

# Strategic Plan

2023-2026

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# Our unique role



Human rights violations in digital spaces are on the rise, with inequalities and mechanisms of discrimination exacerbated by the capture and commodification of data for profit, control or political propaganda. New technologies such as facial recognition for border surveillance and automated decision-making in the workplace can reinforce colonial dynamics of exploitation, extraction, and displacement. This interaction between new technologies and existing dynamics of power and oppression has led to a broad spectrum of human rights violations. **The Digital Freedom Fund (DFF)** was established in 2017 to support the digital rights community in Europe through the use of strategic litigation. We aim to advance and protect human rights in digital spaces, reduce the negative impact of technology in the world, and create **systemic change** through **conscientious grantmaking, curated skill- and knowledge-building events and a growing network of partners and allies.**

In the past, policy makers were ill-equipped to address the emerging phenomenon of digital rights, but European regulators are finally starting to recognise that digitalisation needs to feature prominently in their political agenda. However, it remains to be seen whether recent and forthcoming regulations will be sufficient – and sufficiently enforced – to properly uphold digital rights. The general public tends to overlook the threats posed by business models such as surveillance-based advertising and the expanding use of artificial intelligence systems. Nevertheless, a growing number of individuals, communities and organisations are becoming aware of these challenges and taking action to defend digital rights. The DFF stands by, supports and promotes these efforts to advance and protect digital rights.

Our work is informed by our values and theory of change, which have been thoroughly revised for our new **Strategic Plan 2023-2026**. Underpinning our work is the belief that we are stronger when we work together and that those facing the most oppression deserve the most of our efforts. Our digital rights are under constant threat, but violations disproportionately affect those who are already marginalised by existing

structures of oppression. At the same time, rapid technological developments and the seemingly infinite power and control of “Big Tech” call for new alliances, fresh thinking, and approaches that target the root causes of discrimination, exploitation and marginalisation.

Our **theory of change** has shifted to encompass a wider scope of organisations working towards a society in which technology and digital spaces are used justly and fairly, so that all communities and individuals can fully enjoy their human rights. To protect digital rights in the current context, civil society needs to use all the tools at its disposal. Our experience working directly with the digital rights community over the last five years has underlined that **strategic litigation** is still an important tool for advancing digital rights. Our work adds real value by ensuring this litigation is supported and effective. At the same time, our programmes, tools, events and communications seek to emphasise that litigation is just one of many tools that can be used to advance digital rights and challenge digital oppression. Over the next four years, our litigation support work will evolve to better match the needs of the different ecosystems we interact with, and our values.

Since 2020, we have co-led and actively participated in an ongoing process towards **decolonising the digital rights** field in Europe. Our strategic plan is anchored in the learning brought about by this decolonising process, as well as by the internal decolonising processes we have put in place, and integrates anti-oppressive approaches in our internal and external processes. Through our commitment to this decolonising process, we recognise the undue nature of our position of power in a world of power imbalances. We acknowledge the violence, exploitation, displacement and erasure on which this position of power is based, and are therefore engaged in the dismantlement of structures of oppression. By structures of oppression, we mean the intentional production of inequality along racial, cis-hetero-patriarchal, classist, ethnic, ableist and border lines that lead to discrimination. We recognise that our mission – to facilitate spaces for the imagination and planning of the things the world

