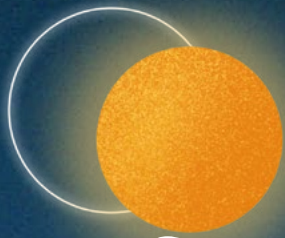


# THE ENGINE ROOM


## Organizational Strategy

2026-2028



# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Vision and who we are</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Targets for 2026</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Commitments and approaches to our work</b>	<b>6</b>
Organization-wide approach	6
Structure and implementation	8
<b>Context specific approaches</b>	<b>9</b>
Our approach to tech	10
Our approach to research	11
Our approach to internal infrastructure and culture	12



**At The Engine Room we are building resilience for a justice-oriented-centered-forward world with care, energy, healthy transformation and communities at the center.**

*We engage with practitioners, communities, humanitarian organizations, and philanthropic institutions to undertake and advance **community-centered research, responsible data governance, security and decision-making, and reimagining healthy digital ecosystems.***

The Engine Room (TER) has arrived at 15 years as an organization that operates and partners in solidarity and with care around many facets of tech. It's clear that we have transitioned greatly as an organization while still being grounded in the roots of our work, thinking, and leadership.

It is important that we continue to think about and take care in how we connect with partners as a US-based global non-profit; but we are no longer led predominantly by Global Minority leaders or grounded primarily in lived experiences from the Global Minority. We more closely mirror and connect with our partners in the Global Majority. Our voices and what we have to say are different.



## Vision and who we are

What we are doing and how we see ourselves has evolved since the last time we reflected on our body of work and our approach to partnerships during the pandemic. Our 2026-28 strategy builds on who we are but casts forward with what we have learned and where we want to put our energies next. Some questions we considered in creating this new strategy included:

- What do our core tenets of resilience and responsibility look like across all of our work?
- How can we frame and communicate this to partners and peers?
- What new work, upgrading, and reframing is needed to strengthen our connections?
- What connects who we were before, who we are now and who we want to be?

### Resilience and care as fundamental to creating possibilities

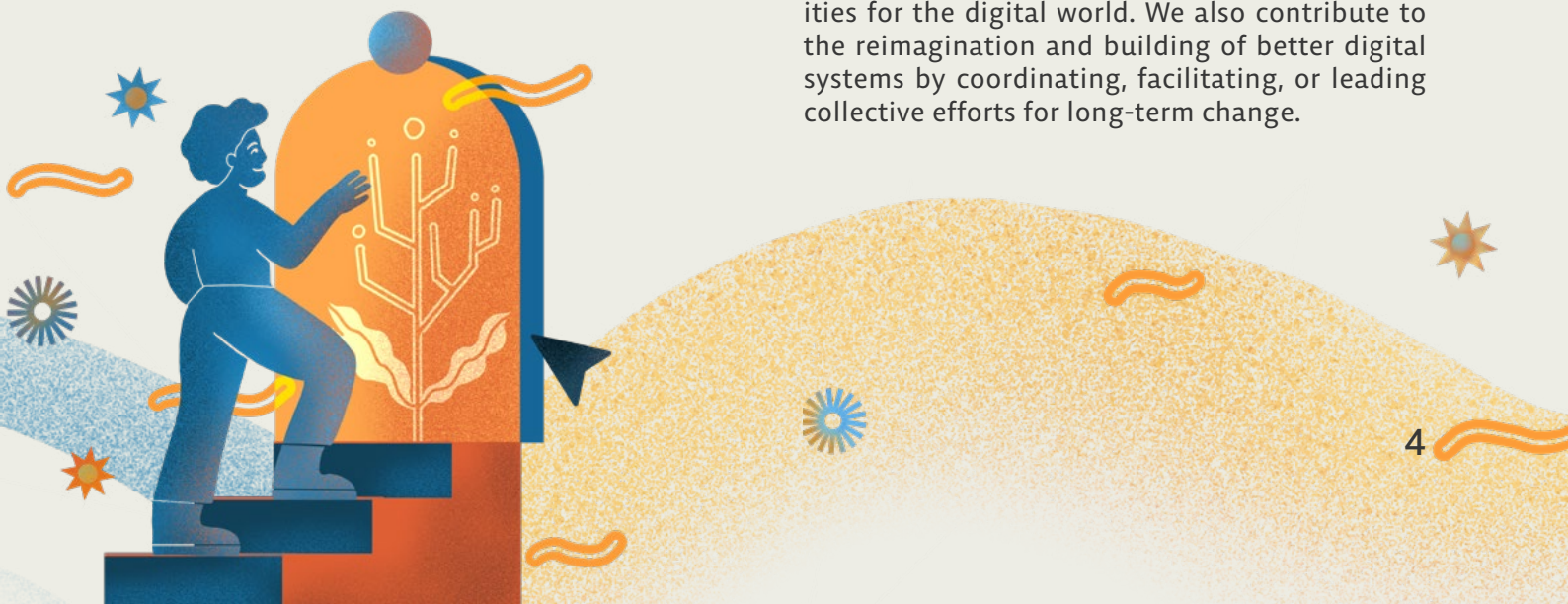
Resilience continues to be at our core. Resilience of tech and of communities - and how they shape tech and use tech - matters to us. Our approach is responsive to changing threats and builds strategies to advance social justice. This is a critical step for mitigating harms, re-imagination and creating possibilities - including our own. This includes seeing knowledge and knowledge creation as part of resilience.

