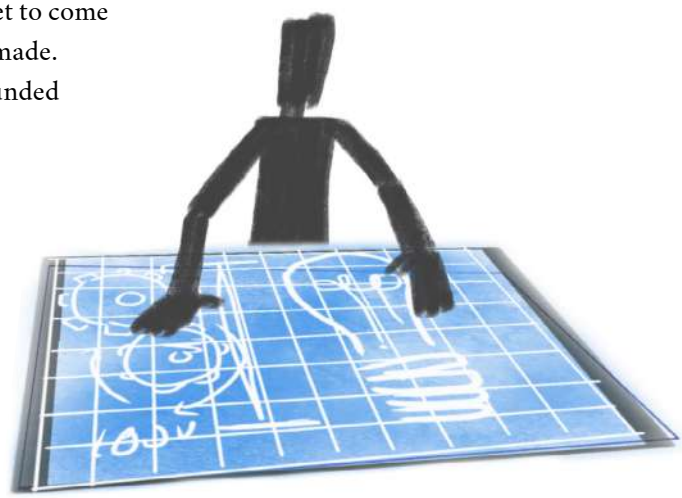
Stanford SOCIAL INNOVATION Review

CONTENTS

WHAT IS THIS MONOGRAPH?

Philanthropy and Digital Civil Society: Blueprint 2025 is the 16th annual industry forecast about the ways we use private resources for public benefit in the digital age. Each year, I have used the *Blueprint* to provide an overview of the current landscape, point to big ideas that will matter in the coming year, and direct your attention to sources of future promise.

WHY IS IT CALLED A BLUEPRINT?



I use the metaphor of a blueprint to describe the forecast because blueprints are guides for things yet to come and storage devices for decisions already made. My father is an architect. I grew up surrounded by scale models of buildings, playing in unfinished foundations, trying to not get hurt by exposed rebar. I eavesdropped on discussions with contractors, planning agencies, homeowners, and draftsmen[1]—all of whom bring different skills and interpretations to creating, reading, and using blueprints. Creating a useful blueprint requires drawing ideas from many people, using a common grammar so that work can get done, and expecting multiple interpretations of any final product. I intend my *Blueprints* to speak to everyone involved in using private resources for public benefit and to help people see their individual and institutional roles within the dynamics of the larger collective project of creating civil society. I hope you will use it as a starting point for debate and as input for your own planning. Please join the discussion in the fediverse (Mastodon) and on BlueSky at #blueprint25.

WHO WROTE THIS DOCUMENT?

I'm Lucy Bernholz and I'm a philanthropy wonk. I am a senior research scholar and was the founding director of the Digital Civil Society Lab at Stanford University's Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society (PACS), from 2014 to 2024. *HuffPost* calls me a "philanthropy game changer," *Fast Company* named my blog *Philanthropy 2173* "Best in Class," and I've twice been named to *The NonProfit Times*' annual list of 50 most influential people. I studied history and earned a BA from Yale University and an MA and PhD from Stanford University. In the fediverse I'm known as @p2173@norcal.social, I'm @p2173 on Bluesky, and my website is www.lucybernholz.com.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

Previous *Blueprints* can be downloaded at https://pacscenter.stanford.edu/resources/blueprints. If you are just joining the *Blueprint* series with this edition, welcome. If you've been reading since 2010, thank you.

INTRODUCTION

Hello. And welcome back.[2]

This *Blueprint* almost didn't exist. I and 410 million other people around the globe are (or have been) disabled by long COVID.[3] I'm one of the "lucky" ones given that, at least for the moment, I have insurance, access to health care, and a paycheck. Being disabled in a world not designed for it has drastically changed my capacity for work. Look around you—who is missing? Were they also disabled by COVID? Chances are you know someone whose life was permanently changed by COVID. The pandemic is not over, and new ones are coming.

By postponing publication until January, instead of early December as before, the *Blueprint* team and I adapted to the realities of time for disabled people. We learned a lot from working on what the community calls "crip time." No doubt, you and your organization could benefit from learning to work this way. Trista Harris, a futurist who specializes in nonprofits, predicts that many more organizations will need to adapt to the growing number of people working with disabilities.[4] It took a true team effort (see the acknowledgments) to make this *Blueprint* happen.

The Civil Society Lab closed earlier this year after 10 years of work, and its closing also shaped this edition of the *Blueprint*. I am proud of the Lab's work and the amazing people—fellows, postdocs, and colleagues—who made it happen. I also take pride in knowing they all will keep doing their work and fighting our fights even as the danger increases. The value of standing up for women, LGBTQ people, people from the global majority, people with disabilities, and others gets ever more important.

Changes in the Blueprint

Like its 15 predecessors, this year's *Blueprint* includes essays and buzzwords. What it doesn't include is a set of predictions for the year 2025. As I outlined last year, I no longer think we have the insight to make such timed calls. As I said then, "Our means of analysis, from **decentralized networks of futurists** doing their work in public to opaque algorithms buried inside institutions, are also in flux. When both the **variables and the equations are new**, then the predictions—and their timing—are far too uncertain to make claims of next month, next year, next decade." It seems likely that 2025 will bring massive, structural changes to nature, governments, borders, and economies. Instead of predictions, I'm including a section called **Keeping prior conversations going**, where I check in on big questions and themes that have run through the *Blueprint* series and offer them as topics for continuing conversation. I hope these ideas prove meaningful within the context of your work and with the partners and colleagues with whom you pursue your mission.

I'm also asking for your help. Sixteen years is a good run. I've had several offers to take over the *Blueprint* or to reshape it into something else, both of which raise the question: Should the *Blueprint* continue?

To answer that question, I must ask some others: Why do you read it? What do you get out of it? What would you like to see? In **Conclusion and next steps,** you'll have a chance to tell me what you think philanthropy and digital civil society need going forward, how scholars can be more useful to practitioners, and what suggestions you have regarding getting information you need. This is an experiment (just as the *Blueprint* was when I started writing it in 2009). The questions and the cumulative answers will be available to anyone who might care to view them. Perhaps your organization can make use of the input.

When the pandemic hit, I borrowed an insight from Arundhati Roy, who urged us to see the global disaster as a portal through which we could take the important things and leave the rot behind. I often remind myself of this. How have I changed since the world stopped and restarted? What do you do differently now than what you did before 2020? Our sense of time is warped—by COVID, typhoons, wildfires, and floods; by political disaster, social strife, and great uncertainty about what is truth. News coverage from around the world feels like scenes from Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, brought to life.

What amazes me most about these times, though, is not how extraordinary they are, but the mundane ways in which we and our institutions (media, companies, universities, political parties) respond. Politically expedient, hateful, nihilistic fearmongering has such a tight hold on so many Americans that it has created its own alternate reality, experienced and believed by millions. The most basic questions can reveal how made-up stories clamor above the fray of the truth. Public officials' repeating fantasies about a government that **controls the weather** leads to **armed threats against disaster responders**. Collectively, we're being led by politicians obsessed with fealty to a known lie and a proven liar.

What amazes me most about these times, though, is not how extraordinary they are, but the mundane ways in which we and our institutions respond.

I count on multiple communities to help me pursue a future as different in degree from my past as is my present. One step is checking whether I'm doing something because I've always done it that way, and, if so, seeking alternatives, while reminding myself that new and shiny isn't definitionally better. This *Blueprint* has some familiar components, such as the essays that follow, and some new sections. The biggest change is my ask of you: Should it continue? If so, how and by whom? In what form? What do you need it for, and how else might you get that need filled? I invite you through the "portal," to leave the past behind and focus on creating something better in the future. See the prompts to participate in the **Conclusion and next steps** section.

Changes in the landscape around the Blueprint

I've been writing the *Blueprint* series since 2010. I am happy to note that since then there have been many changes in philanthropy and civil society. Online giving platforms and data providers—from GoFundMe to Candid—are well-known sector resources. Publications such as ***Inside Philanthropy*** and ***Why Philanthropy Matters*** are established voices. ***The Chronicle of Philanthropy*** has new leadership, ***Nonprofit Quarterly*** is a reliably excellent publication with a point of view, and all kinds of people and organizations now make annual predictions focused on civil society. In addition to periodicals, the last decade has seen a number of scholarly and critical looks at philanthropy, with several new books **focused just on the Gates Foundation** (see *House of Gates*, by Nicholas Kulish, and ***Billionaire, Nerd, Savior, King***, by Anupreeta Das).

After more than a decade and a half of advocating for new frameworks for understanding philanthropy and giving, I'm glad to see the industry taking note. **Data providers**, **industry promoters**, and **think tanks** now count many forms of generosity, expanding their previous focus beyond 501(c)(3) nonprofits and institutional foundations. These changes may be significant; time will tell. Experienced philanthropy scholars are taking note of a "**new ecosystem of generosity**" and raising concerns about (possibly) unintended consequences. If pushback is a sign of change, then change is afoot. The first *Blueprint* in 2010 proffered a new landscape that included impact investing, social enterprise, and

online actions. This understanding is still taking hold, but it's gaining ground as seen in the work of the **Urban Institute**, **Giving Tuesday Data Commons**, and **The Generosity Commission**.

The organic changes in the social sector documented over the last 15 years have just run into a policy chop saw. Members of the new U.S. federal administration have well-known antagonistic beliefs about "woke" nonprofits and endowments. Their new positions will give them new powers to close groups they don't like. Since the *Blueprint* began, there have been ground-level shifts in how people organize to make change happen and how they fund it. How these two forces—a vengeful regulatory regime and change in the field—combine to reshape the nonprofit sector in the United States will be the story of the next few years.

The U.S. vice president-elect—and the Republican Party's favorite think tanks and dark money networks (the Heritage Foundation and Conservative Partnership Institute)—are aiming **tax proposals at the endowments of colleges and foundations**. At the same time, I've frequently pointed out that the laws that guide giving are not only **tax related**. Proposals and regulations that limit free association and assembly have metastasized in the U.S. since 2016, and they matter. Regulations about foreign policy and the definition of charity have greatly impacted Palestinian and Jewish organizations in the past year. The opaque interoperability between political and charitable groups in the U.S. lays bare the lie that there is a meaningful difference between them.

The dynamic landscape of giving and organizational forms will be on trial over the next four years.

The dynamic landscape of giving and organizational forms will be on trial over the next four years. Before the new administration even takes power, the U.S. Congress is continuing to expand a crackdown on civil society and nonprofits that the *Blueprint* series has been documenting at the state level. Prior *Blueprints* have the details on the steady increase in laws against protest and assembly. New laws proposed by this incoming administration to empower the U.S. Treasury to revoke nonprofits' tax status open a Pandora's box. The very arguments from those pushing this law—anti-terrorist funding—are one of the oldest ruses in the authoritarian playbook. When the new administration talks of anti-terrorism—while at the same time boosting cryptocurrencies, a financial tool beloved by terrorists—you'd be safe to think there's something else going on.

It's risky to predict how this new power to revoke tax status will be used. It's also tough to know how the anti-assembly laws, threats of military force, and fealty to Christian nationalists will combine, but it's easy to imagine a significant set of changes in the nonprofit sector in the U.S. over the next few years. My guesses on the priority actions of the new administration regarding nonprofits and philanthropy begin with erasing any of the (mostly pretend) lines between political and charitable contributions and organizational action. Permission slips for politicking from the pulpit will be granted.

Unfounded investigations will be designed to harass, and ultimately bankrupt, Black, queer, immigrant-focused, Muslim-serving, and women-serving nonprofits. Given the conflicts of interest that attach the world's richest man to the president, it's possible that tech policy nonprofits may find themselves facing unwarranted scrutiny. The new administration may use the grant databases of foundations as honeypots of information on its "enemies." They may put tax and spend pressure on university endowments and those of center-left foundations or nonprofits.

Some nonprofit organizations may try to claim church status for protection. Many will set up "friends of" groups overseas. The overall number of organizations is likely to grow much more slowly, perhaps even decrease, as donors focus on efficiency over pluralism and everyday givers tighten their purses. The last quarter of 2024 itself will be fascinating. Usually the biggest giving quarter of the year, it comes to a population exhausted and broke from two years of political donations. Will charitable giving decrease from previous fourth quarters? The new administration's "promises" of greater efficiency portend both a decrease in government workforce and, given the interests of those leading the charge, a likely massive increase in government use of faulty, yet unaccountable, automated systems (artificial intelligence [AI]).

Finally, the universe of online social media platforms changed drastically in 2022 with the sale of Twitter. That universe is changing again with AI and may change further if the courts are allowed to act on **Google's monopolistic status** without administrative interference. Civil society must navigate these new media waters to be heard above the bots and disinformation and to be found among the fakes and AstroTurf organizations. Civil society must do this to be part of critical global and local conversations about climate change, public governance, artificial intelligence, racism, and inequity.