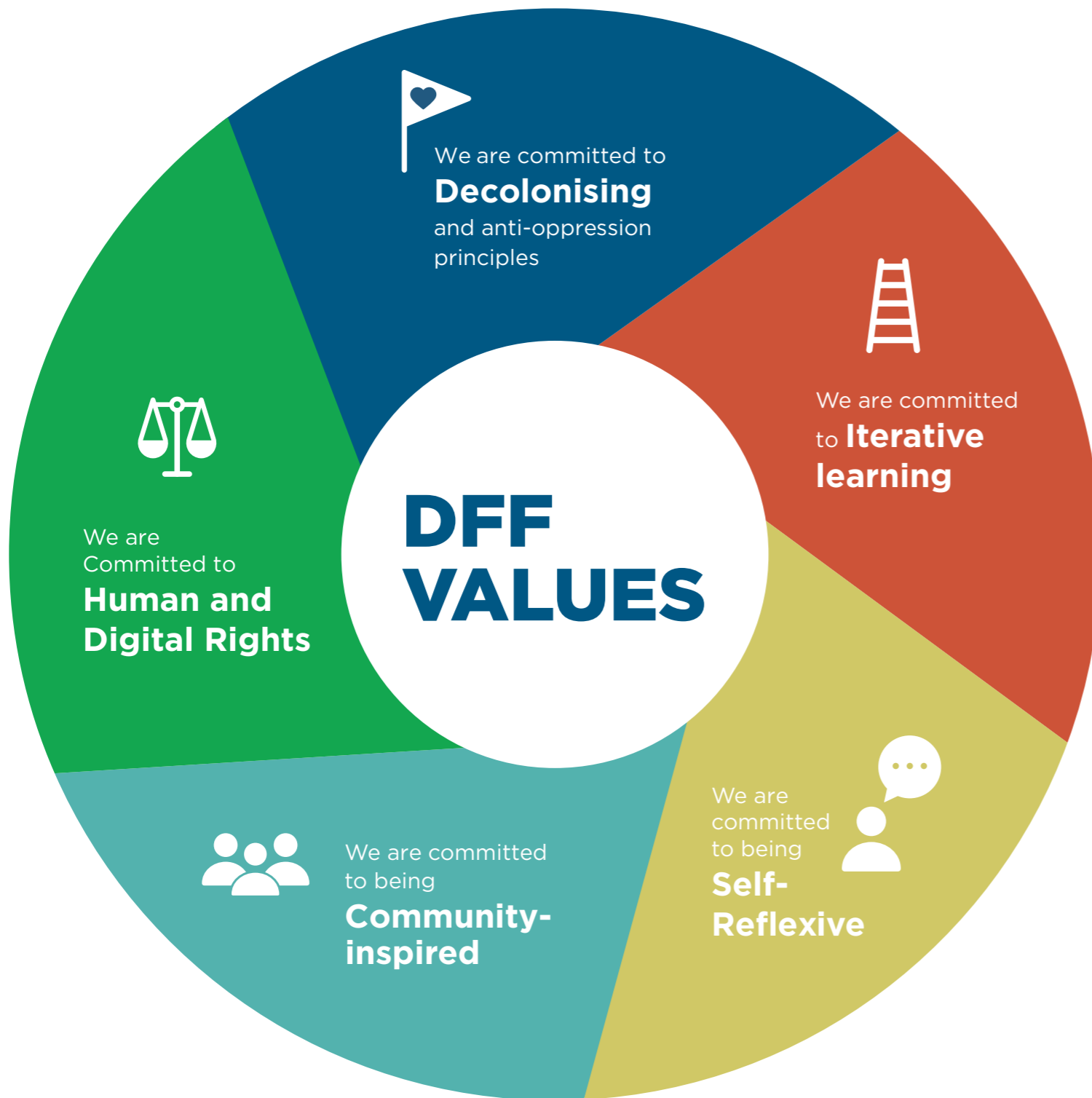
needs to be reborn – will ultimately create the conditions that will lead to our own obsolescence. Finally, we acknowledge being newcomers to this journey; we are at the start of our decolonising process and have a lot to learn.

The concept of “**community**” is mentioned repeatedly in this document. It is an aspirational use. Members of our “community” can encompass any individual or organisation working in some way on digital rights issues in Europe, even if it is not their main line of work. This largely includes civil society organisations and funders, but can extend to governments. We use this framing to better reflect the intentions, motivations and objectives of our work and the values to which we ascribe. We would like to continue engaging with a range of organisations on digital rights, and in doing so to contribute to building a community that we can strengthen and support through our programmes. The term “community” is not used to silo or segregate work on digital rights from other forms of activism, resistance, or human rights work; instead, it is meant as a loose term to define the intended beneficiaries of and participants in our programmes. Our **Digital Rights for All** programme, for instance, has been steadily reaching out to racial, social, economic, gender, LGBTQI+, disability, migrant and environmental justice organisations doing digital rights work to better integrate their priorities into digital rights debates, and to help build their skills on digital rights-related issues.

“We aim to advance and protect human rights in digital spaces, reduce the negative impact of technology in the world, and create systemic change”.

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We seek to catalyse a process of structural change to decolonise the digital rights community, and to the establishment of an anti-oppressive work culture within our organization and beyond



We seek to revise and fine-tune our activities as they are undertaken, learning from and keeping an open line of communication with the digital rights community as a core part of our work



We acknowledge that as a participant in existing societal structures, we may inadvertently contribute to harm. We continuously question our role and orient it towards reducing these harms and contribute to the advancement of the communities we aim to serve



We set our priorities based on the needs and inputs of the communities and organisations resisting digital rights harm. We also identify gaps in skills, knowledge, and strategy, and invite the digital rights community to focus on these gaps



We observe, promote and respect human and digital rights in everything that we do. We prioritise those facing the most oppression

# Theory of Change

The community develops stronger, more strategic, better informed, adequately resourced, and efficient digital rights litigation plans, representing a wider range of issues, and are better able to articulate, coordinate and implement these plans

The community becomes more resilient and stronger, aworking on digital rights issues, such as racial, social, economic, gender, LGBTQI+, disability, migrant, and environmental justice organisations

New coalitions are fostered based on anticolonial principles of equity, dignity and redistributed power dynamics

We provide funding centred on the needs of the grantee, for collective strategic actions

We support a community working on digital rights issues to develop impactful litigation plans which promote and/or defend digital rights on a range of issues and is resourced to implement them

We convene a community working on digital rights issues to discuss challenges, opportunities and potential partnerships to strategically address these issues

We support the community to share learnings, build skills, knowledge and capacity, and collectively work towards acknowledging and addressing injustice

## COMMUNITY STRENGTHENING AND SUPPORT OUTCOMES

## LITIGATION OUTCOMES

## IMPACT AREAS

## VISION

A society in which technology and digital spaces are used justly and fairly so that all communities and individuals can fully enjoy their human rights.

