

The Internet Belongs to All of Us.

Let's Take It Back.

Big Tech isn't just big any more. It's political, it's dangerous, and it's working against us. Companies worth more than entire nations are actively undermining democracy: amplifying hate speech, fuelling climate denial, extracting wealth from communities, and trapping people in manipulative platforms designed to maximise engagement, not wellbeing. They do this by design — because it's what makes them money.

Regulation helps — Europe is paying more attention than ever. But regulation cannot give communities the real alternatives they need in their everyday lives and work. We need a third way: not corporate, not government-controlled, but collective. The technology already exists. What has been missing is the organised, collective effort and sustainable funding to deploy it at scale.

INTRODUCING THE DEMOCRATIC TECH FUND

The Democratic Tech Fund (DTF) is an initiative founded by Free Knowledge Institute, Commons Network, Waag Futurelab, and Fundación Platoniq / Goteo — with a growing European federation of member organisations. Our funding model builds on the successes of the Goteo crowd and match funding platform. It's proven across Europe (€25 million distributed since 2011). We provide grants to communities, cooperatives, and civil society organisations to adopt, build, and maintain open digital infrastructure: tools that communities actually control, built on principles of transparency, co-governance, and solidarity.

Our collective fund methodology:

- Civil society organisations and individuals contribute to the fund.
- Communities run crowdfunding campaigns.
- Municipal and regional governments match contributions.
- Charities and values-aligned funders multiply the impact.
- Communities decide together what gets built and maintained.

Projects receive grants, not loans — so communities can focus entirely on impact.

WHY THE MOMENT IS NOW

The open internet was designed to be decentralised and community-driven. What we see today — surveillance, manipulation, monopoly control — is not inevitable. It is the result of concentrated private investment. Counter-investment in democratic alternatives is both possible and necessary.

We already have what we need: open-source technologies, tested governance models, and pathbreaking cooperative projects to build from. Collectively, we have the momentum. Every day of delay allows Big Tech to dig deeper and the window for intervention to narrow. The time to act is now.

This isn't charity. It's investment in our collective future.

THREE PLACES TO START

The DTF is currently building capacity in three areas where we see the most community interest and readiness. These are starting points, not limits.

🕸 Collaborative Workspaces — escaping the hyperscalers

Many communities rely on ‘free’ services from Google, Microsoft, or Amazon without fully realising the cost: surveillance, data extraction, and infrastructure that can have its terms changed — or be withdrawn — at any moment. We fund the adoption and maintenance of open-source, community-governed alternatives covering communication, file sharing, project management, and more. Real alternatives already exist; they just need the resourcing to reach more communities.



🌐 Our Socials — safe, on our own terms

More than 15 million people are already interconnected through the fediverse — Mastodon, PeerTube, Pixelfed, Matrix — in spaces that are constructive, human-scale, and free from engagement-maximising algorithms. We support communities to build and govern their own nodes: choosing who to interconnect with, what moderation to apply, and what kind of digital public space they want. No surveillance. No shadow-banning. No algorithmic manipulation.



⊕ Cooperative Tools for Organisers — practical and maintained

Sometimes the need is specific. Foodsoft, an open-source food-buying platform used by cooperatives across Europe, is functional and proven — but chronically under-resourced for maintenance and development. We fund this kind of work: not slick platforms, but the everyday infrastructure that keeps communities running. Cooperatives, buying groups, mutual-aid networks, local exchange, collective care.



WHO IS THIS FOR?

This document is a first introduction for two overlapping audiences.

Communities and organisations in the social and solidarity economy — cooperatives, social enterprises, civil society groups, and public institutions — that need digital tools aligned with their values, not platforms built to extract from them. We also prioritise communities where digital safety is urgent: climate and migration activists, feminist and LGBTQ+ collectives, peace movement and others facing surveillance, deplatforming, or algorithmic suppression.

Funders and municipal partners who want to invest in the digital commons as a genuine public good, co-determine what gets built, and see their contributions multiplied through the DTF's matching model.

HOW IT WORKS

01 Discover

Collective mapping of what already exists and what communities actually need. No one starts from scratch. We learn from existing projects and governance models across the federation.

02 Campaign

Crowdfunding combined with match-funding from public partners and values-aligned funders. Projects receive grants, not loans, keeping them focused on impact rather than repayment.

03 Deliver

Infrastructure built with the community, not for it. Operational costs fully covered and audited by the funding community. Progress and learning shared across the federation.

WHY DEMOCRATIC TECH MATTERS

Democratic digital infrastructure matters for everyone — but in ways that differ by situation.

For cooperatives and social enterprises: Own your tools. Govern your data. Stop subsidising surveillance capitalism every time you send a message or share a file.

For climate activists: Digital infrastructure consumes 2% of global emissions and rising — and most of it profits from climate denial. Democratic tech can be built sustainably.

For workers and platform users: Platform cooperatives mean workers own their tools and data. No algorithmic manipulation. No extraction by distant shareholders.

For marginalised communities: Democratic platforms wire in protections from shadow-banning, algorithmic suppression, and content policies that amplify dominant power. Women, BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and migrant communities deserve infrastructure that serves them.

For democrats: This is about reclaiming the digital public square from corporate control — and returning it to the people who actually live and work there.

GET INVOLVED

▶ Become a member

Join the growing federation of organisations and communities. Members help shape what gets funded, how the DTF develops, and build solidarity across borders.

▶ Fund a project

Contribute to the fund and co-determine what gets built. Municipal and institutional partners can provide match-funding for validated community projects.

▶ Start a conversation

If your community has a specific digital need, get in touch. We begin with discovery — mapping what exists and what you actually need — before a single euro is committed.

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