Our thinking around the concept of responsibility has evolved. Responsibility carries different meanings, depending on who holds it. Responsible data (and now AI) is an entry point to conversations, but we have to be careful about whether responsibility is something that is being assigned to others or assumed with agency. We are pivoting from responsibility to collective care.

### The arc of engagement, partnership and support

The work that we do with organizations takes place on an arc. Partners and collaborators can plug in depending on where their “now” is, but we know that where an organization is at any given moment in time can change as they or their context changes. Their place on the arc may be intense fundamental security needs or they might be leaning into more sustainable and healthy tech or creating new futures. Journeys aren’t always linear and don’t have to be approached from start to finish. It’s important that we connect with partners over time at multiple places on the arc.

As a Global Majority-centered organization, we imagine, define and technically contribute to digital futures that are meaningful to us in dialogue with local communities. When we work with organizations that are under-resourced or under threat, we assess how we can help them right now and, at the same time, how we can help clear the table for thinking about possibilities for the digital world. We also contribute to the reimagination and building of better digital systems by coordinating, facilitating, or leading collective efforts for long-term change.



# Targets for 2026

It's important to us to be able to say clearly and transparently what we have achieved and what makes us wildly proud. Our targets are intended to look forward in time over the next two years - but with clarity about what we need to achieve in the first year (which will in turn help us know where we need to be in the final year of this strategy).

In our work, we now have external and internal targets (as well as learning questions) for all of our projects. Organizational level targets enable us and our partners to state the larger changes that roll up from individual project impacts. The space and resources we hold put us in a privileged position. With that comes the responsibility to ensure that our efforts are relevant, important and have a positive impact. The pandemic put us in a small space. Authoritarianism, surveillance, and corrupt power structures want us to be small. It is a political act to be expansive. Our targets are expansive and bold - and we will need to stretch to meet them. We embrace that.

## TARGET 1 - PARTNER SUPPORT:



**We will have achieved the external goals we collaboratively set with our partners in at least 10 intensive and 20 lighter project partnerships.**

This is key to having a resilient presence where all of our partners achieve their own goals with our support by the end of 2027.

## TARGET 2 - ADVANCE TECH IN CIVIL SOCIETY:



**We have a new body of work that reflects our strategy and approaches, is meaningful to us in size and scope, and has demonstrated channels with measurable use.** By the end of 2027 we will have a body of useful and affirmative work in the form of community-centered and accessible research, tools, and guides that is used to create measurable meaningfulness and influence the digital rights movement.

## TARGET 3 - FINANCIAL RESILIENCE:



**We will raise an additional \$653k to cover our FY2026 operating budget and have raised \$667k (in addition to current commitments) so that we have \$1.45M in committed funds for FY2027.**

## TARGET 4 - LEARNING AND GROWTH:



**We will have achieved 90% of the internal targets we set for our projects.**

This learning and our work going forward will be supported with the tools, infrastructure, decision-making practices and capacity-building that allows our team to grow and flourish.