Legislation, regulation, policies and practices which protect human rights in digital spaces and all that regards the use of technology is established, improved and/or enforced.

There are positive changes which yield benefits across society, but especially for the groups, communities and individuals most impacted by technological harm and digital rights violations.

Court cases led by the community obtain judgments which advance and promote digital rights.

The community develops practical and experience-based learnings and evidence to advance litigation strategies for digital rights, that apply anticolonial principles.

## OUTPUTS

Human rights violations in digital spaces are increasing. The capture and commodification of data for profit, control or political propaganda exacerbates inequalities and deepens discrimination mechanisms. The use of new technologies in this context reinforces colonial dynamics of exploitation, extraction and displacement. Emerging law and policy do not sufficiently protect communities and individuals from human rights infringements in the digital context. There are inadequate legal protections to prevent (and seek accountability for) these violations. The organisations working on digital rights issues have insufficient resources and capacity and they are not collaborating with each other effectively. There is a lack of production and sharing of expertise, knowledge and partnerships which hampers the impact of strategic litigation.

## PROBLEM



# Programmatic work



Based on our experience over the last five years, combined with external evaluations and feedback, we are confident that our programmes on **Litigation Support** and **Community Strengthening and Support** are still relevant and in great demand. However, we also recognise the need to evolve these programmes to make them fit even better the current context and reach a wider range of organisations and individuals. Therefore, over the next four years, we will deepen these programmes of work and facilitate their evolution and development in new directions:

1. Our **Litigation Support** programme provides financial support to digital rights litigators through our grantmaking initiatives and increases the likelihood of cases having a positive impact on the people affected by digital rights violations in Europe. Additionally, through the application process and support for grantees, we provide advice on strategic litigation planning, expert feedback, and contact suggestions to connect people and foster collaboration among the community.
2. Our **Community Strengthening and Support** programme helps to set up events and convenings and develop resources to support organisations and individuals in pursuing litigation on digital rights issues. We aim to expand the programme to encompass a wider range of projects, each with their own visions and objectives, as well as shared common goals and transversal values in line with decolonial and anti-oppression principles. The five projects encapsulated by this programme are described in detail [below](#).

Combined, the work in these two programmes will help the digital rights community to engage in more robust and strategic digital rights litigation, and to create a stronger, more resilient and expanded community that incorporates a wider range of organisations and individuals.

## Litigation Support

We began our grantmaking programme with a simple objective: to support the community to obtain litigation outcomes that advance digital rights. During our first four years of operation, our grantmaking work far exceeded all our goals. We financed over 70 projects on pre-litigation research and litigation. These grants covered issues from gig economy worker protections and promoting free speech online, to challenging bulk surveillance and algorithmic profiling.

Drawing on feedback from the community, we further improved and broadened our grantmaking programme to better support our partners' litigation needs, and since 2021, we have been offering litigation track support. This approach guarantees projects are financially supported throughout, from the first to the final instances, which reduces the administrative burden on applicants since they only have to apply for one, rather than multiple grants, and helps in pursuing strong and strategic litigation. This litigation track support has been well received by the digital rights community; all our calls for applications are regularly oversubscribed.

Although our current grant offering aligns closely with the needs of many in the community, the current grant types do not work for everyone. For example, various organisations and individuals have given feedback that they need litigation financing coupled with other more flexible funding. We also want to increase the geographic and thematic diversity of the cohort of organisations we support, in line with our decolonising principles. Hence, in the next four years, we will actively explore and experiment with new and more flexible forms of funding. For instance, rather than only funding a specific case, we could provide flexible funding for an organisation to work on litigation strategies and cases on a broader digital rights issue for an extended period. The focus would be less on litigation outcomes, and more on organisational learning, piloting and strengthening outcomes. The goal of this funding would be to help particularly under-resourced or marginalised organisations, or organisations new to digital rights litigation, to have the time and resources to move forward with litigation.

We aim to increase our total grantmaking budget, including through new donors, so that we can commit adequate funding to our regular litigation track support and pre-litigation research grants while making room for these much-needed new grant types.

“[Over] the next four years, we will actively explore and experiment with new and more flexible forms of funding”.

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# Grantmaking to match the community's needs



As well as improving our existing grantmaking framework, new types of flexible grants and methods will be needed to further improve and decolonise our grantmaking. Here are some approaches we will be exploring over the next four years:

- 1. Flexible litigation support:** Flexible funding for an organisation to work on litigation strategies and cases on a broader digital rights issue for an extended period. Flexible funding could also take on other forms such as:
  - Pre-litigation planning or small travel grants to strategise and explore litigation plans
  - Community/movement lawyering support in the form of holistic support for individuals or groups to receive legal support to choose their own legal pathways
  - Post-litigation support to help ensure the implementation of a judgment, to help nourish movements after the litigation is over and to help spread the lessons learned with others
- 2. Flow fund for innovative ideas:** Inspired by community participatory grantmaking models such as those used by the [Kindle Project](#) and [Mama Cash](#), a flow fund would focus on encouraging more creative thinking by giving grantees the opportunity to experiment with casework that isn't necessarily destined to have considerable impact, but which addresses an issue in an unconventional manner, without harming the ecosystem. The decisions on these grants will be made in a participatory fashion.
- 3. Litigation hub support:** Supporting coordinated action by a group of organisations doing targeted work on a specific issue. Compared to litigation track support, this type of support would allow for more strategic planning across organisations as well as an effective use of incremental strategic litigation.
- 4. Theme-specific or region-specific grants:** Calls for applications on litigation on a specific theme or issue, like the digital welfare state, competition law or migrant rights. This type of grant should only be established based on a particular demand or need communicated by the digital rights community.