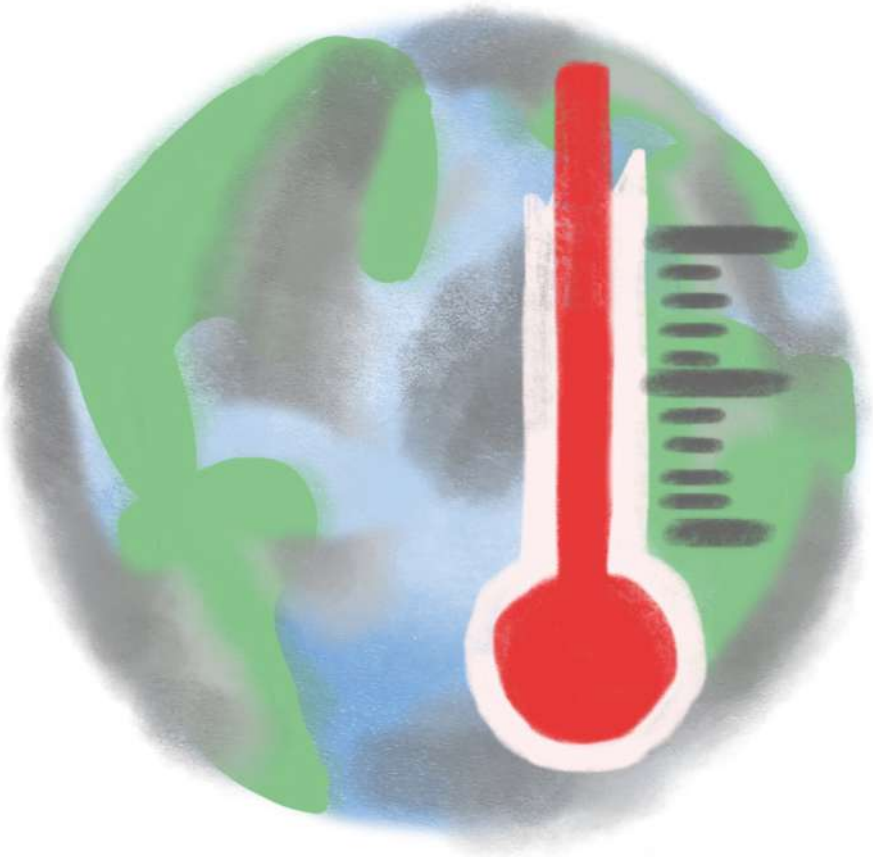
The system of nonprofits and foundations that relied on and sheltered a certain form of (imperfect) civil society is gone; the protections are unreliable, and the work is more dangerous.

Let me also say that the worst conclusion one can draw from a slow or stuttering or "not so bad" rollout by the new administration of its plans is to assume that things will be OK. If you are someone active in civil society, a professional or volunteer at a nonprofit or foundation, the work has changed. The system that relied on and sheltered a certain form of (imperfect) civil society is gone; the protections are unreliable, and the work is more dangerous.

Civil society must navigate new media waters to be heard above the bots and disinformation and to be found among the fakes and AstroTurf organizations.

Authoritarian America

I finalized this document two weeks after the U.S. presidential election. Every *Blueprint* since 2020 has been a *cri de coeur* to formal philanthropy and civil society to take seriously emerging threats to democracy and to their existence. The *Blueprints* have been pointing out these threats as corrosive, direct, and imminent. The 2024 election marks both the popularity of those making the threats and the extent to which our fundamental rights of association and assembly and the rule of law are no longer a reliable underpinning for the actions you take. I have been association and assembly and and will continue to argue that we are living in a syndemic of crises (*Blueprint 2021*)—what others call the "polycrisis"—that is, the crises of climate collapse, democratic collapse, wars, rising autocracy, ongoing and new pandemics, and global surveillance.



Assuming otherwise and acting without understanding this context will guarantee failure.

We must continue our collective pursuit of inclusive, multiracial civil societies and democracies, and we must learn useful lessons from the election, not old ones. For decades, center and left foundations in the English-speaking world have looked on the strategies of conservative foundations with envy. With the conservative takeover of the U.S. Supreme Court and the end of *Roe v. Wade*, those foundations and their grantees thought they had won. As I write this, the Heritage Foundation is working with the presidential transition team to put in place the horrors of their **Project 2025**. They think they've won. They're already at work on their most horrible ideas, such as deporting or incarcerating millions; banning women's health care; throwing the old, poor, and disabled onto the streets; and increasing fossil fuel extraction.

But I'm not sure there's much victory in the work done by the conservative foundations and their political project. To the contrary, I think they've lost control of the plot.

> The conservative foundations wanted a rational, ideology-based restructuring of the post-Cold War, post-neoliberal democratic era. What they've got is a vengeful, monomaniacal felon, in power to line his pockets and keep himself out of prison. He is backed by heavily armed white supremacists, and his victory was powered by Christian nationalists pursuing a biblical state who are as determined to control the U.S. as the Taliban is to control Afghanistan.

For all the expected chaos and the vast extent of the American right's plans, I have two key messages for the political center and left, as people in civil society and in philanthropic institutions:

1. Recognize that what the administration accomplishes will be determined by those of us who stand in opposition to their plans. We are the guardrails we've been waiting for. Our actions—or lack thereof—will shape what happens versus what is threatened.[5]
2. Assume corruption. Of course, there's the obvious kind, in which the newly empowered line their pockets. This was on full display from 2017 to 2021. But an even more pernicious and pervasive form of corruption is now in play: The rule of law—which was always weak where Black Americans were concerned—has rotted from the top down. That matters to daily life, to how we plan, and to whom or what we trust.

It will take a long time for white Americans to understand how thoroughly we must shift our mental models. Unluckily for us, we will have to do this while crises abound and expand. Luckily for us, we have teachers all around—those from other places who've experienced the slide to authoritarianism and those who've fought back to democracy. We can learn from Black American history, our neighbors from the global majority, queer people, disabled people, and all of us who've been fighting to be included in this democracy since its birth.

For those readers who voted for this administration, I have two thoughts for what you can do to help maintain democracy in the U.S. The first is to find ways to talk to the other half of your fellow citizens who are terrified by your choice. Help us understand what you want. The media (which has its own significant problems) keeps telling us that you either (1) were fooled by lies or (2) only wanted some but not all of what the new administration is offering. If either of these is true, then standing together in opposition will be necessary.

The other thing I ask is for you to be honest with yourselves about the question "Is this what you wanted?" Two months prior to inauguration, the incoming administration is trolling the nation with cabinet picks hand-selected to be offensive, unprepared, and extreme. The nomination process itself is being used to take power from the legislature and give it to the executive branch. If there are parts of the platform that don't thrill you—whether that's the higher prices that tariffs and trade wars will bring, military use

against your neighbors, cutting off care for the elderly, the expansion of Israel and Russia, mass deportations, or hungry school kids—will you stand up to your party? The margin of victory was extremely narrow. In the popular vote, 49.9 percent took home the presidency while 48.3 percent of Americans lost.[6] That's hardly a mandate for the degree of destruction the winning side promises. It's also precisely why the U.S. Constitution protects the "minority from the tyranny of the majority,"[7] and it's why we all have work to do.

History and literature taught me that well before policies begin to change, social permission is given to hateful acts, and racist and misogynist violence begin. We saw it this year in the streets and on social media on election night.

I claim no prescience here (I **stopped making predictions** two years ago, remember?). What I've learned from history and literature (and a life lived in this country) is that well before the policies begin to change, social permission is given to hateful acts, and racist and misogynist violence begins. This year, emboldened racists and homophobes, misogynists and xenophobes, took to the streets and social media on election night itself.

The implementation of the centralizing, theocratic playbook that autocrats use—controlling the judiciary, seeking to remove the military's independent civilian leadership, weakening the legislature—is underway. Legal cases with abundant evidence are being dropped, and the whitewashing of the January 6 attempted insurrection as a grand moment in U.S. history has begun. High school curricula will expand the Florida and Texas projects for teaching false histories. Congress is considering sweeping IRS reforms on nonprofits. The playbook directs authoritarians-in-waiting to silence, break apart, and isolate civil society activists. This administration will come for the IRS; it will come for nonprofits.

To our civil society allies outside the U.S.: Please don't give up on us. Call us out when we're weak and obedient, bolster us as we seek new paths, and help us minimize the damage to the planet and global communities.

There's also a keen need for civil society allies outside of the U.S. Many of you have been through transitions into and out of democracy. You know much more about operating in repressive states than many Americans do, especially those who are now saying things won't be that bad. Your writers and activists, theorists and doers, know what autocracy feels like at the neighborhood level, in families, in communities. Don't give up on us (gloat all you want, but please don't give up on us). I hope you will call us out when we're weak and obedient, bolster us as we seek new paths, and help us minimize the damage to the planet and global communities. The U.S. will turn 250 years old in 2026. Help us make it there as the republic our founders gave us.

Later in this *Blueprint* I call on political theorists to be among the activist heroes we need now—to help us imagine what self-governance can look like going forward. What models of democracy might work in a world of immediate and pervasive lies; consolidated corporate control of expression, assembly, and association; and daily disasters? Other heroes will be each of us who finds a new, additional way to contribute to our communities, heroes who hold on to the values of justice, love, and the rule of law, who stay close and take care and ready themselves for re-democratizing the nation.

Our heroes will be all of us who hold on to the values of justice, love, and the rule of law, who stay close and take care and ready themselves for re-democratizing the nation.

We also will need historians. Those who can look back at this era—with more than a week's reflection—and tell us how we got here. Right now, it feels like we are sleepwalking into fascism. Hopefully, obstruction and refusal of such a transition will rise up. Some elements of this we don't need to wait much longer for. We should already be asking, "How can you tell me AI is good for democracy when the rise of the digital infrastructure that makes AI possible has already contributed to the demise of an informed public?"

More simply put, our current technological revolution—AI—isn't going to help us out of the mess we're in. **Professor Jill Lepore**, a Harvard historian whose book on the **Simulmatics Corporation** is one of the best on technology and politics, recently wrote of the effects that the steady incursion of technological promises has had on American politics, starting in the early 1960s, more than 60 years ago:

> *There was no grand plan, no sinister scheme. Instead, there were dedicated people trying to do their jobs as effectively as possible using the latest technologies, with the result that year by year and decade by decade, in both politics and journalism, automated data processing and targeted messaging replaced face-to-face interaction and mass circulation in the interest of speed, efficiency, and personalization. Meanwhile, polarization grew and trust in government fell, and, for reasons that, to be sure, were driven by forces that went beyond technological change, Americans became lonelier and angrier; more susceptible to conspiracy theories, hoaxes, and frauds; and more likely to believe that much of what they once thought was true was in fact a lie.*[8]

Artificial intelligence will not save us. Keep that in mind when you make choices about using AI that is controlled by a few companies, in a time when the global commercial surveillant infrastructure is effectively married to (many) governments' surveillant infrastructure.

For a decade, this *Blueprint* and the Digital Civil Society Lab tried to build digital understanding, resilience, and safety into philanthropic and civil society's use of these tools. Some progress was made, but not enough. Significantly more skepticism of corporate/government-controlled technologies is needed. What is needed but doesn't exist is a global, rights-protecting infrastructure for resistance and opposition.

The "convenience-based" trade-offs we've all made with our data for decades should be weighed against the potential harms that those corporate/government systems cause. Much more needs to be done to re-create and sustain our individual ability to come together privately, to organize collectively, to stand in opposition, to dream and implement better tomorrows for all people, on a planet that can sustain us, in a world that is just. We are nowhere close to those goals.

Much more needs to be done to re-create and sustain our individual ability to come together privately, to organize collectively, to stand in opposition, to dream and implement better tomorrows for all people, on a planet that can sustain us, in a world that is just.

Finally, let me state something obvious. It is an impossible task to anticipate the full impact of this election as I revise the *Blueprint* now, in November, knowing it will publish five days prior to the U.S. presidential inauguration. It is impossible to capture all the ways an emboldened global cabal of billionaires and autocrats shifts the assumptions undergirding your work. My advice going forward is to check *every* assumption.[9] For those of you doing program planning, making grant decisions, setting up new institutions—how will your plans hold as the rule of law further erodes? How can you communicate your work on a polarized internet overflowing with bots and lies? Your work happens in context. And the context in 2025 will be radically different than in 2024.

Your work happens in context. And the context in 2025 will be radically different than in 2024.

