



Shared Power in the Age of Artificial Intelligence



Where women lead, change follows.

Shared Power in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence is a profound economic, political, and social transformation that is reshaping how knowledge is created, labor is organized, infrastructure is built, capital is deployed, and decisions are made.

As AI transforms our societies, it is making visible questions that have long existed beneath the surface:

- Who creates value?
- Who captures it?
- Who bears the costs?
- Who has the power to decide?

These are not new questions. They are the very questions that have always shaped gender justice.

The rapid pace of AI presents both extraordinary opportunity and profound risk. It has the potential to accelerate discovery, improve accessibility, strengthen research, and expand human capability. At the same time, it is concentrating economic and political power, increasing demand for energy and water, reshaping labor markets, expanding surveillance and militarism, accelerating competition for digital infrastructure, and exposing longstanding systems of extraction and inequality.

The question before us is not whether artificial intelligence will shape our future. It already is. The question is whether that future will be shaped with accountability, democratic participation, and shared power.

At Women's Funding Network, we believe technology should expand human agency, strengthen communities, and deepen democracy. Tools should serve people, not the other way around.

This moment calls for more than mitigating harm. It calls for building the institutions, governance, public participation, and movement infrastructure capable of ensuring that the benefits of technological change are broadly shared and that communities have meaningful influence over the systems that affect them – including the power to set boundaries and say no.

Women's Funding Network approaches artificial intelligence through five guiding principles.

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Responsible AI in Philanthropy: A Feminist Framework

Shared Power in the Age of Artificial Intelligence



AI is a Question of Power, Not Simply Technology



Innovation Without Accountability Can Deepen Existing Inequities



Communities Must Help Define the Future



AI is Infrastructure



Philanthropy Has a Calling to Shape What Comes Next

Grounded in nearly four decades of gender justice philanthropy, this framework reflects what women's funds have long understood: lasting change requires shared power, community leadership, and accountable institutions.

1 AI is a Question of Power, Not Simply Technology

Artificial intelligence is already influencing how information is shared, how decisions are made, how resources are allocated, whose voices are amplified, and whose experiences remain invisible.

These are not simply technical questions. They are questions of equity, representation, governance, and power.

A gender justice lens helps illuminate how AI affects access to opportunity, economic participation, civic engagement, safety, labor, care, and democracy across diverse communities and lived experiences.

Understanding AI therefore requires more than technological expertise. It requires listening to communities, examining systems of power, and asking who benefits, who is excluded, and who has the authority to shape the future.



2 Innovation Without Accountability Can Deepen Existing Inequities

Technological progress alone does not guarantee social progress. Without intentional governance, AI can reinforce existing inequities by concentrating wealth and decision-making, expanding state and corporate surveillance, increasing demand for finite natural resources, reshaping labor without adequate protections, and accelerating competition over land, energy, and public infrastructure.

Technology is never neutral. Its impacts are determined by the incentives, institutions, and governance that shape its development. Responsible innovation therefore requires transparency, public accountability, democratic oversight, and meaningful participation by the communities most affected.



3 **Communities Must Help Define the Future**

Communities should not simply experience the consequences AI – its consumption of water and land, its noise and light pollution, its extraction of data and tracking, its replacement of labor, its expansion of surveillance, and policing.

They should not be subjects of technology. They should be partners in shaping it: helping determine its design, governance, and deployment, and sharing in its accountability, resource management, and financial benefit.

Many people are understandably skeptical of artificial intelligence and may wish to opt out altogether. That skepticism deserves respect. At the same time, disengagement carries its own risks. When communities are absent from conversations about AI, decisions about how these systems are designed, governed, deployed, and monetized are made by others.

The question is not whether every organization should adopt AI. The question is whether the public will have a meaningful voice in shaping the systems and guardrails that are becoming part of everyday life.



Women's Funding Network believes that lived experience is a form of expertise.

This philosophy is reflected in initiatives such as Interpretation Commons, which pairs quantitative data with community interpretation, and in community-defined taxonomies that recognize that those closest to the issues are often best positioned to define what matters.

At the same time, responsible governance includes recognizing when artificial intelligence is not the appropriate solution. Some challenges are better addressed through stronger public institutions, community leadership, care infrastructure, democratic participation, and human relationships than through technology.

Responsible innovation includes knowing when not to innovate.

Communities Must Help Define the Future 3

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AI is Infrastructure

Artificial intelligence is often described as software, yet it depends upon an extensive physical, civic, and economic infrastructure.

Every AI system needs:

- Data
- Energy
- Water
- Land
- Long Haul Fiber
- Labor
- Supply chains
- Public policy
- Democratic governance
- Financial capital

This infrastructure is unevenly distributed. So are the benefits and burdens it creates.

Communities frequently experience the environmental, economic, and democratic consequences of AI infrastructure long before they are invited into decisions about where and how that infrastructure is built.

Understanding these systems allows philanthropy and communities to anticipate opportunities, environmental impacts, democratic implications, and emerging risks before decisions become irreversible.



This understanding informs Women's Funding Network's work through InfraWatch, which helps illuminate the physical infrastructure behind AI and strengthens philanthropy's ability to respond proactively rather than reactively.

Infrastructure shapes outcomes.

Understanding infrastructure helps shape more equitable ones.

AI is Infrastructure

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Philanthropy Has a Calling to Shape What Comes Next

Philanthropy has always played an important role during periods of profound societal transformation. Artificial intelligence is no exception.

Women's Funding Network believes philanthropy has an opportunity to strengthen the public institutions and community capacity necessary for democratic oversight of AI and its consumption of community resources.

That includes investing in:

- Community leadership, organizing, and power
- Democratic governance
- Ethical and accountable innovation
- Local and independent journalism
- Public-interest research
- Independent data infrastructure
- Privacy and anti-surveillance regulation
- Movement infrastructure and collaboration
- Public participation



Technological change must reflect public priorities, not market and state incentives alone. Women's Funding Network is committed to convening those conversations. Through DataWoven, Interpretation Commons, InfraWatch Power, and the Women's Funding Network Summit, we are working alongside members and partners to build the field's capacity to see these systems clearly and act on what they see.

Women's Funding Network does not view artificial intelligence as simply another emerging technology. We view it as one of the defining infrastructure challenges of our time.

For nearly four decades, we have invested in the relationships, leadership, data, and systems that strengthen the gender justice movement. That work has never been about any single technology. It has been about power: who holds it, who is denied it, and how it can be shared. The institutions we build, the voices we elevate, the communities we invest in, and the decisions we make together will shape whether AI deepens inequality or expands community power.

Women's Funding Network is committed to helping philanthropy strengthen the democratic capacity needed to ensure this technological transition advances gender justice rather than undermines it.

Women's Funding Network believes that future should be shared.

We invite philanthropy to help build it.

**Philanthropy Has a Calling to
Shape What Comes Next**

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About WFN

Women's Funding Network (WFN) is the world's largest network of women's funds, foundations, and gender justice funders, bringing together more than 120 members across 14 countries. For nearly four decades, WFN has strengthened the infrastructure of gender justice philanthropy by convening leaders, advancing research and data, fostering collaboration, and mobilizing resources to build a more equitable and inclusive world. Together, our members invest more than \$1 billion annually to expand opportunity, strengthen communities, and advance lasting systems change.



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