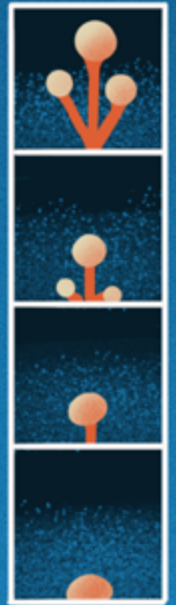
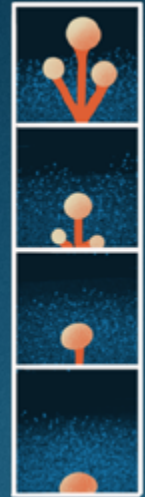


THE
ENGINE
ROOM

Organizational Strategy

2024 – 2025





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Our mission

The Engine Room fights for equitable and sustainable societies by reimagining and redirecting the use of technology and data so that it is community-centered, social justice-oriented, and transformative in healthy ways.

Context

Today, data thirsty big-tech infrastructure impacts the territories of communities across the world, amplifying the impacts of extractivism by increasing water scarcity and provoking displacement of peoples. Labour structures built to fuel these infrastructures also greatly affect communities that have been actively marginalized by oppressive systems.

Social justice activists, particularly climate and land defenders, face digital security attacks and the spread of misinformation through social media. Information ecosystems across the world have gone through radical changes, involving an exponential increase in the invasive ways that data is being collected about each of us at an individual level. The focus on rapid growth is dangerous to a finite planet and has eroded democratic systems. These days, big-tech data-driven technologies are also at the

forefront of the public's attention, with an emphatic focus being placed on AI.

While these technologies have great potential to support civil society in creating strong, stable, and resilient democracies, a critical assessment is necessary to assure healthy and strategic use of them. This requires increased research, capacity-building, and cross-collaboration among a diverse set of local, regional and global stakeholders.

Over the past 12 years, The Engine Room has explored how emerging technologies carry these oppressive systems forward, proposed approaches to mitigating harm by centering social justice, and supported partners in making safe, responsible, and strategic use of technology and data, while simultaneously mitigating the vulnerabilities created by digital systems.

Our role

We at The Engine Room want to live in a world where everyone thrives, and where technology serves to advance social justice in equitable and sustainable ecosystems and societies. Through our work we have seen how using technology in strategic ways can increase impact, but also bring new risks.

This is a pivotal time of climate emergency and regressive and authoritarian social and governmental systems. **The Engine Room is in a critical position to identify how we can reimagine digital systems, redirect emerging technologies, and sustain hope so that these systems and the people who use them meaningfully contribute to transformation towards trust, dignity and joy.** Doing so in collaboration and partnership with Global Majority communities creates opportunities to reimagine how digital technologies can contribute to a healthy future for us all.

For us, this means uplifting digital technologies and data approaches that contribute to the world we want to live in, as:

- **Community centered:** defined, held and sustained by communities who can change them as well as phase them out.
- **Social justice oriented:** intentionally weaving anti-oppression strategies into all stages of their creation, maintenance and deployment.
- **Transformative:** working to transform lives and ecosystems by supporting justice, collective care, and interconnectedness between all living beings.

We are uniquely positioned, through our longstanding and trusting relationships with partners across Africa and Latin America as well as others outside of the centers of power, to provide support and conduct non-extractive, community-centered research. Through this approach we are able to gather the insight and knowledge that helps funders and humanitarian organizations better understand and resource those they serve.



2024 Organizational targets

- 01. Resilient and healthy infrastructures:** We will have the infrastructure and knowledge that give our team the confidence and autonomy to act propositionally, advance our mission, and be healthy.
- 02. Civil society target – Propositional voice:** We will be propositional, passionate, and critical in our thinking, writing and speaking about what is relevant and important at the intersection of tech and social justice, in ways that are based on our own research, our work with local communities, and conversations with our peers/partners. As a result, partner organizations are better equipped and more protected, and have increased agency to make better decisions about tech and data for social justice aims and advocate for them.
- 03. Civil society target – Cohesiveness:** We will have supported more partners, and our support will be better tailored to their needs. We will use our resources effectively and cohesively to help civil society organizations thrive, be resilient, and be adaptive in the use of digital technology and online systems as they fight for social justice in challenging contexts.
- 04. Opportunity development:** We will have an annual budget that allows us to add toward a reserve, grow our impact, increase support to staff, create joy in the workplace, and pay the bills.