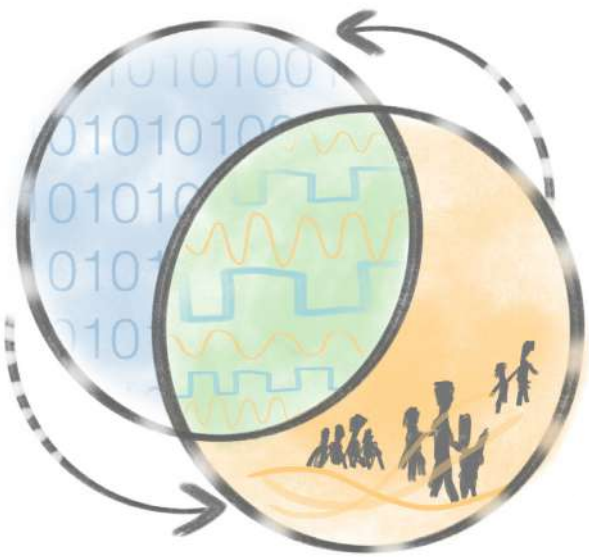
In the U.S. the context includes fights over the legal and regulatory regime that shapes civil society and philanthropy as well as policy battles within each social domain. The sector **will change**. Maybe the changes we've been seeing, of more informality, more politics in charity, more time-limited efforts, and less institutionalism (all documented in the *Blueprint* series), will catalyze more agile, self-governed, oppositional civic action. Maybe real changes will come that lock up less money in perpetual institutions with weak accountability structures. Or maybe not. It will depend on what lessons we learn together.

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES AND THE COMMON GOOD

(Reprinted from Alliance *magazine, June 2024)*

Fifty years after early techies welcomed each other to "cyberspace," we are still grappling with the implications of lives lived simultaneously and persistently online and in physical space. Scholars and pundits debate the internet's implications for democracy as authoritarianism rises around the world and disinformation generated by and passed from bot to bot defines online communications. As difficult as it is to define and pursue the common good in the physical world, it is insufficient to do so. Citizens of modern, electrified economies live in hybridized worlds made of online/offline, analog/digital interactions. The pursuit of the common good needs to account for the dynamics of both the physical world of institutions, norms, and laws; the digital world of privatized discourse monitors, boundaryless spaces, timeless storage, and endless remixability; and the interactions between the two. To pursue the common good in our hybrid digital/physical world we need to redirect the powers of digital technologies toward our shared purposes. To do so will require reinventing how we govern ourselves and our resources for shared purposes. In other

To pursue the common good in our hybrid digital/physical world we need to redirect the powers of digital technologies toward our shared purposes. To do so will require reinventing how we govern ourselves and our resources for shared purposes.



words, doing so will require reinventing organizational governance.

It took centuries of technical advances and governance evolution to get from exclusive royal licenses to cooperative ventures or the distributed autonomous organizations (DAOs) made possible by cryptocurrencies. The earliest wayfarers into cyberspace sought to reject the progress manifest in independent, liberal, democratic nation-states and called for the internet to be free from all governments. Such ideals offered little resistance to the energy of capitalism, and we now live in a world where a few dozen corporations control a vast percentage of the digital spaces we traffic and the tools we use to do so. Our world is shaped not only by different expectations and norms in physical and digital spaces, but by the interactions between our historically evolved systems of governance and a cyberspace shaped as much by competitive, commercial interests as by laws and regulations.

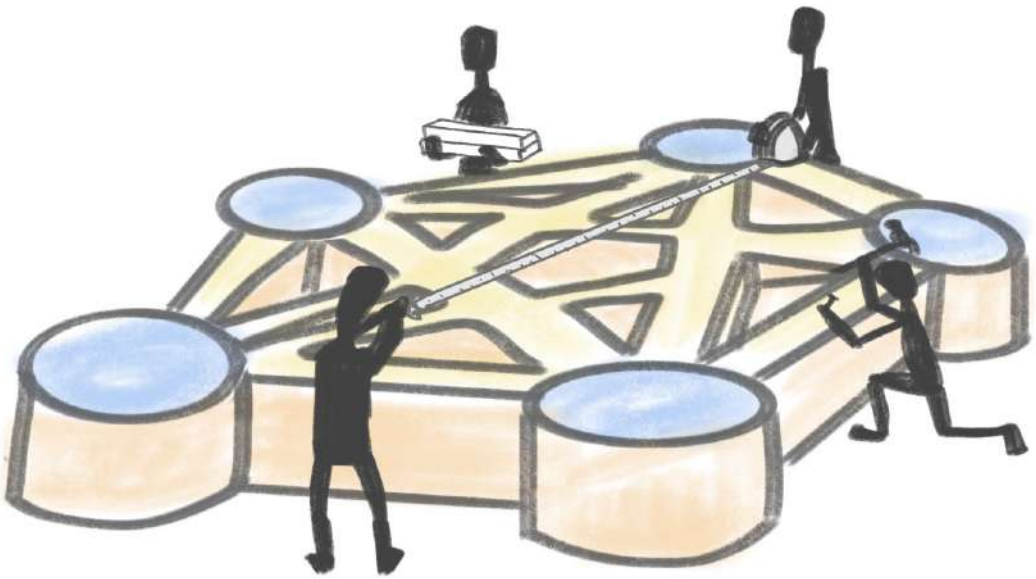
How then do we even define a "common good"—let alone pursue it—that qualifies as such in both physical and digital realms?

How then do we even define a "common good"—let alone pursue it—that qualifies as such in both physical and digital realms?

The answer lies not in the "what" of a common good, but the "how." The answer is not in the substance of a thing or the nature of a service—it matters not whether we are discussing atmospheric clouds or internet storage marketed as "clouds"; not whether we're discussing algorithmically sorted speech or street corner speech, virtual game grazing pastures or feed for real animals.

Whether or not a physical or digital good is a shared common good is determined by how it is governed, not what it is.

Governance defines whether something is truly shared, truly available for common purposes, common use, common thriving. From the early "common" pastures that preceded both private enclosure and corporatized ownership to today's global commons of knowledge, Wikipedia, and the Internet Archive, the role of users in controlling and making decisions over the resource is a critical determinant of commonality. Despite the hope of early internet pioneers, governance is key to ensuring common access, use, and public purpose. Modern nonprofit corporations, which can meet the need for (but do not alone guarantee) general access, use, and purpose, struggle to protect common digital resources from the enclosing and privatizing energy of the modern internet. Fault can be found with every such resource and its managing organization—from Wikipedia to Creative Commons, the



Internet Archive to Mozilla. Alternatives exist in a variety of forms. One example is the *fediverse*—a system of independently governed and interoperable servers that enable social media engagement. In this system of open-source software and protocols, anyone with the technical skill and financial resources can add a server into the fediverse; set the rulemaking procedures for that server; and become part of a global, collective, social media landscape. There are two key contrasts between the fediverse—in which anyone can set up a server, establish rules, and invite like-minded participants—and social media providers such as Meta or X: First, the governance systems are vastly different, and second, the fediverse relies on people to sort and share information, not algorithms.

Managing physical resources as common goods is difficult but doable, and there are abundant examples in practice and Nobel Prizes for the theory. Using algorithms, automated processing, or crypto-based contracts to manage digital resources in common—for common use—is the goal for many organizations, including the **Distributed AI Research Institute** (DAIR), **Metagov**, **RadicalxChange**, and **Project Liberty**. They are taking on the challenge of designing and implementing technical protocols that reproduce the governing values of a community of people, over time and across the globe. This work is particularly difficult because of the diversity of human values, the small number of people capable of documenting those values in software code, and the need to invent new mechanisms for due process and auditing of the technical artifacts.

We have managed resources in common for centuries, but doing so in a world of digital/physical intermingled experiences requires developing new systems of governance, both human and technical; new systems for building trust; and new processes for repairing failures or harms. Managing things in common is not synonymous with pursuing the common good, but the latter is predicated on the former.

Not surprisingly, the imagination and experimentation to develop new governance mechanisms for our hybrid digital/physical world is coming largely from civil society-based actors. This is because commercial enterprises and governments have little incentive to distribute control or reimagine governance mechanisms toward openness. Civil society is home to experiments in trusted data intermediaries, data trusts, new DAOs, open collectives, and a growing number of other new institutional forms built of both human and software "rules." The opportunity is enormous: We have the chance to redesign governance to purpose-fit the possibilities of digitized data, global connectivity, and near-infinite storage while providing protections for personal and community privacy, collective control, and both safety and serendipity. This is civil society's (and philanthropy's) great chance to set forth organizational opportunities that will hold and nurture and generate common benefits and enhance our common well-being. The internet that most of us know is one that serves best the purposes of commercial and government-based actors. The opportunity to invest in and care for our common humanity is again upon us—and it comes in the form of governance innovation for the common good, swimming against broader political and economic powers the entire time.

The opportunity to invest in and care for our common humanity is again upon us—and it comes in the form of governance innovation for the common good.

(End of reprint from Alliance*)*

ALL CIVIL SOCIETY IS DIGITAL CIVIL SOCIETY

Lessons from the Digital Civil Society Lab

In 2014, shortly after the media revealed information obtained from Edward Snowden that showed the breadth of U.S. government surveillance of its citizens and others, we launched the Digital Civil Society Lab at Stanford, part of the Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society. The Lab's mission was to understand, inform, and improve civil society in the digital age. We were filling a gap in academia, as the first such university philanthropy center to focus specifically on civil society—most other centers, if not all of them, focused on digital technology and government or industry. We structured the Lab to balance scholarly and experiential wisdom, hosting practitioner fellows from around the globe, whose daily challenges and innovative solutions informed the Lab's research agenda and teaching. The Lab has closed, but digital civil society lives on.

The Lab's mission was to understand, inform, and improve civil society in the digital age.

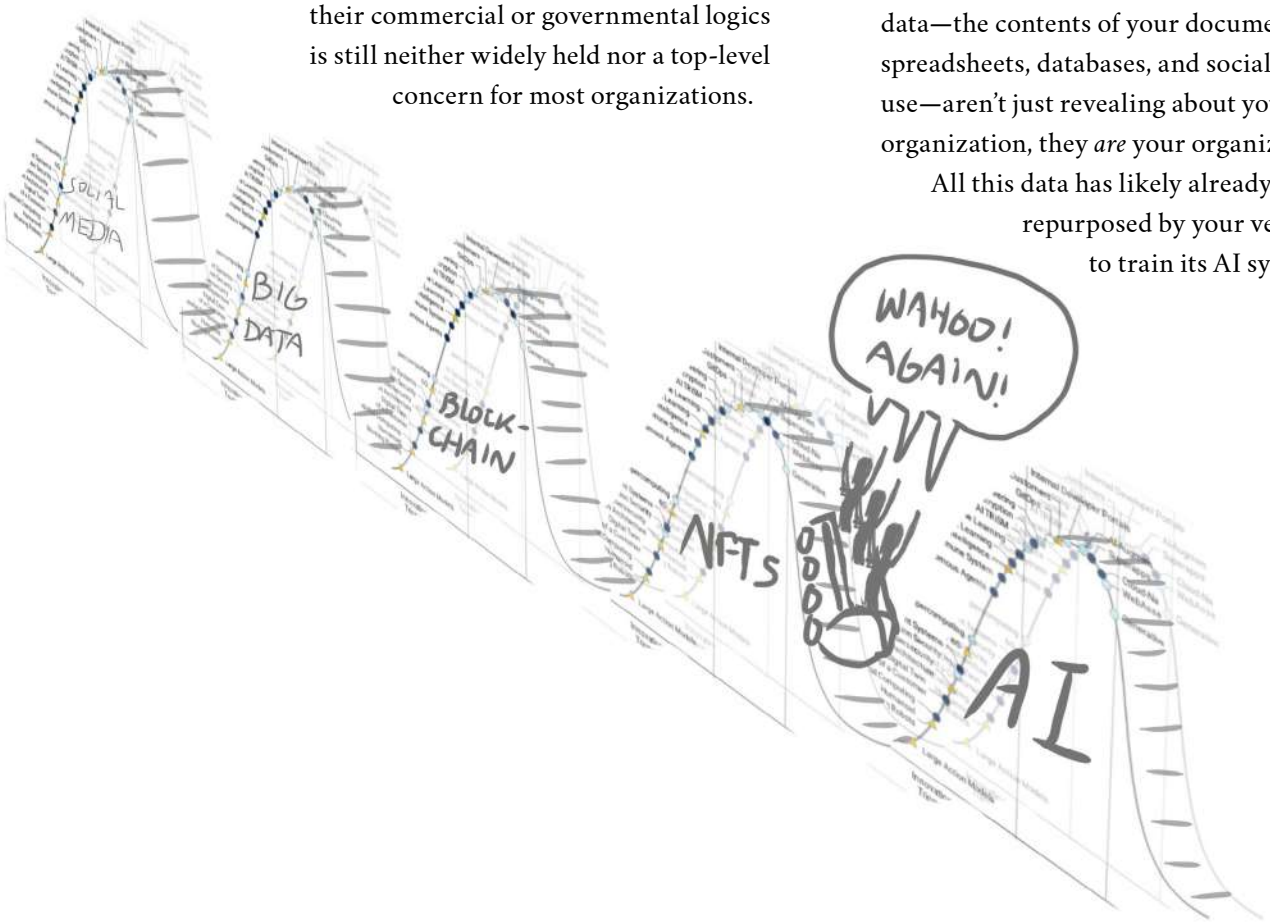
In our Stanford seminar we discussed digital civil society as including all the ways we can come together to make change in the digital age. We discussed ways that civil society actions take place *using* digital tools, such as the role of mobile phones in organizing and the counter-use of stingray technology by police to limit assembly. We looked at civil society *on* digital systems, such as the use of avatars, hashtags, and other forms of social media collectivity. Finally, we studied actions *about* digital systems, such as the fights for net neutrality and efforts to hold companies accountable for teen suicides.