# Commitments and approaches to our work

Since our founding, we have collaborated with over 900 groups of human rights defenders, climate advocates and social justice organizers across the Majority World who are using data and technology to advance change. TER engages in equitable collaboration with our community partners and places their knowledge, experiences, goals and contexts at the center.

Our approach is designed to:

- Uplift and prioritize the self-defined needs and expertise of the communities and organizations with whom we work
- Actively examine and counter harmful practices and embedded power imbalances to build equitable partnerships
- Use technologies, support, engagement and research methods that are resilient, embrace diverse ways of knowing and ensure the well-being of our partners and their communities

The way we go about our work has been clarified and codified in our current commitments and approaches. These run through the entire organization and are no longer siloed by workstreams. The glue of the commitments and approaches helps us all see ourselves as belonging to, and responsible for, the whole of what we do.

## Organization-wide approach

Our values are not abstract; they are concrete commitments we make with each other, our partners and the spaces we share with others. We actively practice them daily through intentional behaviors that shape how we show up for one another. We are mindful of these values in how we communicate with each other and how we speak with the world.

### Our organizational values and commitments

#### Centering community:

We center the knowledge, leadership and priorities of our partners, and use non-extractive practices that allow us to integrate and learn from multiple ways of knowing and making sense of the world.

#### Building energy and propositionality:

We center joy, curiosity and agency when designing engagements and developing partnerships. We amplify knowledge and perspectives that seed change and sustain communities and the planet.

#### Care:

We safeguard people and data with care and responsibility, using and promoting responsible data practices that respect data sovereignty of our partners. Our relationships with our partners are rooted in trust, mutual care, wellbeing, and learning.

#### Resilience, health and transformation:

We use tools and methods that are adaptive, flexible and responsive to different contexts, strengths and constraints. We share our process and outputs in accessible ways that people can use and engage with over time.

## Our organizational practices

### Centering community

- **Focusing on community needs, questions, curiosities and impact:** Every project begins with the questions expressed by our community partners through previous collaborations and our capacity-building programs. We engage in active listening and co-design projects that amplify and support what communities care most about and are already working towards. For each project we co-design and commit to shared targets and learning.
- **Nurturing equitable partnerships:** We explore different forms of partnerships and build in shared ownership from the start. This means co-defining goals, roles and timelines in a way that feels meaningful and fair to all involved. Our collaborations extend beyond to form partnerships and ensure our support remains relevant and useful.
- **Seeking and cultivating local alternatives:** We build and contribute to sustainability through existing tech and data alternatives that expand the possibilities for local contexts. We sustain, propose improvements, maintain and expand community infrastructure (platforms or tools) and we actively support and uplift local leadership.

### Building energy and propositionality

- **Uplifting stories of agency and possibility:** We openly share our partnership journeys to highlight our collaborative and co-creation approach to direct support. We highlight stories of agency, possibility and resistance in our work that illustrate how different communities use technology to advance justice and support the well-being of their communities and the planet.
- **Building connections between communities:** We multiply by nurturing communities of practice around digital resilience.
- **Making tech accessible through play, joy and experimentation:** We create spaces where people can engage with tech through curiosity rather than fear or guilt. We give our team and our partners engaging spaces to learn from one another and explore tools and ideas together. We use play and interactivity to make concepts tangible and memorable, such as CATio, which offers our partners a light en-

vironment to learn about Cybersecurity. Play is a catalyst; it's how we build energy, confidence and momentum to actually do things.

### Care

- **Contextually and culturally relevant tools:** We prioritize accessibility, language justice and resilient technologies. We adapt our tools and communication methods to fit the needs, priorities, capacities and comfort of each community partner. We build in opportunities for pushback, pause or refusal.
- **Implementing non-extractive knowledge sharing methods:** Our methods aim to reduce harm, ensure mutual benefits and credit different ways of knowing. We do not gate-keep knowledge, and we compensate people fairly for their time and expertise.
- **Ensuring safe and meaningful access:** We share our process and outputs openly, in formats and languages that allow for meaningful access and engagement with our work and support to partners. When needed, we use low-tech and resilient tools that support participation in low-bandwidth or high-risk environments.
- **Developing responsible data protocols:** Together with partners, we design consent-based, context-sensitive protocols for data collection, storage and use. We aim to minimize the collection of unnecessary data and we use secure, community-approved storage solutions whenever possible.