## Making grantmaking more accessible for all actors

Another important aspect of decolonising our grantmaking process is to increase the accessibility of grants to all actors in the community, including smaller organisations that rely on volunteers. We will reconsider the types of strategic litigation activities we support to explore the possibility of supporting a wider range of activities before, after, and around litigation cases. The focus would extend beyond legal action aimed at achieving enforceable decisions, to legal action that creates useful impacts for communities whose digital rights are most affected. Additionally, we will re-evaluate and potentially revise our thematic focus areas ensure sure they align both with the priorities of the wider field, and with our values.

Adaption of the application process itself should be an iterative process, and the changes we make should be informed by the recommendations and demands of the actors we want to support. For a change to be considered, it should help to reduce power inequalities and reduce the burden on applicants and grantees. These changes could include, for example:

1. Shorter application forms
2. Allow audio/video applications
3. Accept applications in different languages
4. Revised grantee reporting timelines and consider other forms of grant reporting (email, audio/video format, phone call)

The digital rights field in Europe, and the funders that support digital rights actors, are not fully representative of all the people we seek to protect from digital rights harms. There is an absence of those who are racialised, gendered, queer and trans, working class, differently abled, and those hailing from the Global South. It is important that the community fighting to advance digital rights, and the funders supporting this community, are firmly situated in broader social justice fights and actively working with other movements.

Furthermore, while our funding support is focused on litigation, decolonising the digital rights field extends well beyond litigation. We will need to carefully consider our role as a funder within this wider context. We lack the power of philanthropic foundations, but at the same time, we have built a solid reputation, have close relationships both with larger funders and litigating organisations, and have wider networks. Beyond our own grantmaking, we also aspire to play a leading role in wider decolonising processes for other funders in the digital rights space. This involves helping other foundations recognise the value of such a process.



# Community Strengthening and Support (CSS)

We have demonstrated our value in helping to build a “community” of organisations and individuals working on digital rights issues. Over the next four years, we intend to continue building this community and extend it to a wider range of organisations. We will continue to facilitate events and convenings and create resources to support this community in pursuing strong and strategic litigation on digital rights issues, with better coordination amongst organisations. At the same time, we aspire to better equip this community with the means to apply anti-colonial principles in their work, such as equity, dignity and redistributed power dynamics. We also aspire to facilitate the creation of anti-oppression coalitions.

Our CSS programme includes five projects, each with their own strategic vision, goals and objectives, as outlined in the sections below. In addition, these projects share overarching objectives for community building, community strengthening and community support, that cut across the entire programme. These shared objectives outline our intention to build and foster a community, strengthen the community’s work, catalyse joint opportunities, help to avoid duplications, assist the community in adapting to a changing digital context, and aid in making their work sustainable:

## Community Building

To bring together organisations and individuals working on digital rights issues and build a community within which collaboration, co-ordination and coalition-building can occur

To promote a multi-disciplinary community of individuals and organisations who can mutually support and reinforce each other’s work on digital rights, including through the participation of litigators, technologists, advocacy specialists, activists and community organisers

## Community Strengthening

To organise and facilitate opportunities for the reciprocal sharing and strengthening of skills and knowledge, including around strategic litigation, legal frameworks, digital technologies, and anti-oppression and anti-colonial practices, to uplift the litigation work of the digital rights community

To maintain environments in which those in the digital rights community feel empowered to articulate and map obstacles, challenges and opportunities in their work, and to co-design responses to them

## Community Support

To organise and facilitate regular events and convenings that respond to the needs of the digital rights community. These activities should be oriented to sustain the work of the community by strengthening case ideas so that they are more likely to be funded under our grantmaking programme, and by centring self- and collective care

To design, develop and promote access to materials, tools and resources that support the digital rights community in taking or supporting strategic litigation cases on digital rights

The specific community strengthening and support projects we are committed to during the 2023-26 period are detailed below. To see the specific CSS objectives of some of these projects, please go to **Annex 1**.

## Annual Strategy Meeting

Through our **Annual Strategy Meeting**, we will continue to bring together organisations and individuals working on digital rights issues to jointly strategise, share information or lessons, and co-ordinate work. Our Annual Strategy Meeting will remain open to all members of the digital rights community to look back on the year that has passed and collaboratively plan and strategise for the months ahead.