Our undergraduate students have only known a digital world, and so unpacking what matters about these systems is a bit like showing goldfish the water in which they swim. The data collection responsibilities, security vulnerabilities, fake accounts, prevalence of lies and falsehoods, and roles of bots are well known to students. What was less robust (usually)

A working understanding of both the nuance of digital dependencies and the theoretical underpinnings of an independent civil society is what the Lab tried to build.

was an understanding of civil society in democracies. Adult learners, with whom we interacted via countless workshops, grasped the democratic concepts but struggled to understand why their dependence on a handful of software companies for their informational infrastructure might not be so wise. A working understanding of both—the nuance of digital dependencies and the theoretical underpinnings of an independent civil society—is what we tried to build with both students and practitioners.

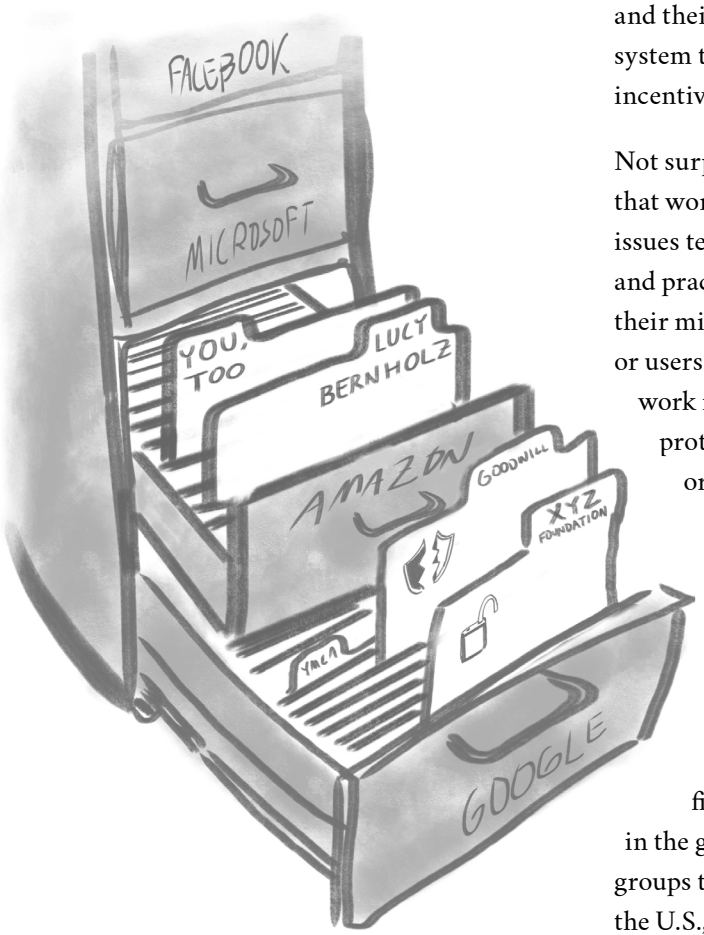
An understanding of how civil society depends on digital systems and is shaped by their commercial or governmental logics is still neither widely held nor a top-level concern for most organizations.



There is a great divide between organizations who are clear about the dangers of these dependencies and those who continue to chase widely marketed shiny new objects, even when they can't figure out what they might use those objects for. We've taken a ride on the same tech hype cycle that has repeated itself at least five times since 2010: social media, big data, blockchain, NFTs, and now, artificial intelligence. The companies and consultants selling the products make big promises and hand-wave away the risks. That all civil society still doesn't "get it" is reflected in the agendas of sector-wide conferences and the curricula of capacity-building organizations. Rarely can one find a model of "effectiveness" that incorporates digital acumen and safety as well as being able to balance the books.

You are responsible for sensitive data on other people. Think of what's in your cloud documents, your online spreadsheet, and your databases of donors or grantees. Your data—the contents of your documents, spreadsheets, databases, and social media use—aren't just revealing about your organization, they *are* your organization.

All this data has likely already been repurposed by your vendor to train its AI systems,



without your knowledge or compensation, and with no regard for any harm that may come from doing so. To the degree that you rely on commercial cloud services, your information sources (data) are sitting on other companies' servers, being managed by the cloud company's rules, and will be shared with law enforcement according to the service vendor's policies, not your organizational policies. Your organization is but a folder in their filing cabinet.

Among other problems, these digital dependencies diminish civil society's ability to act as a counterbalance to corporatization or as resistance to government overreach. Instead, over the last few decades, more and more organizations have become more dependent on digital companies. Tomorrow's historians are sure to ask, "To what degree was the fragility of democracy exacerbated by the absorption of nonprofits, foundations, and their data into a singular surveillant system that had been primed by the incentives of business and government?"

Not surprisingly, civil society organizations that work on the most contested social issues tend to be the most well informed and practiced in using tools that align with their missions and don't put their clients or users in danger. They know that they work in opposition to the status quo—and protect themselves accordingly. These organizations are trying to use digital technology safely, ethically, and effectively. They have learned a great deal about protecting the data they collect and have integrated digital expertise into their work with the same integrity they use in their programmatic and financial work. Their work is visible in the growing network of digital defender groups that exist to protect Black people in the U.S., abortion providers in restrictive countries, and journalists and environmental defenders globally.

These civil society groups constantly toggle between the benefits of digital systems and the dangers the systems bring along. They help other organizations protect their data, limit what data they collect, and delete information when it's no longer needed and could be used for harm. Well-run and effective civil society organizations pay constant attention to their digital practices, what their policies enable or require, and the shifting landscape of both companies and technologies within which they do their work. It's time to support, connect with, and learn from them.

In its 10 years of operation, the Lab made progress with individual organizations (see **Digital Impact**—a free resource for data governance choices), produced practical research with community organizations,

published several academic volumes, and helped several funders work differently with their grantees. We named the issue—*digital civil society*—and the name took hold. As artificial intelligence tops the tech hype meter, civil society faces renewed urgency around old questions. Can civil society use commercial AI tools without compromising their own data or putting constituent/donor data at risk? Can individual organizations protect themselves and their data from the giant sucking sounds of AI companies scraping the web? The argument for how civil society can engage with AI is an extension of how it should have been governing and using its digitized data all along—carefully, with harm mitigation strategies and mission at the forefront, and as independently as possible. Civil society's incentives have shaped its distinctive financial and organizational structures; they should also shape how it governs its data and uses AI.

Civil society's incentives have shaped its distinctive financial and organizational structures; they should also shape how it governs its data and uses AI.

Beyond individual organizational choices, the arrival of AI challenges all civil society—individual activists, informal groups, networks of organizations—to contribute to setting boundaries on the market and government players seeking data. At this early stage, **copyright lawsuits** are one method being used to rein in the AI companies. Civil society organizations are leading and will continue to lead legal and policy fights to influence how AI companies collect, use, and reuse your data. These groups will fight in court, with regulators, and with the media—trying to protect humans and human rights. They must counter the arguments made by corporate marketing budgets and pro-innovation regulators.

It is this challenge—differentiating civil society organizations from businesses and governments—that connects the tactics of data governance to the health of democracies.

It is this challenge—differentiating civil society organizations from businesses and governments—that connects the tactics of data governance to the health of democracies. Also known as the third sector, civil society must serve different purposes in different ways for different people than the other two sectors do; otherwise, it wouldn't be necessary. To date, the defining features of civil society organizations have been codified in corporate and tax laws. These characteristics delineate the public-serving mission of civil society by preventing private financial benefit or ownership through requirements for public benefit and rules against self-dealing. We are seeing innovation in real time to create new corporate rules for civil society—organizational and public policies—that can extend this purpose-driven differentiation to the management and use of digital resources, as well as financial ones. The need to manage data for mission is driving the emergence of data trusts, collective fiscal sponsors such as **Open Collective**, licensing protocols that give priority to sharing over private ownership, and the use of **open-source AI** models as market differentiators.

The changing information environment

The information landscape around civil society is changing. The *Blueprint* series provides a partial record of civil society's adoption of and concerns about social media and the digital information environment. Artificial intelligence is the tech topic dominating today's headlines. Several technologies—social media, big data, crowdfunding—have had their moments in the hype cycle and then slowly blended into daily routines in the decade and a half since the first *Blueprint*. Others have been hyped and deflated, such as the metaverse and NFTs. Chasing after these individual technologies—each of which is accompanied by marketing budgets that could swallow entire philanthropic endowments—is partly why time seems to move faster than "in the old days."

It's worth pausing for a moment and reflecting on the entirety of the information environment in which civil society operates today. In general, we've seen consolidation in both legacy and digital media, contraction in print and broadcast, and further encroachment on cable and broadcast by streaming companies. Globally, a few enormous companies control more and more sources of information and entertainment, a trend that's been underway since the 1990s.[10]

In the recent past, however, changes other than consolidation have also taken place. These include legal settlements declaring **Google a monopoly**, Elon Musk's transformation of Twitter into a morass of right-wing conspiracy theories, and the global growth of TikTok. More than 60 countries held elections in 2024, providing an opportunity for **over four billion people** to go to the polls. Misinformation and disinformation around elections have proven too much for the internet companies. After several cycles of trying to stamp it out, they've largely pulled back, either hiding behind free speech claims or counting on faulty artificial intelligence and blaming the AI when efforts to stamp it out fail.

Civil society groups have played large roles in efforts to counter misinformation and disinformation. Organizations or their staff members partnered with companies to try flagging, tagging, community notes, and content moderation. From earnest collaborations early in the decade to **scathing report cards** of failure by the 2020s, nonprofits and activists tried several approaches to working with industry. The civil society slant on this story should also include coverage of the changing strategies used to hold the companies accountable. With this lens, we see a set of strategies being repeated today as **nonprofits launch ratings and reports** on chatbots and AI models. Such a story must also note that representatives of the U.S. government, specifically Rep.

Visualization created with mapchart.net2024

Jim Jordan, R-Ohio, and his ironically named Select Subcommittee on the Weaponization of the Federal Government, **threatened, harassed, and ultimately drove out** of operation numerous nonprofit research efforts focused on disinformation on the internet. The U.S. government's efforts against civil society—aided by some of the tech billionaires—are about to increase exponentially and become much more visible.

The digital platforms that civil society relies on for communicating about its work are presently a swamp of chatbots, AI-generated junk (known as slop), and the output of distributed networks of both paid and volunteer propagandists.

Despite all these efforts, the digital platforms that civil society relies on for communicating about its work are presently a swamp of **chatbots**, AI-generated junk (known as **slop**), and the output of distributed networks of both paid and volunteer propagandists.

The information ecosystem in which nonprofits and foundations communicate and connect is not what it was a decade ago. It is more adversarial and polarized. It is full of lies and conspiracy theories. The ease with which anyone with an internet connection can wreak havoc is remarkable. Finding ways to be a signal amid the noise, or to share evidence-based information, or to protect one's digital presence from chaos is costly and time-consuming, and requires a level of adaptability that few organizations can support. Resources for **good data governance** exist, but they are not well known and are costly to keep updated.

Civil society plays numerous roles in this information ecosystem. The fediverse, with its numerous hosted servers that allow short-form posting, is a powerful example of a civil society alternative to the commercial platforms. Numerous organizations focused on digital rights fight for corporate and government accountability on everything from internet shutdowns to children's safety to consumer privacy, and now they're taking on artificial intelligence. Networks informed by previous tech hype cycles, such as the **New Protagonist Network**, have coalesced to bring civil society voices into global debates on AI. Research collaboratives such as the work of **Rootcause** can power these activists. Collective efforts have been slow, but some, such as TechMatters' **Better Deal for Data**, have taken years to pull together and have had difficulty building traction.

There are patterns in this past. The hype cycle is one. Resistance, adoption, resignation is another. The surveys I've seen so far on nonprofit AI adoption find that more than two-thirds of nonprofit respondents use AI, even though "half of those surveyed were either uncertain of or believed that the rewards and risks were evenly balanced, meaning there is a significant amount of uncertainty and lack of understanding about what AI is and what it means for the world."[11] We buy into the hype, each and every time.

REVIEW, REFLECT, REIMAGINE

Having now completed 16 annual editions of this *Blueprint*, I think it's time to take a breath. I wrote the first in 2009 and published it in 2010 to provide a resource that I knew was common in other industries—an annual forecast. Foundations and nonprofits are not a "neat" industry or field. In many cases, the only thing these organizations have in common is their place in the corporate and tax codes, but I thought it worth a try.