### Resilience, health and transformation

- **Commitment to rewiring structures for health and resilience:** We are consciously looking at, unlearning and undoing the structures and norms of power-centered hierarchies and uplifting Global Majority tech, knowledge, and leadership.
- **Sharing knowledge for justice and transformation:** Our work emphasizes that knowledge is not a neutral resource but a living practice that can shift power relations, nurture solidarity, and inspire social justice. We design projects to contribute to structural change, sometimes by translating findings into direct support and capacity-building, and vice-versa; others by generating evidence or designing community engagements that support visions of liberation co-imagined with our partners.



## Structure and implementation

Each of our partnerships moves through a series of semi-predictable stages and steps in our partnerships and projects. These help us stay true to our practices and our commitments.

### Stage 1: Developing and proposing community-centered partnerships

- Step 1: Scoping and vetting for alignment
- Step 2: Develop the proposal and partnership: fit, timing, interest
- Step 3: Thoughtful transition to the project team



### Stage 2: Collaborative mapping and design

- Step 4: Compact and structure for how we will work together
- Step 5: Committing to targets and learning
- Step 6: Detailed project mapping and support

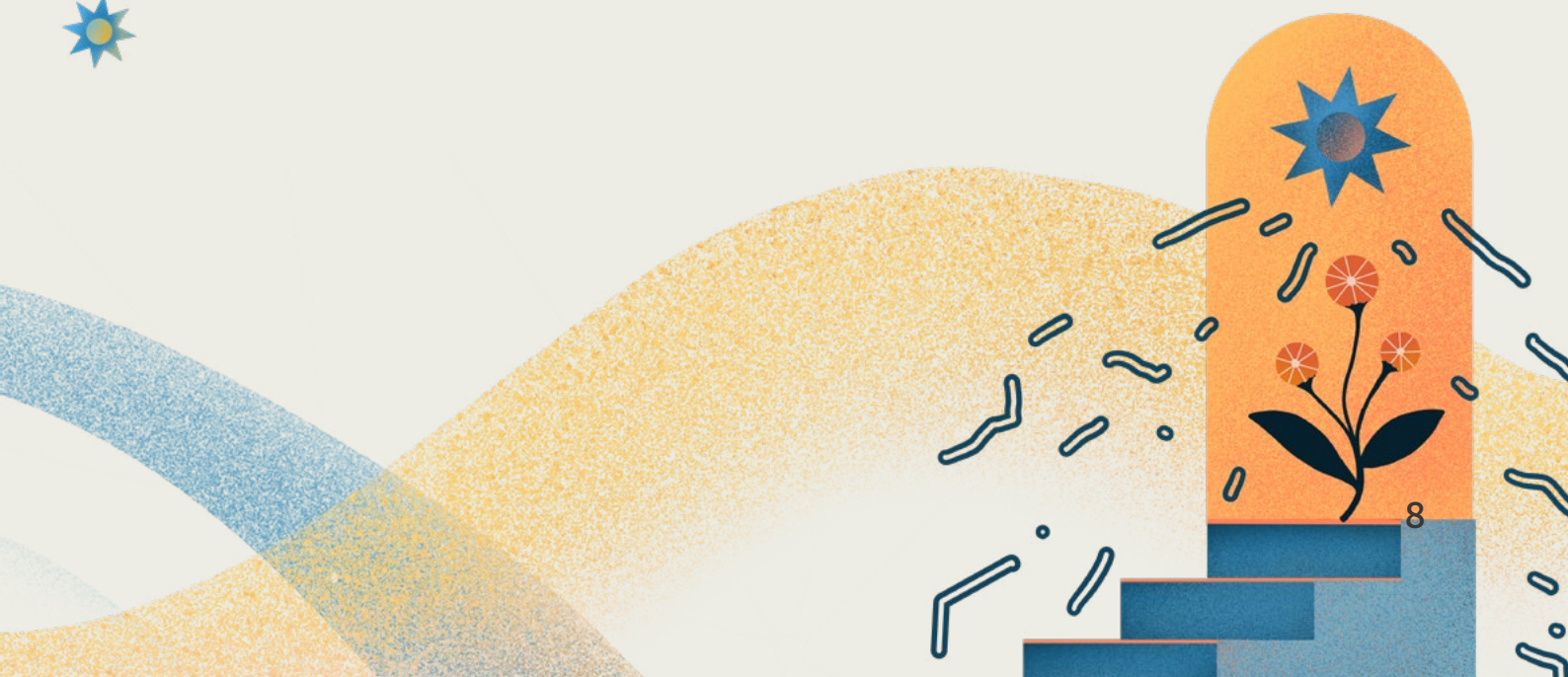
### Stage 3: Project implementation

- Step 7: Establish and onboard internal and partner teams
- Step 8: Implement the project



### Stage 4: Assessment of impact, learning and future planning

- Step 9: Assess impact
- Step 10: Reflect on learnings and the partnership
- Step 11: Looking ahead
- Step 12: Close the project according to responsible protocols



## Our approach to local engagement and support

We provide sustained, relationship-centered accompaniment to partners in Africa and Latin America. We work alongside partners in their tech and data journeys, strengthening their capacity to make decisions that increase their resilience and serve their communities. We offer proactive support based on trends and research so we can offer timely, relevant support that meets partners where they are heading, not just where they have been.

### Where we align - a few areas with contextual specificity

#### Centering community

- **Focusing on community needs, questions, curiosities and impact:** We offer continuous, evolving support, building lasting relationships with partners throughout their technology journey. We understand that meaningful change takes time and that partners' needs shift as their contexts, capacities, and challenges evolve. Rather than establishing and delivering solutions and then stepping away, we remain present - adapting our support, and deepening our understanding alongside them.