As the community of organisations and individuals working on digital rights grows, and as there is greater engagement in strategic litigation on digital rights issues, we expect the Annual Strategy Meeting to similarly grow in scale, but thoughtfully. We intend to maintain the participatory nature of the event, for example by engaging with participants on agenda input and shaping specific goals, and ensuring it remains a safe space for information sharing and joint strategising. Therefore, it may be necessary to adapt the format of the strategy meeting, which has thus far always been a single event, to meet these objectives and retain efficacy.

We will devote greater energy to pre- and post-event engagement to make better use of the opportunities presented by the strategy meeting. We will continue to offer a skills-building component at the meeting, so there is an opportunity for participants to learn something new that can directly benefit their work.

The outputs from the Annual Strategy Meeting are invaluable for setting and revisiting our priorities and plans for the year(s) ahead, both for our litigation support work (such as reflecting on the thematic focus of our grantmaking) and our CSS work (such as ensuring our priorities are informed by those of the community).

## Decolonising Processes for the Digital Rights Field

Phase II of the decolonising process wrapped up at the end of 2022, and Phase III to define a multi-year programme to **decolonise the digital rights field in Europe** is starting in 2023. Therefore, some aspects of the specific roles we will take are still to be determined. Nevertheless,

inspired by early learnings from the process, we are committed to becoming a support hub for decolonising the digital rights field, and we set these preliminary goals for ourselves:

- To build and strengthen coalitions of anti-colonial forces working on digital rights issues
- To facilitate access to and production of anti-colonial visions of digital issues
- To support organisations engaged in decolonising processes within the digital rights field
- To help funders better understand their role and undertake internal decolonising thinking and discussions

To achieve these goals, we will have at least the following streams of activities:

- **Anti-colonial retreats and peer-learning sessions:** We will continue to organise peer-learning sessions, open to all interested organisations, on tackling digital rights issues from an anti-colonial perspective. To allow for greater space for exchanges among peers, some peer-learning sessions will be content-related and some group-specific. The retreats will take place in-person, including at a digital anti-colonial summer school, and will be aimed at strengthening anti-colonial practices to challenge and resist technological harms.
- **Anti-colonial content sharing and production:** We will take a further role in the sharing of knowledge and practices on the abolition of power dynamics rooted in coloniality via the creation of a network of experts, the production of toolkits and other printable documents, and the development of a participatory online platform that allows the sharing and archiving of anti-colonial content.
- **Peer-learning group of funders:** We will continue to play a leading role in the co-organisation of a nascent group of philanthropic foundations, and meet with them regularly to discuss decolonisation theory and practice within their own organisations and how they can best support decolonising processes within the digital rights field.

## Digital Rights Litigation Skills Building

Through our **Digital Rights Litigation Skills Building** project, we will continue to develop resources (materials and tools) and organise convenings, meetings and workshops that can help to improve the strategic litigation skills of the community of organisations and individuals working on digital rights. This includes not only those actively seeking litigation, but also those whose work can inform, support and/or complement digital rights litigation.

Activities within the Digital Rights Litigation Skills Building project will fall within one of two categories:

- **Skills Building:** “Skills building” includes building or strengthening specific litigation skills, such as workshops on legal tactics, building litigation strategies, learning from previous litigation efforts, and strengthening legal practices (e.g. movement lawyering practices). As an effective point of entry into building or improving strategic litigation skills, particularly for those new to the topic, we will continue to organise strategic litigation retreats, which walk participants through the steps of designing and running a strategic litigation case and offer an opportunity to brainstorm and collaborate with others involved in litigation. In the shorter term, we will prioritise building skills around explaining and unpacking new technologies in litigation, working with communities and movements, and engaging with litigation tactics (e.g. collective redress mechanisms).
- **Knowledge Building:** We intend to continue delivering events focused on sharpening and refreshing the knowledge of the digital rights community on legal frameworks and legal processes, with the aim of facilitating more strategic and intersectional decision-making in digital rights litigation. We intend to continue building the community’s knowledge of topics such as competition law. In the shorter term, we will also focus on increasing knowledge of the enforcement opportunities under emerging legislative frameworks, such as the Digital Services Act, the AI Act, and the Digital Markets Act. We will also seek to build knowledge on raising intersectional legal arguments in strategic litigation on digital rights issues.

## Digital Rights for All (DR4A)

Through the **Digital Rights for All (DR4A)** project, we will continue to support racial, social, economic, gender, LGBTQI+, disability, migrant and environmental justice organisations to strengthen their capacity to challenge and resist technological harms on their own terms. To do so effectively, we need to acknowledge and adapt to the organisational constraints of such groups. In alignment with the objectives of our projects on Digital Rights Litigation Skills Building and Decolonising Processes for the Digital Rights Field, DR4A further aims to support movements to challenge technological harms and to strengthen the development of broader and more inclusive coalitions of organisations and individuals working on digital rights issues within Europe.

DR4A will hence be introducing a new set of activities for skill and knowledge building:

- **Brainstorming litigation retreats** on specific topics deemed relevant to strengthening social justice movements, during which organisations will have the space to strategise and coordinate on litigation concerning a digital issue, to reflect on opportunities to join forces and to build coalitions for developing joint litigation plans, for example.
- **A collaboration hub**, with a more flexible framework than fixed date workshops, which will offer slots during which organisations could troubleshoot issues with their strategic litigation work with experts, including legal, communications, and organising experts, who would be on retainer with a monthly regularity.
- **Content production and sharing** via events, toolkits, and so on, to widen the accessibility of racial and social justice, understanding of technological harms and means of resistance in Europe.