The publication has evolved over the years, as have the ways I engage with readers. I've held webinars, hosted social media discussions, traveled the world discussing the *Blueprints*, done one-on-ones with organizational leaders, participated in board meetings and strategic planning sessions. I've given countless conference presentations, taught classes, and joined other organizations' staff meetings to discuss that year's *Blueprint*'s implications. In *Blueprints*, I've included worksheets, workshop agendas, document templates, and links to resources such as **Digital Impact**, a curated collection of data governance tools I developed with the support of many foundations and nonprofits.

It feels essential to take a hard look at the past with a willingness to make a break and imagine new directions. I need a clearer picture of what the *Blueprint* has been up to in the past. And to do that, I want reflections on the *Blueprints* that come from outside myself. As an historian, to make decisions I need to go backward to go forward.

One way I've sought a fresh perspective on the *Blueprint*'s past comes from Susan Joanis, a Canadian human rights lawyer who is very active in her local community near Toronto. She has organized local "fix-it" gatherings in her neighborhood to help people reuse material goods instead of throwing them away. She's been following the work of **Take the Jump**, a UK-based resource that helps individuals take meaningful action to limit their environmental impact. Until I asked her to review 15 *Blueprints* and tell me what she learned, she'd never read any of the series. You'll find her review of the *Blueprint* series below.

As another way to understand the *Blueprint*'s past, I tried an experiment. I used a large language model (LLM—the methodology underpinning much of the current AI) to analyze the prior *Blueprints* for me. I chose a tool called **NotebookLM**, a Google product made specifically for writers. After running the experiment, I realized that I had learned very little, and I cut it from this document.

Finally, as I mentioned at the beginning, I'm looking to you, the readers of the *Blueprint*, for your reflections, suggestions, and ideas. You'll find more about how to add your thoughts in the **Conclusion and next steps**.

A LAYPERSON'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE BLUEPRINT

Susan Tamar Joanis

All of us engage in some way with the world of philanthropy—reporting charitable donations to reduce personal tax bills, intentionally purchasing from businesses identified as social enterprises, soliciting or being solicited for donations to a wide variety of causes. Most of us are casual players contributing in relatively small ways, but the sector is organized, directed, and run by a large cadre of dedicated professionals behind the scenes—the *Blueprint*'s usual readers.

Philanthropy professionals have diverse roles, but the tasks associated with each are specific. Like specialists from any sector, these professionals no doubt spend most of their time and attention trained on a relatively narrow focus as they work to achieve specific enumerated goals. I believe this is one of the ways the *Blueprint* shines and offers an especially helpful resource for its audience. The *Blueprint* examines the philanthropy landscape from an expansive and integrative view, thus offering philanthropy professionals the potential to zoom out and perhaps understand their missions and how they pursue them in a more comprehensive way. This bird's-eye view allows people in the field to see the whole picture, including how philanthropy intersects and interacts with other major sectors.

The Blueprint consistently and closely examines how the philanthropy world is shaped and impacted by the rapidly evolving and ever more important role played by digital technology. —Susan Tamar Joanis

Yet the publication also maintains a particular focus, one I believe could be equally helpful to professionals in any field these days. The *Blueprint* consistently and closely examines how the philanthropy world is shaped and impacted by the rapidly evolving and ever more important role played by digital technology. This focus helps practitioners understand key questions, threats, and challenges the field faces or will likely face and provides some direction for beginning to grapple with them.

The Blueprint does two things through a range of features: It provides a set of basic tools that establish a common understanding of key relevant terms and concepts, and it covers a broad scope of topics viewed from a wide-lens vantage point. —Susan Tamar Joanis

The *Blueprint* does these two things through an interesting range of features. First, it provides a set of **basic tools**, thus establishing a common understanding of key relevant terms and concepts. This helps to ground its readers and bring them together. The tools include:

- Important terminology—Naturally, the *Blueprint* employs essential industry terms. However, it also defines them, explains them, and updates their meanings or uses as appropriate. Related but with their own space come the "Buzzwords" and occasionally a supplemental glossary.
- Conceptual frameworks—Every issue contains a series of articles from a range of contributors offering extensive discussion of existing and emerging concepts, helping readers understand trends and patterns across sectors and actors.
- Forecasts and forecast reviews—Every year (until last year, when the pace of AI's infiltration into the digital scene rendered it impossible), *Blueprint* author Lucy Bernholz engaged in a forecasting exercise, drawing on her imagination and her knowledge about the current state of affairs, to predict what might emerge or develop in the coming year. This would be accompanied by a chart showing her forecasts from the previous year and how accurate (or not) they were.
- Reference notes—Finally, through a combination of hyperlinks that run throughout the publication and an extensive list of endnotes, the *Blueprint* offers professionals in the field a wealth of additional resources and materials to buttress their understanding and exploration of the complex issues covered.

As a novice reader in this area, I found these tools fascinating and on a practical level extremely helpful. Beyond these tools, however, the *Blueprint* covers a **broad scope** of topics, viewed from a wide-lens vantage point. This manifests in several ways:

- Comprehensive approach—The *Blueprint* addresses philanthropy in all its many forms, including charitable giving (large and small) by individuals, as well as the roles and intersections of nonprofit organizations, foundations, government agencies, the various types of social enterprises, impact investing, and political giving. This broad frame for thinking about philanthropy no doubt encourages *Blueprint* readers to expand their understanding about intersecting elements and their ideas about what is possible, thus impacting how they approach their work.

- Geographic and disciplinary orientation—While the *Blueprint* is a product of the U.S. and firmly rooted in an American context, it has nevertheless increasingly adopted a more international scope, thus broadening its readership base and introducing its readers to one another. It has also widened its perspective by including contributors from disciplines outside of philanthropy. Through this wider lens, I imagine professionals learn of new ideas and initiatives along with opportunities for sharing information and for collaborating more broadly.
- Trends/patterns/expectations/intersections between entities and sectors/key questions/challenges—The *Blueprint* gives space to numerous adjacent but essential questions. A quick dip into what other publications have to say about it confirms how this breadth is both noticed and appreciated. A sample from *NonProfit PRO* illustrates: "In *Blueprint 2023,* Bernholz and co-authors identify bright spots, model initiatives, and resources for creating a safer, more equitable, and more effective civil society for the digital era, including opportunities for institutional innovation, case studies on what's worked (and what hasn't), and ways philanthropy can help (and reduce its own harms)."

Beyond this, however, the *Blueprint*'s consistent (and unique) **focus on the digital context** in which the world of philanthropy now operates sets it apart. Of course, *everything* now operates within a digital context; this is now the air we breathe. We have adapted to it and (literally) accepted its terms as part of the background landscape, a new requirement for conducting business. Our acceptance and normalization of how digital technology has been incorporated into virtually all our transactions makes it hard for us to step back and see the bigger picture, question its current structures and mechanisms, or look ahead to see the unexpected and unforeseen ways it could be used. The *Blueprint* helps us do that, specializing in the intersection of philanthropy, digital technology, and civil society.

For example, it shines a spotlight on issues related to data privacy, ownership, and management; the role played by relevant legislation and regulation; and the emerging ethical challenges related to the digital nature of our interactions. By highlighting and explaining these issues, the *Blueprint* alerts philanthropy professionals to potential threats, helps them fully understand the implications and dangers inherent in the technology we have adopted and come to rely on, and offers a platform to consider solutions and paths forward for civil society. As far as I could tell through brief explorations into other philanthropy-related materials, no other publications currently play this role.

Given changes the United States can expect to see under a more organized, focused, and capable Trump administration, the insights and ideas that the *Blueprint* examines and explores related to our reliance on and use of digital technology become that much more salient. Indeed, they become critical, as civil society struggles to not only survive in such an environment but play an increasingly important role. Recognizing the real danger facing those who challenge this new government, a clear understanding of how digital technology works and how it could put those challengers at risk will become essential. Stated simply, with U.S. democratic institutions and systems under threat, this publication offers a crucial vehicle for communication and coordination among representatives of civil society who

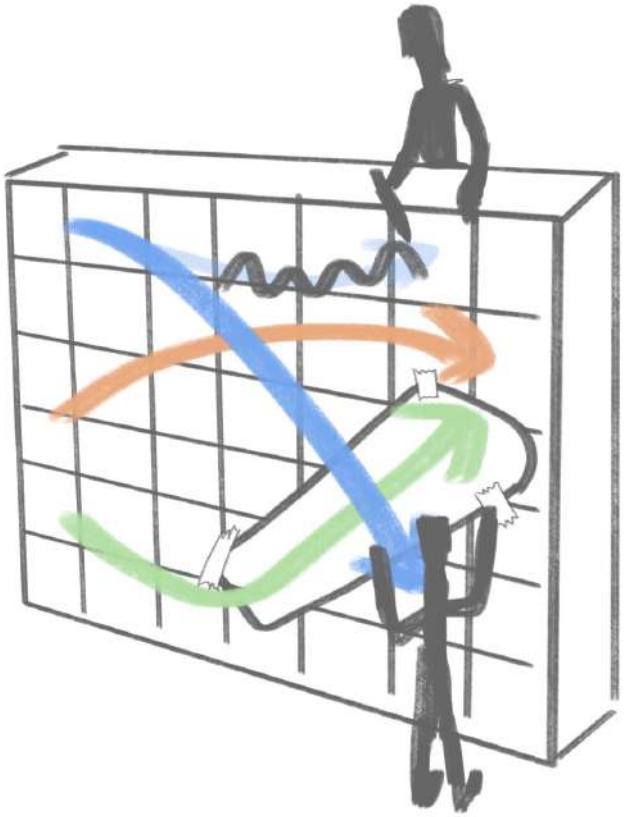
must work together to continue advancing the public good, while protecting the most vulnerable among us.

Assuming the *Blueprint*'s nearly 10,000 regular readers agree with me, an interested outsider, that it *should* continue, what form might that take? While I'm not in a position to comment on the financial structure, here are two possible models that would enable the writing to continue:

- Building on the way this publication has connected with and involved others both in the U.S. and from around the globe, perhaps the *Blueprint* could become a fully collaborative endeavor, with partners from various countries contributing articles about what is happening in their part of the world or their corner of the philanthropy sector. In this scenario, an editor in chief, perhaps with help from a small supporting team, might develop thematic ideas for a given issue and then solicit contributors internationally to write the content. The editor and team would finalize the contributions and put them together to create the publication.
- Either as part of the above model or separately, a small team could produce shorter, focused, "deep-dive"-type documents (e.g., Data Privacy for Philanthropists)—a sort of mini-*Blueprint*. Perhaps multiples of these mini-editions could be produced at intervals throughout the year.

KEEPING PRIOR CONVERSATIONS GOING

Sixteen years of thinking about the year ahead leaves a lot of room for second thoughts and themes that beg to be continued. Lots of things happened faster—and slower—than I thought. Lots of the predictions were off by months or years. Of course, many were just wrong, as the scorecards showed. In this *Blueprint*, however, I want to quickly revisit some ideas, predictions, and possibilities that have been discussed in prior *Blueprints*, the resolutions of which may still be ongoing.



I chose the following topics from the past *Blueprints*, but they were not the only options. Any of these, or any of those that you might have chosen, would make good topics for further discussion. (Let us know via the survey what you think, what you want less of, and what you'd prefer to see.)

Boundary blurring

I and others have been writing about sectoral blurring for a long time. Using an old western metaphor of a three-legged stool, democracy's dependence on the three legs of markets, governments, and civil society is complicated when the meaningful differences between these sectors are indistinguishable to the public. To push back against boundary blurring loses me my seat at the cool kids' table, since we now stand in what Gerry Salole refers to as the "age of hybridity."[12]

What I've seen in the U.S., however, is the deliberate manipulation of blurred lines. Here we find basic commercial enterprises reaching for a "trusted" halo by taking on a nonprofit structure—and yes, I'm looking at you, OpenAI. But a more pernicious blurring occurs across charitable and political lines. Political operatives are especially adept at

Political operatives are especially adept at "borrowing" the anonymity and tax benefits of charitable organizations, applying them to political donations, and then shutting the entire enterprise down when the elections end but before the reporting requirements kick in.

"borrowing" the anonymity and tax benefits that attach to charitable organizations and applying them to political donations, then shutting the entire enterprise down when the elections end but before the reporting requirements kick in. This blurring becomes a tax dodge and campaign finance deception. The blur has won; the **rules don't work**. I expect we'll soon have new, worse, rules.

Last year I wondered about—and had an undergrad build me a **dataset** of—the number of AI-focused nonprofits and hybrids.[13] I even hypothesized that the bounty of hybrids in the AI space might hint at something coming down the road in the broader nonprofit sector. It's not clear yet whether the abundance of hybrid or multipronged (c3+c4+profit partnerships) organizations in the AI realm are unique to AI or will serve as models for other domains. The OpenAI organizational drama of the last few years is fascinating. The organization has gone from a nonprofit to a capped profit and is now **headed toward** full profit. The company has famously fired its original nonprofit board while taking billions in investment from the likes of Microsoft, other tech companies, and venture capitalists—all entities known for their altruism (that's sarcasm, minus the emoji).