Focus areas

Elevating equitable and sustainable technologies

Through our research and support, we see how technologies can strengthen old systems of oppression. While we will continue to acknowledge and explore how technology impacts people, we will be more focused on uplifting transformative digital technologies that contribute to the world we want to live in. Moving from the “tech for good” to the **“tech for joy”** perspective, we will examine, analyze, and elevate approaches that foster justice, equity, accessibility for diverse bodies, and wellbeing for defenders and advocates.

Centering ecological and social justice approaches

The urgency of the climate crisis is clear! If we want to move from extractive infrastructures to sustainable and equitable ones, we must continue naming how these oppressive systems work, and [looking critically at emerging technologies’ contribution to them](#). We must ask ourselves and support our partners in asking themselves: Do we really need this technology for this purpose? Who is benefiting from it? There are many community-based initiatives, including indigenous-led ones, that propose different digital systems and take more nature-resilient approaches. Some of these are composed of low-tech, [lo-tek](#), decentralized and open-source digital infrastructures. Others take into account solar-powered technologies and “carbon-aware” web design techniques. Local, and generally Global Majority, approaches can provide sustainable alternatives that are community-based and maintained, rather than technologies built with a one-size-fits-all approach.



Building digital resilience

We will build on our experience in navigating digital ecosystem change, to further identify the conditions (both organizational and digital systems related) that help social justice organizations to be more technologically and operationally resilient. We will continue to examine and consider how emerging technologies can help or hinder these efforts. This includes identifying what community efforts can look like in increasing resilience. This will expand our own research and knowledge-sharing around open source technologies, including alternative hardware and software that is more environmentally just, and more creative and impactful capacity building.

Movement building

To achieve the futures we want, we must act in coordination across digital rights and social justice communities. Over the years, we have contributed to sustaining and growing communities that take more responsible, critical and ethical perspectives to technology and data, and we are already well-positioned to organize cross-movement perspectives that help dismantle barriers to action, perspective, and learning. We have accumulated experience and knowledge that we can deepen and expand. In future, this might include:

- Facilitating collective learning by practice, or helping diverse voices to act together.
- Engaging technology and design experts to create by adapting open source technologies.
- Partnering with researchers and storytelling creatives to shift narratives around emerging technologies.
- Collaborating with advocacy, policy, and community leaders to turn research into action-oriented resources.



Our work

We support partners in two primary regions (with lighter support elsewhere in the world)

In both Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean it is important to us that we help create strong communities of partners, provide targeted and differentiated resources, undertake non-extractive and locally useful research, and assure that our work and spaces are accessible and approachable through a commitment to language justice. We will also work to create spaces for knowledge-sharing within communities, and across regions.

Africa

We are working on building and supporting a strong community of partners and funders who have improved their responsible data and tech practices and cleared pathways to implement data and tech in their work, and who communicate relevant subject matter with their peers. We start by acknowledging and understanding the differentiated and unique needs of communities in specific sub-regions: West, East, and Southern Africa. We will propose approaches to address these needs through a combination of targeted community research, accessible technical documentation, synthesizing and adapting our research to increase engagement, providing critical recommendations around infrastructure and practical decisions, and making our content available in other languages, such as French, Portuguese and Swahili.



Latin America and the Caribbean

Our partners' experiences have been critical to informing our research on subjects such as the intersections of digital rights and social justice, or environmental justice and technology and data. However, in the past four years, Latin American partners haven't been represented as much in our support work, and we want to change that. We'll do so by further exploring language justice, diversifying the languages we provide support in and creating social justice oriented resources for responsible data and organizational security, specifically oriented for the technological and socio-political contexts of partners in the region. We are also taking forward a flagship project to address regional needs for healthier information systems and uplift creative and constructive approaches to community-oriented digital technologies, in an integrated approach that combines participatory research, engagement, knowledge documentation and support.