- **Nurturing equitable partnerships:** Our support is grounded in mutual learning, where insights flow in both directions. We offer guidance and recommendations, and partners retain full agency to adapt, contextualize, or decline what is shared. This approach helps rebalance power, respects local expertise and experiences, and ensures that outcomes are shaped by those closest to the work.
- **Seeking and cultivating local alternatives:** We understand our limits and acknowledge when we are unable to directly support a partner and do our best to connect them to peers or other support organizations. We maintain relationships with organizations and individuals in our ecosystem that can provide adjacent support to our partners.

#### Building energy and propositionality

- **Building connections between communities:** We engage cohorts for shared learning and growth. These combine structured learning modules grounded in both theory and practical application with space for group discussion, peer problem-solving, and relationship-building that builds a sense of shared journey. At a bigger picture we work on collective and cross-regional learning and exchange that connects community members from Latin America and Africa.

- **Making tech accessible through play, joy and experimentation:** We strengthen partners' skills and confidence to use technology and data effectively and safely, fostering agency so partners can take meaningful action without reliance on us. Many of our partners want to work with developers, IT experts, or platform providers and don't yet have the confidence to engage as equal collaborators. We build partners' capacity to articulate their needs, ask critical questions, evaluate proposals, and hold technical partners accountable.

#### Care

- **Contextually and culturally relevant tools:** We tailor the depth and pace of support to what partners actually need. Sometimes this means Light Touch Support (LiTS) for rapid, focused engagements; other times it means a Matchbox partnership for deeper, more intensive accompaniment. Partners can transition between support models as their needs evolve.

#### Resilience, health and transformation

- **Sharing knowledge for justice and transformation:** We invest in developing individuals within partner organizations to become champions of responsible data and technology practices. These champions become internal resources for their teams that enable them to train colleagues, advise on tool selection, and adapt practices as contexts shift. Beyond individual capacity, we encourage and support partners to take on leadership roles within the broader community. This approach ensures that knowledge and expertise are rooted in the regions and contexts where they matter most.