Democracy theorists need to wear capes these days—as we will need superhuman efforts to return to democracy. This challenge is enormous, and it **reaches deeper** than simply defining civil society, markets, and governments. Every day our world fills with new challenges. The **people you are meeting with online might not be people**, but their bots. The person passing you on the sidewalk might be reading your entire online identity, as they pass by you wearing **Meta facial recognition-capable glasses**. Bots as people, privacy as a commodity, fiction as truth—all these things help kill democracies. We need new models.

Bots as people, privacy as a commodity, fiction as truth—all of these things help kill democracies. We need new models.

Equity and inclusivity

In June 2023, the **United States Supreme Court** ruled against the use of race-based admissions to college, striking a blow against affirmative action programs around the country. In doing so, the court succeeded in dramatically de-diversifying institutions. In a single year, universities around the country reported significant drops in enrollment of students of color—for example, 9 percent (MIT), 8 percent (Amherst), 6 percent (Tufts), and a 3 percent

drop in enrolled Black students at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The SCOTUS decision will further strengthen higher education's role in social sorting and diminish its potential as a force for social mobility. The decision also greased the skids for additional lawsuits—including those against **Black-specific grant programs**—and provided cover to corporations to **drop diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives** (Tractor Supply Company,[14] Ford Motor, John Deere, Lowe's, etc.). It's hard not to see the decision as legally sanctioning racism. And in this time of simmering political violence, there has been a concomitant increase in attacks on DEI proponents and **researchers who focus on race and racism**.

The SCOTUS decision against the use of race-based college admissions will further strengthen higher education's role in social sorting and diminish its potential as a force for social mobility.

The decision already has energized foes of inclusion, given cover to white people who feel like they're losing societal status, and provided legal backing to those who oppose diversity as a "woke mind virus." The decision unleashed a slew of lawsuits taking on DEI and affirmative action in other settings, including giving. In September 2024, **the Fearless Fund**, a venture capital firm with a philanthropic arm focused on Black women entrepreneurs, shut down its grant program to settle a lawsuit that charged the organization with discrimination against white people. This fight and its conclusion **redound to philanthropy writ large**, as a major strike against donor choice and autonomy and a restraint on social change-oriented giving. We need to encourage philanthropy and civil society to keep up the fight for inclusion. We need to avoid the slippery slope of "**anticipatory obedience**" to dictators.

Copyright law and civil society

I've been writing about copyright law and its implications for philanthropy and nonprofits since the *2014 Blueprint*. Copyright claims are one of the first responses to AI companies' having sucked everything on the internet into their maw of training data. Everyone from comedians (Sarah Silverman) to large corporations (*The New York Times*) is suing for damages under copyright law. **Keep an eye on these lawsuits**, as they will influence how your organization goes about sharing information in the future. Copyright lawsuits are also roiling the world of libraries (again), as experienced by the **Internet Archive** and **public libraries** trying to offer e-books.

Unsurprisingly, new nonprofit organizations are being created to attempt alternatives to this litigious reality. **Fairly Trained** is one such effort: a nonprofit that will provide certifications for AI systems trained on data from creators who have given their consent for its use. Finally, "AI ethics nonprofits" such as Fairly Trained will be the **next subsector to develop** within (digital) civil society.

Tax laws and giving

Twenty billion dollars. That's the amount of **charitable giving that did NOT happen** in the U.S. as a result of the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. That would put my *Blueprint 2018* claim that the

law would change the rules of the game for charitable giving into the "correct" column for predictions made. Fewer U.S. taxpayers are claiming charitable deductions. The relationship between taxes and giving is not always so clearly demonstrable, and **the effects of tax law** changes aren't visible only in dollars donated. The new administration will try to repeat this tax trick. Given the billion-plus dollars that voters gave to the presidential election, I'd also guess there will be a drop in charitable giving in Q4 2024. (It also would be nice if the campaigns would stop texting us, but that might be too much to ask.)

Discussions about new forms of giving—or rather discussions about **defining philanthropy** to include many **well-established, tried, traditional, and non-western forms of giving**—are adjacent to those specifically about tax incentives. If we truly come to see philanthropy as more than just tax-deductible cash donations, we will finally be able to look for more expansive policy incentives than just tax policy. For example, I'd propose that universal broadband access and universal childcare are likelier incentives than tax policy to promoting civic participation (within which I'd include giving).

AI and fundraising

Nonprofits are eager to improve their fundraising and make their operations more efficient, and every AI salesperson in the world is promising them tools to do this. Noteworthy applications are **AskGive.org** from the Better Business Bureau, **Your Guide to Good** from Giving Compass, and autonomous fundraisers (see "Buzzword Watch 2025" on **page 40**). AskGive.org is a chatbot, powered by the giving information accumulated over the years from the BBB's Give.org site. It responds to different kinds of questions, including identifying organizations to donate to. Of course, its database defines the limits of who it can recommend. If an organization isn't in the database, it cannot be recommended. Such tools are inherently exclusionary (they don't include all possible organizations) and recursive (the more people give to the organizations it does recommend, the more frequently the system will recommend those organizations). Tools like this will lead to giving to a few (likely well-resourced) organizations.

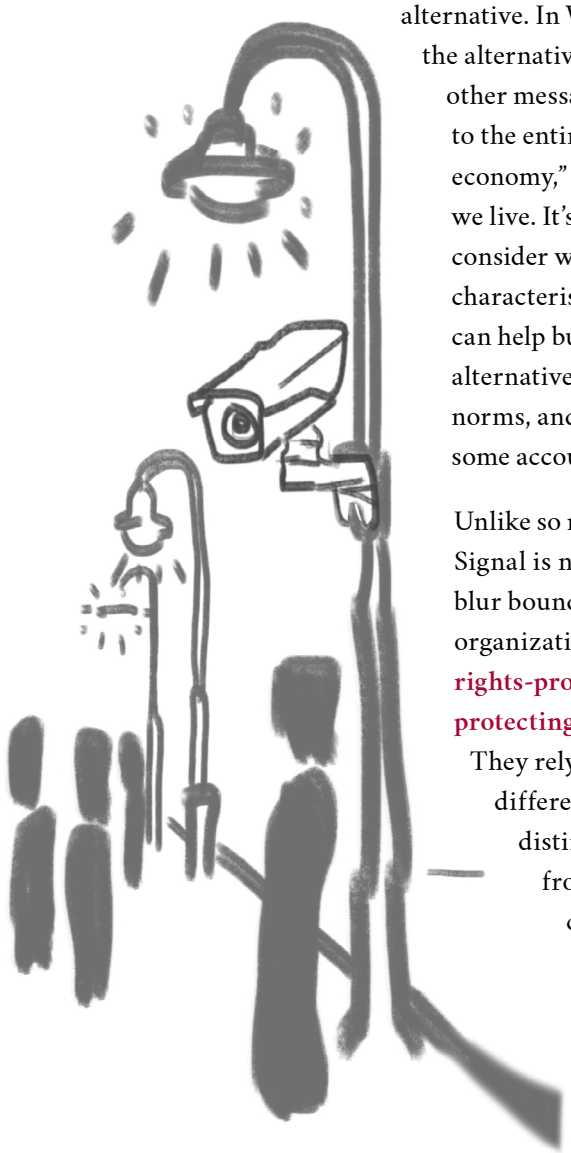
Autonomous fundraisers, on the other hand, are organization-specific, meaning that organizations like universities can set these up and donors can interact with them. People in the fundraising field have been talking about being more community oriented, more diverse, and more than transactional. If those are real aspirations, using a chatbot with donors strikes me as oxymoronic.

Encryption and civil society

Fights over digital encryption are even more predictable than ideas for philanthropy reform. Governments and rights groups have been fighting about encryption since the dawn of the internet. Civil society groups have always been in this fight. When the French government **arrested the CEO of Telegram** (2024) for knowingly facilitating crimes and child porn on its encrypted platform, the debate returned to the front pages. Tech leaders no longer walk on water (though no one seems to have told some of them), and the European Union continues to be the most aggressive developer and enforcer of regulations intended to protect the public. Civil society groups have played

key roles for decades in evergreen policy battles over encryption. There are few other areas in which nonprofit-funded technology actively competes with commercial software in terms of usage rates. Wikipedia has long been the poster child in this regard; encrypted messaging tools offer another example.

Signal, a fully encrypted messaging platform, is **made by a nonprofit organization** and run by **Meredith Whitaker,** formerly of Google and AI Now. Whitaker knows the history of the encryption battles. She's firmly in the camp of using a nonprofit organizational structure, along with its accountability mechanisms and funding restrictions, to build an alternative. In Whitaker's mind, the alternative is not just to other messaging apps, but to the entire "surveillance economy," within which we live. It's important to consider what structural characteristics of nonprofits can help build trust, provide alternatives to market norms, and provide some accountability.



Unlike so many nonprofits, Signal is not trying to blur boundaries. The organization is **building rights-protecting, people-protecting technology**. They rely on the regulatory differences that distinguish nonprofits from commercial corporations and on the "halo" of trust that all nonprofits hope for but few can really demonstrate. "Signal vs. the Tech Industry" will be a key story about both technology and civil society in the 2020s.

Mutual aid beyond crisis

The pandemic sparked the creation of countless mutual aid groups, the nonhierarchical form of community care that precedes (and probably exceeds) formal philanthropy. For a time, it seemed that people interested in mutual aid who were employed in the hierarchical world of foundations and nonprofits were going to maintain a lasting interest in it. As the first wave of the pandemic gave way to the second and third, many mutual aid groups folded, and others took on 501(c)(3) status in the pursuit of external funding and, perhaps, some form of external legitimacy. There is a (square peg, circular hole) problem in fitting mutual aid into the restrictions of nonprofits.

My guess is that mutual aid groups that preexisted the pandemic are doing fine, and many more new groups will be created in the coming years. Those **born from crisis** and not from existing community roots may have a tougher time keeping going. We have no longitudinal, cross-national data source, although the **Mutual Aid Wiki** counts more than 5,780 such groups. We are in the middle of a real-world experiment on this. As climate disasters accelerate and the impact of the new administration's policies takes effect, we will also see waves of mutual aid, crowdfunding, and peer-to-peer giving. Few if any of these efforts are yet tracked independently and over time. We need a research structure, or maybe we just need researchers who want to track these forms of giving, either by

themselves or in relationship to "nonprofit charitable giving." (Ah, if only I were still advising dissertations.)

We are in the middle of a real-world experiment with mutual aid groups—as climate disasters accelerate and the impact of the new administration's policies takes effect, we will also see waves of mutual aid, crowdfunding, and peer-to-peer giving.

Data philanthropy

Consumer Reports, the U.S.-based consumer rights organization, is building from its experiments in data philanthropy (see *Blueprint 2022*). They started by asking people to donate pictures of their cable bills, which resulted in an overflowing email inbox filled with shaky cell phone photos. Then they helped volunteers try to implement their rights under the California Community Protection Act. This proved so onerous that it spurred Consumer Reports to build the app Permission Slip, which helps people manage their privacy settings across the commercial internet. They are working on an online platform that will facilitate additional community projects in data philanthropy. Mozilla also funded several data donation efforts via its Data Futures Lab and celebrated those projects at MozFest in 2023. I'm not aware of a central database of projects like these—perhaps you are? (One more useful area of research for anyone looking.)

Another aspect of data philanthropy that we saw in a rush in 2016 was the creation of backup archives, mirror datasets, and other redundant digital assets offshore from the United States government. The "archivists" who copied U.S. environmental data from the Environmental Protection Agency to Canadian servers back in 2016 will be busy again. U.S. nonprofits and foundations whose missions run counter to that of the new administration can't start soon enough to recruit crews of data protectors and find ways to offshore and save their records (while making sure they're not putting people in harm's way).

Philanthropy beyond metrics

In the *2023 Blueprint*, my Stanford colleague Aaron Horvath provided an essay about the negative consequences of impact measurement. He has continued to build out these ideas, moving from observations on metrics to broader theories of collectivity that might inspire philanthropic reform. The latest version of his thinking is available here. Horvath and colleagues from Stanford are working to understand and define what post-neoliberal forms of philanthropy could look like. As Horvath notes,

> *Our work on this topic is rooted in the insight that, over the past several decades—amid welfare retrenchment and growing economic inequality—wealthy individuals and philanthropic organizations began to play an ever-larger role in shaping the public sphere.*

During that time, we have witnessed growing interest in using for-profit means to achieve nonprofit ends. A new generation of funders and philanthropic professionals have valorized the problem-solving power of markets and entrepreneurial genius, dismissed democratic institutions as hagridden with inefficiencies, and insisted that civic organizations be evaluated in terms of their measurable impacts and social returns on investment. The more civil society came to reflect these ideas, the more its critical functions fell into disrepair. Loneliness, polarization, and diminished opportunities for public participation have been the unfortunate results. Through a critical examination of philanthropy's recent past, we seek to understand how philanthropy might be reoriented in service of building civic infrastructure, invigorating citizen engagement, and fostering the conditions necessary for a thriving, egalitarian democracy.