## Tech Community Engagement

With digital rights increasingly under threat from sophisticated technologies, from machine learning algorithms to intricate data processing practices, identifying and challenging digital rights violations will require a truly interdisciplinary approach spanning law and technology. Through our project on **Tech Community Engagement**, we seek to take a careful and intentional approach to bridging gaps between litigators and technologists, with a view to building an interdisciplinary community that can work collectively on strategic digital rights litigation. This is not about finding techno-solutions to social problems; instead, it is about understanding technology better and working together towards technology for the good of human beings and the environment.

Initially, we intend to establish this interdisciplinary community and initiate a conversation between technologists and litigators. In addition, we will produce a report on the role of technologists in evidence gathering for cases and how we can improve the sharing of information and evidence. We began a pilot of this work in 2022, which we will continue through 2023, and then evaluate its outcomes before deciding if and how to continue it in the future.



“Over the next four years, we intend to continue building [the] community and extend it to a wider range of organisations... [W]e aspire to better equip this community with the means to apply anti-colonial principles in their work...”

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# Communications

We hired our first full-time Communications Lead in early 2022 to improve our communications and develop a strategic vision and systematic approach. Communication plays a crucial role in our effective engagement with the digital rights community and in conveying the unique value of both our own work programmes and the transformational work of our partners and grantees. This is vital for amplifying our collective impact. Our communications objectives are listed below. For a more detailed list of our strategic approach to communications, please see **Annex 2**.

1. To engage with external audiences, including our litigation partners, by communicating the unique value of our litigation support efforts and CSS initiatives
2. To amplify the work of our partners and grantees
3. To develop in-demand and respected publications based on our strategic positioning in the community that could help to further the digital rights movement
4. To integrate decolonial framing into our internal and external communication styles and materials, and to ensure our social media strategy adheres to decolonising principles
5. To demystify the work of our organisation and grantees to different external audiences
6. To demonstrate how litigation can be useful to any digital rights organisation by showing how litigation has worked successfully in the past, with an emphasis on the role of legal arguments in achieving change
7. To foster alignment with strategic communication partners and events in the digital rights field
8. To show our existing funders the value of our work and diversify our income streams by attracting new funders, and to communicate the positive impact of our work to them
9. To diversify the communications tools, we use to reflect the diverse needs of our audiences, including through community-based communication channels

## Communications Channels

For this Strategic Plan, we re-defined the focus area of our communications and conducted a SWOT analysis. These exercises allowed us to better define our unique place in the digital rights community and realise that, in some respects, our communication style has been passive. While we will continue to base our communications work on the needs of our audience and the communities we serve, we aim to be more proactive in situations where our strategic positioning is well placed to drive conversation, influence ideas and drive thought leadership. Our current external communication channels are:

1. Our [website](#), which includes a blog page
2. Our [Twitter account](#)
3. Our [Mastodon account](#)
4. Our [LinkedIn account](#)
5. Our [Vimeo Page](#)
6. Our [YouTube page](#)
7. A [quarterly newsletter](#)

We intentionally do not have a Facebook page due to Meta's well-documented human rights breaches. In addition, many actors in the digital rights community may view use of the platform negatively, or are not active there. We acknowledge that there are also open ethical and social justice questions about Twitter and YouTube. Therefore, it will be a priority to reflect on the ethics of the online tools we use and to explore alternatives.





# Organisational growth and development

## Operations

Our operations infrastructure needs to be tailored to meet the following criteria: to ensure the sustainability and resilience of the organisation; to guarantee staff wellbeing, mental health and satisfaction; to align with the principles of anti-oppression and diversity; and to enable future diversification and careful growth.

As our organisation continues to evolve from a “start-up” to a more mature organisation, over the next four years, we aim to consolidate our operations. This means, among other things, that we will only grow our team very selectively and thoughtfully, mostly in support functions, to keep pace with a cautious expansion in our activities and to ensure manageable workloads and staff wellbeing. Improving efficiency will also be a key consideration.

In line with decolonising principles, we aim to maintain a relatively flat hierarchy. However, as the organisation evolves, operational complexity will naturally begin to challenge the flat structure. Therefore, over the coming years, we will proactively explore alternative structures and distributed leadership. We will seek specialised support from an HR expert knowledgeable in anti-oppressive practices to guide us in this exploration.

Our governance structure is also evolving. The focus of the Board has already changed from management to oversight and providing strategic direction. We are recruiting new members to integrate a nine-person independent Board, composed of experts in their fields, with complemen-

tary skillsets, knowledge and experiences. The full Board will continue to meet four times per year and operate between those meetings through committees. One key role of the Board is to review and approve the annual budget and organisational strategy.