## Our approach to tech

We believe that technology and data can support social justice transformation. We define our starting point with the needs and visions of Global-Majority-centered social justice communities.

### Where we align - a few areas with contextual specificity

#### Centering community

- **Focusing on community needs, questions, curiosities and impact:** In our own technology and data choices and the ones we recommend to partners we ask ourselves: Who benefits from this technology? Who is harmed? Who has a voice in its design? Who is excluded? We actively create bridges for social justice communities to influence existing technologies. We amplify Global Majority-led technologies as viable alternatives.
- **Nurturing equitable partnerships:** When it comes to data, we begin by asking ourselves who are the least powerful actors in any situation, how are they affected and reflected by the data, and what do they make of the situation? How powerful are the people making decisions about data in relation to those whose data is being collected and used? We acknowledge these dynamics, and propose ways for communities to mitigate, shift or refuse them. We also guide humanitarian organizations, grantmakers and global networks into taking responsibility in their choices to protect communities.
- **Seeking and uplifting local alternatives:** We collaborate with practitioners across regions, then build collective wisdom accessible to the broader ecosystem. We see ourselves not just as leaders, but also as practitioners within communities, contributing to the bigger ecosystem. We multiply our impact, by growing the capacity, confidence and connection of the people doing this work in their own contexts (for their own communities).

#### Building energy and propositionality

- **Building connections between communities:** We build the digital rights movement by nurturing communities of practice around digital resilience, [Organizational Security](#), Responsible Data, providing direct support, and developing and publishing relevant research and toolkits.

#### Care

- **Contextually and culturally relevant tools:** We prioritize tools that are open source, community-maintained, safe by design and usable, but we reject one-size-fits-all thinking. What works for us and our partners depends on security and local context, such as connectivity, language, device access, technical capacity and what is already in use. We propose technology choices that are: adaptable and context-specific, align with available resources, include local knowledge and culture, and are not extractive.
- **Ensuring safe and meaningful access:** We propose and develop technology and data infrastructures and approaches that are built for the long term. If a data structure is lightweight and organized, it's easier to move to another platform; if the technology is offline first, it will be easier to move to another set up that is energy-responsive. We see responsible data approaches as key to supporting possibilities.

#### Resilience, health and transformation

- **Sharing knowledge for justice and transformation:** We are intentional about what we recommend, ensuring that the infrastructure has undergone its own journey, that there is a community to maintain and strengthen it, and that Global Majority communities' needs are at the center. One example is the [Digital resilience Hub](#), which improves internet access and explores alternative tech for knowledge sharing.

## Our approach to research

We focus on intentional, community-centered and ethical research design. By working closely with the team and our partners, and drawing on feminist and liberatory research practices, we see knowledge production as a strategic and generative practice that builds collective power.

### Where we align - a few areas with contextual specificity

#### Centering community

- **Focusing on community needs, questions, curiosities and impact:** We are intentional about engaging with and showcasing diverse ways of knowing in the evidence we collect. This includes uplifting a wide range of voices in data collection, using community-centered approaches to analysis and interpretation, and working closely with the team to share and translate evidence into accessible formats that reach diverse audiences.
- **Nurturing equitable partnerships:** We explore new methods so participants can connect with their embodied, relational and land-based knowledge during their engagements with us, and research can also become a space for connection and restoration.

#### Building energy and propositionality

- **Uplifting stories of agency and possibility:** We see research as a tool for seeding a sense of possibility that fuels collective action and systemic change. Rather than focusing solely on the harms produced by digital technologies, we intentionally [uplift stories of agency, creativity, and resistance already in motion.](#)

#### Care

- **Contextually and culturally relevant tools:** We support the team and our work by developing research methodologies and choosing tools and frameworks that allow our team to generate the most relevant and impactful evidence to advance social justice. This involves choosing methods of data gathering and knowledge sharing that feel safe, are meaningful, and cultivate connection and community.
- **Ensuring safe and meaningful access:** Consent is an ongoing relational process. We are aware we hold responsibility and power in how we collect and share knowledge, so our approach to knowledge production is grounded in care for how the views, knowledge, and identities of research participants

are represented in the evidence we collect and produce. We revisit consent throughout projects, and offer multiple options for attribution, anonymity, and refusal. This ensures that partners retain agency over how their stories and data are documented, shared, and preserved over time, without fear of exploitation, misrepresentation, or harm.