Work is underway to develop new intellectual frameworks—and eventually new practical and regulatory models—for philanthropy in our lived political context.

Horvath and scholars from the University of Virginia have also done work on the possibilities of a "new communitarian" theory and practice of philanthropy. This scholarship, as well as emerging work on private wealth for the public good, will help us develop new intellectual frameworks—and eventually new practical and regulatory models—for philanthropy in our lived political context as compared with a philosopher's "ideal world."

Philanthropy reform

Calls for philanthropy reform come and go in the U.S. To take one example, for almost a decade, there has been a concerted and organized effort to change regulations on donor advised funds (DAFs). DAFs facilitate both anonymity and obfuscation, and calls for their reform come largely from the political center and left. At the same time, the political right in the U.S. has been using court cases to boost protections of anonymity for donors and seems to have no beef with DAFs. That anonymity, coupled with unenforced boundaries between political and charitable organizations, further enables the billions in "dark money" that flows through charitable nonprofits into political groups. Rather than focus on DAFs, the GOP/Trump agenda calls for **"clawing back" endowment dollars** and redirecting them to a new American Academy, a university that would eschew what the right sees as systemic liberal bias in higher education. That plan may be stoppable, but we can expect incremental steps toward it (at a minimum).

Other possibilities and proposals for philanthropy reform in the United States reveal the farce of "rational" policymaking. Instead, we find ourselves in a highly polarized time with vastly different proposals for what "better" philanthropy would look like. On the left are groups like

We find ourselves in a highly polarized time with vastly different proposals for what "better" philanthropy would look like.

the **Excessive Wealth Disorder Initiative**, the Donor Revolt for Charity Reform, and the Crisis Charitable Commitment. On the right are the **Philanthropy Roundtable** and groups using lawsuits to further blur (or erase) the lines between charity and politics. Just two examples of this are a suit filed by **religious broadcasters** and one filed by **Students and Academics for Free Expression, Speech, and Political Action in Campus Education**. In addition, the Republican Party's nominee for vice president, JD Vance, has a track record calling for **higher taxes on endowments** (or at least on those with whom he doesn't agree).

There's also a strategy underway to change the narrative around philanthropy (see "Buzzword Watch"). The strategy focuses on identifying and naming diverse giving traditions that range from the Native American potlatch to long-standing practices of mutual aid. The aim is to incorporate these traditions in any discussion of philanthropy. What there is not, and what would be useful, is a place where these different perspectives can be proposed, considered, and discussed together. New York University's National Center on Philanthropy and the Law is one of the few regular hosts of research-based conversations on philanthropic regulation. The chances for meaningful reform would vastly improve if greater opportunities were provided for community-generated ideas, elite proposals, and academic research to bring into focus issues such as online giving, digital rights and privacy, and digitally enhanced forms of association.

The challenges of what I've called a "syndemic" (**page 8**) and others call the "polycrisis" are also sparking efforts to change philanthropy. The European regional office of the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC-Europe region) has been planning a "polycrisis think-do tank," advised by South Africa's Impact Trust. In 2025, the IFRC-Europe will roll out ideas for working in new ways with several European national partners. One goal is to make better use of the ground-level knowledge that national RCs have developed over decades of working in communities, along with developing new ways of thinking about the present and the future,[15] to prepare for, prevent, and respond to disasters. Part of the challenge, as always, is managing the jargon that accompanies new ways of working, such as "future studies" and "signal spotting." The IFRC is also thinking hard about philanthropy's "response-ability," the capacity to be responsive to communities, disasters, and needs.

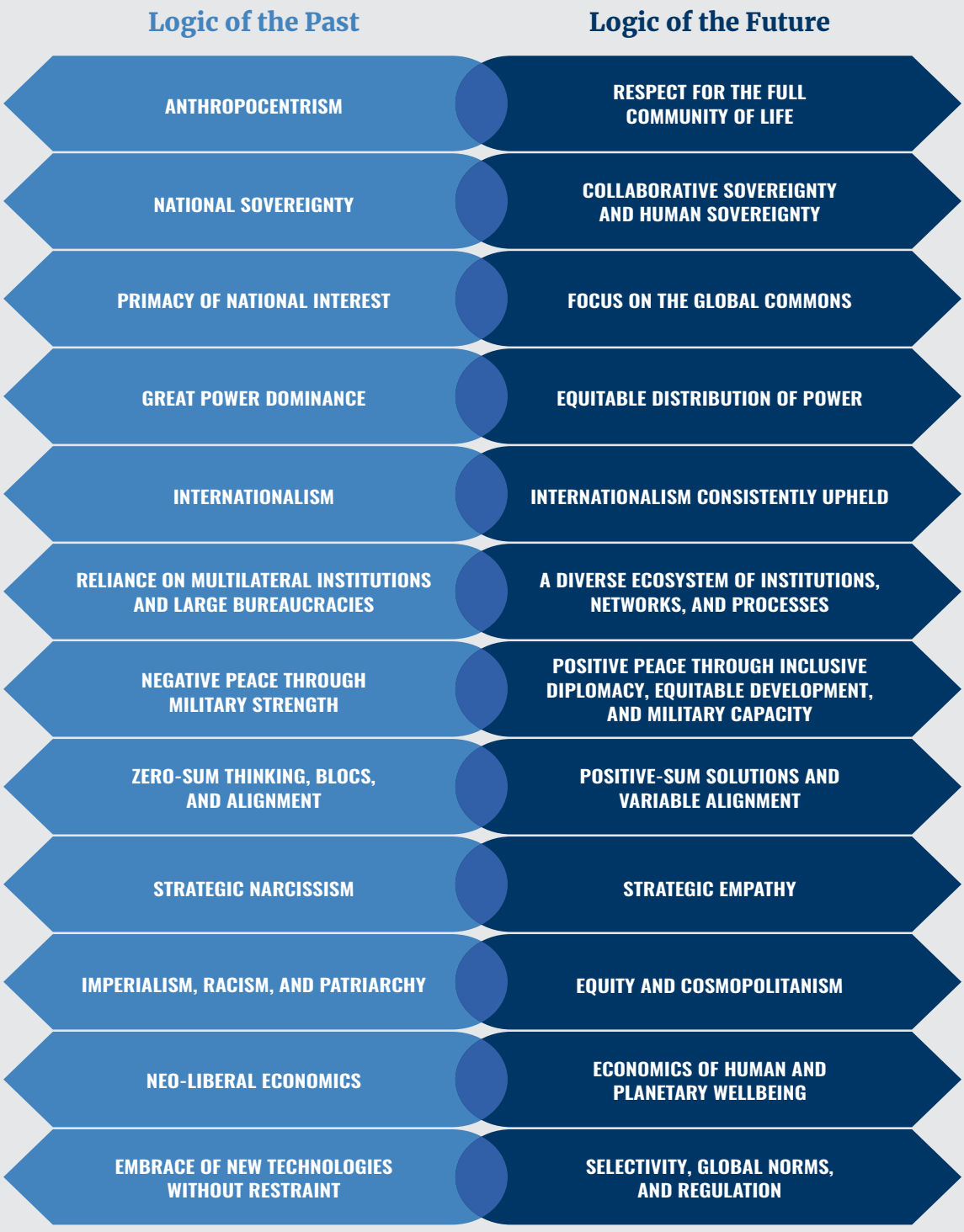
The challenges of what I've called a "syndemic" and what others call the "polycrisis" are also sparking efforts to change philanthropy.

The IFRC-Europe example of improving philanthropy is worth watching because it's coming *from* the nonprofit, with an intention to bring their donors along on new strategy. Red Cross agencies have unique funding relationships with national governments, and their federation model raises its own challenges, so what they accomplish may be tough to replicate.

Finally, I want to call attention to the "logic inventory" that Stephen Heintz includes in his report about the future of international relations (see endnote 15 and page 36). This simple chart provides a lot of food for thought. The process of developing a chart like this—identifying where old logics are no longer working and trying to identify the necessary new logics—is worth doing in the other domains where civil society and philanthropy are active.

A Logic for the Future

12 CORE ELEMENTS OF THE LOGIC OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



From Stephen Heintz, ***A Logic for the Future***, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, 2024.

U.S. nonprofits and democracy

In a compelling back-and-forth, Robert Kuttner and Jeffrey Berry captured philanthropy wonks' attention in late summer 2024 as they discussed the fragility of the U.S. nonprofit sector in the face of a then-potential Republican presidential victory. The problem, Kuttner asserted, is that an aggressive conservative administration would use its powers to limit the political left's ability to develop nonprofits. As the Republican campaign and the Heritage Foundation's Project 2025 call for the active removal of civil servants, Kuttner sees a direct line to a "weaponized" (see "Buzzword Watch") IRS, clamping down unilaterally on progressive nonprofits. Berry responds to this fear with historical evidence of failed efforts to do so by previous administrations. One can easily argue, Kuttner says, that the current state of "institutionalized polarization—wherein the left doesn't trust the Supreme Court and the right is calling for a sweeping removal of civil service professionals"—makes historical examples of limited use.

It's not the details of the two articles that I find important; rather, it's the effort to have a public conversation about the structure of civil society. Bigger than DAF reform and smaller than Horvath's nascent "neo-communitarian philanthropy," the discourse is an opportunity to bring practical thinking about civil society into conversation with political theory. Today's foundations and nonprofits are not those of 1969, the last time the country passed major reform for tax-exempt and tax-deductible organizations. Since then, the corporate code has expanded to include B Corporations, impact investing has grown significantly, and the internet—and online associational life, assembly, and giving—went mainstream. Giving is being redefined to be more inclusive, though I've not (yet) heard anyone seriously calling for expanding the tax benefits of charitable donations to other forms of giving.

This is the part of the new administration's plans that most directly affects nonprofits and foundations, and it's been public for months. I have heard crickets from those who purport to represent the sector in Washington in terms of offering a compelling alternative vision. The status quo is unlikely to hold. None of this instills confidence in organized opposition to the administration's plans.

It's time for a public conversation about the structure of civil society, one that brings practical thinking about civil society into a discussion of political theory.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

The future of civil society in the United States is uncertain and not guaranteed. We elected a self-declared authoritarian, backed by militant and religious extremists who are uninterested in maintaining the rule of law or democratic norms. This is happening around the globe; the U.S. is late to the game.

Our task as members of civil society now is to push for more civic space, not just hold the lines. Our job is to put forward options for participation and multiple ways of "doing democracy" and to fight off the distorting and absorbing tentacles of the current administration.

Our task as members of civil society now is to push for more civic space, not just to hold the line. Our job is to put forward options for participation and multiple ways of "doing democracy" and to fight off the distorting and absorbing tentacles of the current administration. This is a harder task than the one we used to have, but perhaps a more galvanizing one. Whether we can make it happen before being displaced by climate disaster or disabled by a pandemic is anyone's guess.

Don't keep doing what you have been doing, in the ways you've been doing it. Even if your whole life has been fighting for justice, freedom, and democracy, your work is now different. The challenges are bigger, your opponents are more powerful, the structure and memberships of global alliances are different.

For these reasons and others, I won't keep writing the *Blueprint* as I have. Something new or different, probably by someone(s) else, is needed.

I originally launched the *Blueprint* as a synthesis of my blog posts and because I saw several critical gaps in the information about and available to philanthropists and nonprofits. Some of those gaps have been filled, and new needs have emerged. I am calling on you to think about what, if any, purpose the *Blueprint* serves; what other forms it might take; and who, besides me, might be willing to "do" the *Blueprint*, whatever that might be.

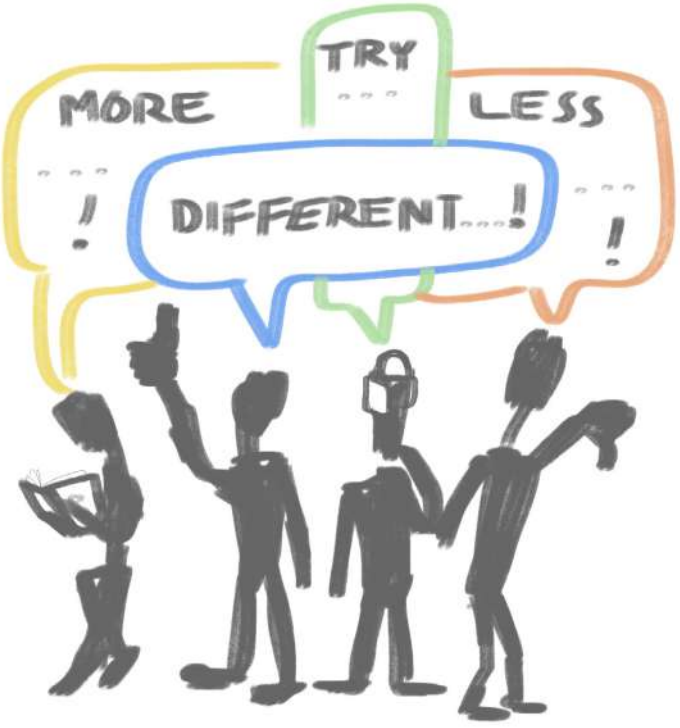
Toward that end, I've created a short survey that you can use to tell me what you want going forward. Anyone is welcome to respond to the questions; they are open to all.