## Finance

We have ensured financial resilience by focusing on funder diversification, reserve building, budgeting and cost control, liquidity management, and implementing financial policies and guidelines. In addition, we have established goals and regularly report to our Board on financial matters and organisational progress. In the coming years, we will continue to build on this robust financial basis, while refining our financial policies to account for larger and more sophisticated operations, with more than ten full-time staff, and to reflect decolonising principles.

We aim to maintain an approximately 60:40 ratio between programmatic and operating costs in the annual budget. Approximately 75% of our operating costs are staff costs. The other 25% goes mostly towards finance-related expenses, communications, and Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) (please see **Annex 3** for a fuller description of our MEAL work). Our operating conditions changed significantly during the pandemic period, prompting us to review our cost structure; for instance, we will collectively review aspects like the need to keep a physical office, our policies on staff travel and our approach

to IT. Additionally, to ensure equity, we will reflect on our compensation practices to date; for instance, we will develop a public-facing and transparent compensation framework for engaging with external consultants, facilitators, speakers and volunteers.

As our organisation has matured, our financial goals have shifted from strict operating cost control to sustaining operations and building further resilience. In addition, like most human rights organisations, staff are our most important resource and largest cost. Therefore, we also aim to increase our monitoring and transparency of staff costs to clarify where our resources are invested. Our decolonising principles require additional investment in staff capacity building, satisfaction and wellbeing; hence, these will be a key focus area going forward with more funds being committed.

Finally, we will revisit all our financial policies with a decolonising lens. We will begin by transitioning to a collective budgeting process. The aim of collaborative team budgeting is to:

1. Empower staff to be better informed, take ownership and be involved in decision-making on the organisation's annual activity plan
2. Raise awareness on fundraising needs and goals to better plan our work for the coming year
3. Increase and facilitate budget ownership in all areas of activity

These revisions will be made with input from individuals and organisations, such as [The Leap](#), who work on the topic of decolonising internal processes.

## Fundraising

Further diversifying and solidifying our funding base is another clear objective for the coming years. This will ensure both careful growth and financial resilience. Funder priorities can quickly shift; as a result, diversity of donors – both in number and type – is crucial to reduce the impact of funding shocks. In recent years, we have been successful in gradually expanding our number of funders; however, all our current funding is from private foundations. In the next strategic period, we are committed to explore funding not only from new private foundations, but also from other sources such as multilateral institutions (such as the EU) and individuals, all of whom will be judiciously examined in light of our Ethical Funding Policy.

We will also focus on establishing an adequate and systematic fundraising structure that involves all staff, with the aim of maintaining the trust of our existing funders and enticing new donors with our innovative ideas. This process will also empower staff to take full ownership of their programme areas and shape them from start to finish. However, as this process transpires, we must keep in mind that cultivating trust relationships with potential donors will require a significant investment of time from programme managers and other senior programmatic staff.



# Annex 1 – Specific CSS Objectives

The specific objectives of some of our **Community Strengthening and Support** projects are as follows.

## Annual Strategy Meeting

- Take stock of the main developments in the digital rights field over the previous year: general trends in policy, legislation and case law, wins and non-wins. What lessons have we learned and what needs can we identify going forward?
- Share updates on existing collaborations within the community and explore new opportunities for collaboration
- Map out the landscape of the year ahead for organisations working to protect digital rights: what should our strategic priorities be, what opportunities can we identify, and what is the best way for us to work together?
- Consider what the intersection between the digital rights, human rights, racial justice, social justice and economic justice fields means for the way we work, and set our priorities accordingly
- Explore strategies and mechanisms for safeguarding our wellbeing and maintaining our resilience during periods of uncertainty, limited capacity and high pressure

## Digital Rights Litigation Skills Building

- Encourage coalition building, co-ordination and information sharing amongst litigators working on similar digital rights issues
- Promote a multi-disciplinary and multi-issue approach in running litigation projects (e.g. intersectionality & encouraging engagement with different legal frameworks to strengthen a case), with the aim of expanding and diversifying litigators' toolkits and ensuring they are working with broader community members and not in isolation

- Organise and facilitate opportunities for the reciprocal sharing and strengthening of litigation skills and legal knowledge amongst litigators, with the aim of uplifting the litigation work of the digital rights community
- Build and strengthen the knowledge and awareness of strategic litigation amongst non-litigators and other stakeholders within the digital rights community, such as technologists, and building bridges between them and litigators
- Design, develop and promote access to materials, tools and resources that will support litigators in taking strategic litigation on digital rights

## Tech Community Engagement

- Build and sustain a community of technologists, litigators and other activists working on litigation, with the aim of developing a better understanding of the opportunities for collaboration on digital rights litigation
- Bring about more cases that are inspired and fuelled by technologists that would not otherwise be brought about without their insight and knowledge
- Encourage litigators and organisations working on digital rights litigation to integrate technologists into their litigation work and make better decisions on the technical expertise they need to succeed in their litigation
- Provide guidelines and structured advice for litigators and technologists to work together with the goal of advancing digital rights litigation

# Annex 2 – Specific Communications Strategies

We will prioritise the following strategic approaches in our **communications work**:

## 1. Segmenting and developing our audiences

To reach our target audiences, we must ensure the right messages are communicated on the right platforms. To be able to do so, we must first understand the audiences that we serve. We are segmenting our audiences so we can better understand their unique preferences and needs. This in turn will allow us to better understand the needs of the entire community that we are positioned to address. We will then develop a tailored core message for each of the target audiences. These outcomes will shape the key messaging in blogs, op-eds, social media and website content. We have identified the following target groups:

- Digital rights organisations and activists
- Racial, social, economic, gender, LGBTQI+, disability, migrant and environmental justice organisations
- Funders
- Strategic litigation lawyers and firms
- Judges and lawmakers

## 2. Engaging with the digital rights community

To ensure our communications remain tuned to the preferences and needs of the digital rights community, we will conduct periodic evaluations of our brand touch points, including our programmatic initiatives. In addition, our communications should establish thought leadership by engaging our audience with inspirational and/or educational content and infographics. We will also actively seek and align with communication partners in the digital rights community, such as [EDRi](#).

## 3. Demystifying our work

The term “digital rights” can be a vague concept to some external audiences. To properly engage with our target audiences and communicate the value of our work, we need to demystify some of the terms and concepts we use to explain our work. For example, we should be able to explain in simple terms what strategic litigation is, or what our work on decolonising digital rights means to someone who has had little contact with decolonial or anti-oppression frameworks. To effectively engage with existing and new audiences, we will need to move away from the overreliance on written communication and look into new communication tools such as simple explainer videos. We will also consider hosting “ask me anything” sessions.

## 4. Integrating decolonial framing

As a key value of our organisation, it is essential that we integrate decolonial framing into all our communications, both internal and external. Doing so goes beyond creating content on the topic; we will also prioritise working with marginalised members of our community to give them a voice in our illustrations, videos and all communications material. In addition, we wish to ensure all our created materials are accessible to everyone. This is a key tenet of our decolonial and anti-oppression approach.

## 5. Communicating on impact

To contribute to the organisation’s reputation, morale and financial resilience, we must ensure that the impact of our work is communicated effectively to the community, our existing and potential funders, and beyond. We need to tangibly document some of our most successful initiatives, and to communicate our successes by blogging on our website, writing for other relevant websites and publications, speaking at media interviews and events, and creating and participating in infographics, videos and podcasts. We also need to improve the video and overall user experience of our website, so that it is easier for our audiences to find the information they need.

## 6. Building a digital rights resource repository

Many of our projects to date have resulted in the publication of materials on our website, such as the [competition law resources for litigators](#) or the [strategic litigation toolkit](#). We have published these materials and conducted launch events, but the materials are not proactively managed as a collective resource. We believe these resources could be better leveraged to create more value for the community by creating a critical mass of sought-after publications that would serve as a repository for digital rights communications. Therefore, we will build a sustainable repository that can be widely used by media houses, researchers and student bodies, among others.

## Annex 3 – Demonstrating Impact and Sharing Knowledge: Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL)

We work with a theory of change and a Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) approach that recognises that impact and success are not only achieved by winning cases. Impact can be achieved even through cases that are lost, and there are many important outcomes that come about through the work and collaboration that happens during and around the litigation process. Therefore, when considering impact, our focus goes beyond achieving positive litigation outcomes, to also building a strong and diverse community of groups and coalitions working on digital rights with the capacity to undertake litigation in a way that benefits those who are most marginalised in society. With this in mind, we aim to carry out MEAL activities in an iterative and self-reflective way, and to constantly adapt our approach to meet the needs of the digital rights community. Over the coming years, we aim to increasingly uphold an anti-oppression lens in our MEAL approach, and to conduct our activities in such a way that they are not extractive and do not add unnecessary burden to our grantees or the wider community.

Over the next strategy period, we aim to continue to move away from measuring the success of our grantmaking only in terms of the outcomes of the cases we support. The framing should rather be how our grantmaking facilitates organisations to have the capacity, expertise and resources to take litigative action to advance digital rights in a way that best suits them. This recognises that only a relatively small number of organisations, mostly in well-resourced countries, fit the current framework of support. This will allow more organisations to take effective strategic litigation on terms that correspond to their organisational practices and capacity.

In order for more groups, particularly those led by and centring migrant, impoverished, racialised, queer, disabled and/or gender minority communities, to be able to engage in impactful cases on digital rights issues, more flexible funding should be made available for the development of skills and strategies. In addition, our work should foster new collaborations and create a sustainable environment from which to launch cases. These will be additional outcomes, that are important yet still measurable.

This is not to say that the outcomes of litigation are not important. We will continue to use our impact measurement framework and assess the outcomes of the research and litigation we support. However, this will be done in the interests of building up the wider digital rights field. As far as possible, we will try to take on the burden of measuring the outcomes and impacts of digital rights litigation.

# About the Digital Freedom Fund

The Digital Freedom Fund (DFF) exists to support the digital rights community in Europe to advance and protect human rights in digital spaces and reduce the negative impact of technology in the world. Since 2017, we have built a strong record of conscientious grantmaking for **strategic litigation**, curated events, and an expanding network of partners and allies, all united in the desire to create systemic change.



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