As we strengthen our regional approaches for Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean, we will explore opportunities for deeper engagement with partners across other regions, based on needs expressed or identified through support or research.



We connect what we learn and listen to locally with what happens globally

Digital resilience approach

Our digital resilience approach integrates digital security, tech intuition, and responsible data and technology use to create a holistic organizational architecture aimed at advancing social justice. Targeting both local and international entities, including civil society organizations, activists, and marginalized groups such as LGBTQ+ and environmental activists, our approach prioritizes creating safe and inclusive digital spaces. We want to ensure that our digital resilience work contributes to the creation of a world where civil society not only thrives in hostile, challenging contexts but is also able to actively engage to reach their desired impact. By harnessing technology for social justice we seek to: 1) foster meaningful connectivity, engagement, memory preservation, and data organization, 2) advance the knowledge of technological concepts in accessible and inclusive ways, and 3) amplify uses of digital technologies and data that are community-centered, social justice-oriented, and transformative in healthy ways.

Research approach

We are taking an intersectional lens to adopting different research methodologies, including action and participatory research. Our research approach centers the communities we work with, and examines how data and emerging technologies impact their lives and efforts towards social justice. We will create a bridge between local and global entities by examining the connections, patterns and trends that are happening across communities. We will engage and collaborate with practitioners, including researchers, activists and storytellers. By leveraging collaboration and knowledge-sharing, we will be able to uplift strategies of resilience and transformative digital technologies. Critical to our approach is ensuring that our research is not extractive, but equitable – from design to implementation – and that it also serves to expand communities' own knowledge. Our aim is to empower civil society organizations, activists, marginalized groups and funders in making better decisions about tech and data for social justice, by sharing the research in accessible language and through different modes of storytelling.

We commit to healthy, resilient, equitable, and joyous practices within our organization

We are building on the work of 2022-2023, where we introduced a number of new structures, policies, and support systems that helped us “level up” as an organization and provide more to our team. This included a values-aligned budgeting system, a new compensation framework, a new project management system and toolbox, a people-centered approach to performance and growth, as well as organizational targets and milestones. This, combined with our existing digital resilience expertise and guidelines, gave us a stronger framework to support our own team.

This year, the focus will be on refining processes and tools, deepening our understanding of how it all works, and increasing our team’s ease and comfort with our infrastructure and organizational practices. We will use an equity mindset to reexamine the support we provide, in particular to team members from the Global Majority. This means bringing the whole complement of our internal support together and assuring that it is integrated and cohesive. This year we added resilient IT and communications to the infrastructure and support team, where we are thinking about: **How do we organize our tools and documentation? What does enabling infrastructure and practice look like for our organization? And how do we support the team by building capability in all of us?** We have a commitment to our internal work that aligns to our work in the world: equity, transparency, and centering the lived experiences and voices of all of our team members – all of which is critical to our collective health, joy, and success.

Our core values

To achieve our mission we are:

- **Rooted within the problems that we're trying to address:** we don't parachute in to do research, we have staff who are from many of the contexts we're working within, and we conduct participatory research together with the communities we're supporting.
- **Critical optimists:** we believe tech and data can increase impact and strengthen work, but we also see the potential problems that could arise and work to develop proactive ways of mitigating these challenges.
- **Trusted within many communities:** our team engages with a range of communities, not just the ones within which we play a key role.
- **Committed to equity and wellbeing:** we prioritize staff well-being, acknowledging that wellbeing needs evolve because needs and our team are not static.
- **Attentive to systemic injustices that shape the world around us:** we start our work by thinking about how power is operating on a macro and micro level.
- **Collaborative and open:** we share what we're doing – the good and the challenging – openly and often, we work to advance the work of our allies, and we see our work as a contribution to the bigger movements we're rooted within.

THE ENGINE ROOM