- **Implementing non-extractive knowledge sharing methods:** We build collective care into our research design, recognizing that many partners operate in contexts where violence, surveillance, and censorship are everyday risks. We champion the use of context-appropriate digital tools, and co-create responsible data and consent protocols.
- **Developing responsible data protocols:** This practice is central to how we design our research process and guides what data will be collected, why we're collecting it, what risks are involved and how to mitigate them, how it will be collected, stored, and deleted, etc.

#### Resilience, health and transformation

- **Sharing knowledge for justice and transformation:** We see research as a practice of building collective power. Research does not end when a report is published; the knowledge continues to grow through relationships, gathering, strategizing and collective use. We work across the team to ensure emerging insights feed back into our support programs through accompaniment, capacity building and targeted programs.

## Our approach to internal infrastructure and culture

How we work internally closely mirrors how we work with partners and who we strive to be in the world. We assure and support team member agency and trust everyone's expertise and learning. This shows up in ways that are aligned with but separate from our approaches to our work.

- **Learning is important:** We think of improvement not as a critique of where we've come from, but a commitment to learning and curiosity. We support team members in gaining what they need to work with confidence and autonomy; and we embed curiosity and play with our DDW. Our growth framework challenges punitive performance metrics; replacing traditional evaluation systems with people's agency in their own learning and growth.
- **High level of trust** for each person to show up, be who they are, and execute work using their expertise and the resources we provide to support them where they don't have expertise! People have the space to learn and iterate forward.
- **Project leadership AND project management:** The division between these two allows each role to provide perspective and experience from their vantage point. Our process has a clear division of responsibilities and makes space to consider support needs.

### Where we align - a few areas with contextual specificity

#### Centering community

- **Focusing on community needs, questions, curiosities and impact:** We are committed to a global majority world within and as a team. We are constantly re-examining what support looks like in the team and assessing access needs, energy and wellbeing, engagement and workloads across the team.
- **Nurturing equitable partnerships:** We have a commitment to shared responsibility and collective direction-setting. Hierarchy doesn't get in the way of us working together. We are working on untangling power from leadership and determining who we are and where we are going as an organization. Everyone works together for the greater purpose of TER. We practice leadership as visioning, facilitation and stewardship rather than control.

#### Building energy and propositionality

- **Building connections between communities:** We recognize and respect that energy presents and is built in different ways. Humor is a part of how we build and keep energy - it is kind and contextual and not at the expense of others; it allows us to be honest and fearless - and bring a bit of unfiltered chaos
- **Making tech accessible through play, joy and experimentation:** Our strategy area teams are established to help us protect the spaces where we can lean into the leading edge of our own thinking and that of others by asking the juicy questions that pique our curiosity. Our annual Deep Dive Week gives us even more of an opportunity for this.

#### Care

- **Contextually and culturally relevant tools:** Our culture goes beyond professionalism, access and safety. We actively think about practices of care, of providing comfortable spaces, and celebrating each other in small consistent ways. We have spaces to celebrate the work and each other - and credit/shine the light on contributors and collaborators
- **Implementing non-extractive knowledge sharing methods:** We prioritize aligning to open source values but know that sometimes we have to make different choices.
- **Ensuring safe and meaningful access:** We don't just use tools because they are different or new. Every internal choice (tools, processes, etc.) reinforces our broader organizational community-centered work. We do intentional and responsible adoption of tech. Our tech support is adaptive and robust with adhoc help, documentation, and interactive trainings.
- **Developing responsible data protocols:** We continuously revisit our own responsible handling of our data, usefulness for our team.

#### Resilience, health, and transformation

- **Commitment to rewiring structures for health and resilience:** We treat organizational health as integral, not as a side practice. How we work internally directly shapes and informs the equity and care we bring to partners. We have a definition of health at an individual and organizational level that is specific to how we function as a team.

# THE ENGINE ROOM



TECH.SOLIDARITY.CARE