I've added a short survey that you can use to tell me what you want going forward. Thanks for a great 16 years!

The answers will also be open and available publicly. I'll use your input to inform the future of the *Blueprint*, and I reserve the right to use or ignore any ideas submitted.

I will also pass good ideas on to people and groups who are trying to make academic research accessible and useful to the public. They will find your input valuable as well. You, too, can use the information offered by the *Blueprint*'s collective community if it's useful to you.[16]

Again, here's the **link** to tell me what you think, and here's the **link** to see what others are saying. If anything useful arises from this experiment, I'll be sure to write about it, from wherever I am. Thanks for a great 16 years!



BUZZWORD WATCH 2025

You know the drill. For 16 years, I've been collecting buzzwords from philanthropy conferences, nonprofit newsletters, fundraising pitches, annual reports, and conversations with people from all parts of (English-speaking) civil society. Every year I list 10 of them that I think are funny and sort of useful, as well as some that are silly and used without real thought. You decide which are which. If you want a list of all the "Buzzwords" going back to 2010, you can ask the NotebookLM I trained on the *Blueprints*.

Accelerationism/accelerationist. Originally, **accelerationist** was used to describe people promoting the most rapid and expansive research and development into AI—some of whom use the term *effective accelerationism* or *e/acc*. Their arguments include the idea that those who create the biggest, fastest, most powerful AI systems will rule the world, regardless of (or precisely *because of*) the risks of doing so. White supremacists and others are inspired by a different type of accelerationism, one in which they foment divisiveness and polarization to hasten the collapse of existing systems and bring on civil war. People promoting both versions of accelerationism organize online, in associations, and using nonprofits. Some of them also work at the White House.

Addictive intelligence. It's important to realize that any chatbot you interact with is working for its maker, not for you. **Addictive intelligence** is one way chatbots do their job. They are easily designed to incorporate "dark patterns" (manipulative choices) that can get us hooked, just as YouTube's "play next" feature does. As more and more people turn to AI-powered chatbots for conversation, comfort, and human relationships, we need to be on the lookout for those artificial intelligence systems that deliberately choose addicting patterns to keep us hooked. If you think social media is addictive, just wait. You ain't seen nothing yet.

Autonomous fundraisers. You knew this was coming. Autonomous fundraisers are AI avatars (chatbots) that can respond quickly, endlessly, and, I assume, politely to donors, in such a way that the donor feels cared for. At least until they don't. I think this is an awful idea, but I'm sure nonprofits everywhere are going to want to try it. The big "What if?" is whether making their fundraising more efficient will also make it more obnoxious and transactional. These are going to backfire spectacularly, so make sure your organization prepares for that.

> ***Third-party AI fundraisers:*** Though not a buzzword, **third-party AI fundraisers**, such as AskGive from the Better Business Bureau (see page 31) and Your Guide to Good from Giving Compass, are related to but different from autonomous fundraisers. These sites query an existing database of organizations to suggest donation opportunities. There will be a rush among nonprofits to be "visible" on these sites, causing additional work in the short term. Ultimately, I think these sites will lead to fewer organizations getting gifts, because the recommendations will become recursive and exclusionary.

It's also going to skew the way nonprofits structure their websites and do their annual reporting, as these provide the raw data that the AIs will consume. Just as search engines led everyone to focus on search engine optimization, we should be prepared for AI optimization—in which nonprofits spend a lot of staff time updating their websites to be found and recommended by third-party AIs. Where the promised efficiency lies in this is beyond me.

Black box billionaires. This alliterative term **black box billionaires** was coined by *Inside Philanthropy* in reporting on ultra-high-net-worth (UHNW or "really rich") donors' use of donor advised funds. For these customers, the alluring features of DAFs are their focus on anonymity and their lack of disclosure. The reporters note the extremely high percentage (80 to 99 percent) of giving by these individuals that goes into DAFs. They also note that many of these donors are extremely involved in political giving as well, leading me to assume that the anonymity and control enabled by DAFs are their most attractive features for these users.[17]

Dandelion. This is the new "it" metaphor among philanthropists and nonprofits. **Dandelion** refers to a strategy for replication of a program or idea—the desire to make it spread like dandelion fluff in the wind. In the age of "No Mow May" and a growing interest in protecting natural, native habitats, the metaphor is a hopeful one. Given the continuing prevalence of manicured lawns, however, those using the metaphor need to depend on more than just "narrative change" or "idea socialization" to reproduce their programs.

Deep doubt. *Ars Technica* uses this term, **deep doubt**, to describe the era in which we live.[18] As AI fakes take over text, audio, and video, it's no longer possible to trust … well … anything on the internet. Expanding off the term *deep fake*, the term encompasses more than one-off examples and extends to our approach to all digital media. As far back as 2019, legal scholars were warning of "liar's dividend." *Deep doubt* captures both the use of faked images and the "excuse" of faked images to explain away reality. Electoral politics thrives and dies on this kind of information. Civil society, which plays a bigger role in disinformation than anyone wants to admit, is both subject and object of this phenomenon.

Digital twin. We spend so much time on the internet, and corporations spend so much time gathering minute data points on us, that it's possible to think of ourselves as having **digital twins**. There is our physical self and our digital twin—the one created by analyzing all those data crumbs and filtering the data through the lens of whatever the corporation is trying to sell us. AI companies promise investors that they can build digital twins of us all and use those twins to do great things (cure disease) and boring things (go to meetings on our behalf). From the perspective of civil society and individuals, we need to consider both our digital twins and our physical selves when it comes to safety, freedom, and mobility.

Slop. **Slop** is a new term to describe the AI-generated junk that now fills the web the way spam has long filled our email inboxes. While spam is incoming and can be stopped at the metaphorical "door" to your inbox, you surf the slop on the web at your own peril. The more slop on the web, the harder it becomes to find the kind of accurate, evidence-based information that good actors in civil society are trying to share. For every organization it becomes a question of how to be seen and heard amid the slop.

Socialize. Where once we focused on making cogent arguments supported by fact to persuade others, we hear now of people **socializing** an idea—meaning they try to build support for an idea with solid information and through the social process of introducing the information slowly, in digestible pieces and bringing others along over time. People one level below the final decision makers often speak of socializing the idea, the proposal, the strategy among their bosses. It is fully adopted, nearly meaningless corporate-speak.

Weaponize. In our Alice-through-the-looking-glass politics, to **weaponize** something is to turn something legitimate and independent into a tool for inflicting political damage, all while claiming it's your political opponents who are doing so. We have had at least one congressional subcommittee focused on the "weaponization" of government power. Leonard Leo, the far-right political activist wielding a billion-dollar-plus bank account, called on the grantees he funds to "weaponize" their work prior to the 2024 U.S. presidential election. In the dark money sandbox of politics and charity that Leo inhabits, the toys are nonprofit organizations and their reputations. Mark my words, this behavior and language will cross over into charitable giving.

RESOURCES

I'll spare you my usual academic recommendations this time around. One way I've had to adapt to my disability is by listening to books rather than reading them (listening requires less brain energy than reading). Since I can't figure out how to cite audiobooks, most of my "reading" has been for pleasure, which for me means fiction. Here are titles that touch on philanthropy, civil society, democracy, and technology "advances" from the 67 books I listened to in 2024. Unlike the whole corpus, this subset is *almost* all written by white writers. Not sure what, if anything, to make of that.

Fiction

Big Time, by Ben H. Winters. A world in which science enables people to take time from one person's life and give it to another.

Deaths at Davos, by Thierry Malleret. Fictionalized version of the annual World Economic Forum event in Switzerland.

Entitlement, by Rumaan Alam. Lightly fictionalized UHNW (ultra-high-net-worth) spend-down philanthropy.

The Fraud, by Zadie Smith. Historical fiction about a lower-class impostor seeking his "rightful" fortune.

Great Circle, by Maggie Shipstead. A female aircraft pilot in the early 20th century and the peril of patronage.

How Can I Help You, by Laura Sims. A novel whose heroine is a librarian. See also ***The Librarianist***, by Patrick deWitt.

Hum, by Helen Phillips. A family navigates living with robots (hums) amid the privatization of nature.

Playground, by Richard Powers. AI, climate disaster, and business masked as giving. Trifecta.

Prophet Song, by Paul Lynch. Life in an autocracizing former democracy.

Trust, by Hernan Diaz. Wealth, power, women, and truth. The making, spending, and losing of a family fortune in 1920s USA.

Music

My favorite song about giving and community: Allison Russell, "**The Returner**."

Newsletters

My inbox, like yours, is full of newsletters. I'm listing a few that I reliably open and read (and that I don't think I've recommended in previous *Blueprints*).

Cranky Old Man Yells at Internet, Dan Tynan

Computer Says Maybe and its **New Protagonist Network**: media training for civil society techies so we can be part of key digital policy discussions. Be sure to check out the podcast, too.

Just Women's Sports

Noema, published by the Berggruen Institute

Solidarity Research Center

Votebeat

NOTES

1. Draftsmen don't really exist anymore in the age of computer-aided design (CAD). This was just coming into practice at the time I'm referring to, and there were still people (the ones I knew were all men) who hand-drew every draft of every floor plan. They've gone the way of typing pools.
2. This is a meme. It's the way RaeShanda Lias opens her reels and TikToks. Her comedy contributes to my waning equilibrium, so credit where credit is due. It's tough out there, people. This is the last funny thing in this report.
3. Al-Aly, Z., Davis, H., McCorkell, L., et al. Long COVID science, research and policy. *Nature Medicine* 30, 2148–2164 (2024). https://doi.org/10.1038/s41591-024-03173-6
4. Trista Harris, *We Are FutureGood*, August 2024 newsletter.
5. The other feature of the system that will slow-roll the new administration's plans are the weird bedfellows within it. The president-elect's chief of staff used to lobby for nonprofits, while his vice president misuses nonprofits and wants to claw back endowments. Go ahead, tell me which way that will go.
6. https://www.reuters.com/graphics/USA-ELECTION/RESULTS/zjpqnemxwvx/president/
7. Alexander Hamilton, the Federalist Papers, *Federalist No. 22*, 1787. https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-04-02-0179
8. Jill Lepore, "The Artificial State," *The New Yorker*, November 4, 2024, pp. 69-72. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2024/11/11/the-artificial-state
9. Later in this document I include a chart from Stephen Heintz and Rockefeller Brothers Fund that guides a process for assumption checking in international relations. The steps are useful in many other domains. See page 36.
10. See the Global Media & Internet Concentration Project for regional and country studies. https://gmicp.org/
11. GivingTuesday, "AI Readiness Report," accessed August 28, 2024. https://ai.givingtuesday.org/ai-readiness-report-2024/#what-people-are-saying-about-ai-in-the-nonprofit-sector
12. Gerry Salole, conversation with the author and PowerPoint, "Myriad," September 23, 2024.
13. Due to changes at Stanford, the AI Civil Society Database is still available but is not being updated.
14. Michael T. Nietzel, "Elite Colleges See Mixed Results in Racial Makeup of Entering Classes," *Forbes*, September 4, 2024. https://www.forbes.com/sites/michaeltnietzel/2024/09/04/mixed-results-on-racial-makeup-of-entering-classes-at-elite-colleges/
15. One useful resource shared with me as I was learning about the IFRC effort is this document from Stephen Heintz of Rockefeller Brothers Fund: Stephen Heintz, *A Logic for the Future: International Relations in the Age of Turbulence* (New York: Rockefeller Brothers Fund, 2024). https://www.rbf.org/logic-for-future
16. Do not put your name on your submission. If the submissions are useful and plentiful, they'll be available to anyone. If there's something you want to tell me directly, email me at *Bernholz at Stanford dot edu*.
17. Michael Kavate, "Meet the Black Box Billionaires: Are These America's Most Secretive Megadonors?" *Inside Philanthropy*, July 10, 2024. https://www.insidephilanthropy.com/home/2024-7-10-meet-the-black-box-billionaires-are-these-americas-most-secretive-mega-donors
18. Benj Edwards, "Due to AI fakes, the 'deep doubt' era is here," *Ars Technica*, September 18, 2024. https://arstechnica.com/information-technology/2024/09/due-to-ai-fakes-the-deep-doubt-era-is-here/