Luminate

Strategic Plan

Luminate envisions a future where everyone has power to shape society.

Our mission is to ensure that everyone – especially those who are underrepresented – has the information, rights, and power to influence the decisions that affect us all.

What we do

Our work focuses on enabling people to fully participate in civic and political life, to safely challenge power, and to access accurate, trustworthy information. Across our work, we seek to ensure that technology works for and not against democracy.

All of our work is focused on:

Participation & Dissent

Information Ecosystems

Over the next five years we're working towards four outcomes:

- Underrepresented groups have greater voice on and influence over the issues that affect our societies
- People can safely and effectively express their political views, organise, and challenge power

- The information that shapes people's views is more accurate, independent, and inclusive of the perspectives of underrepresented groups
- Public debate is better informed, less polarised, and less divisive

WHERE WE WORK

We work globally with a regional focus on Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

NIGERIA   KENYA

SOUTH AFRICA

MALAYSIA

INDONESIA

MEXICO

COLOMBIA

BRAZIL

ARGENTINA

Africa   **Asia**   **Latin America**

Global Programmes

The Global Programmes team engages in global grant-making and operational initiatives across all of Luminate's organisational outcomes and supports and reinforces the work of our regional teams.

Luminate Strategic Initiatives

LSI is focused on tackling digital threats to democracy through grant-making, operational initiatives, and building partnerships with other funders. It works in Europe and the US.

How we pursue change

Funding and **supporting the work of existing projects and organisations,** including with non-financial partner support

Supporting and **collaborating with others** on their new ideas and initiatives

Identifying gaps in the system and **seeding new solutions** where none currently exist

Undertaking our own projects and initiatives, drawing on the experience and expertise of our team

The challenge and opportunity

Around the world, democracy is in crisis and power remains concentrated in the hands of the few. We've seen more democratically elected governments adopting authoritarian tactics, and we are witnessing deterioration in freedom of expression, greater restrictions on civic space, growing polarisation, and the spread of misinformation and disinformation.

The largely unchecked power and influence of Big Tech companies and the pervasiveness of social media platforms are exacerbating these challenges. Leaders are adopting new technologies to surveil opponents and suppress dissent, and weaponising information to deepen social divides. Institutions of power are often unrepresentative of their societies, and those who hold power frequently use it to advance their own aims and repress opposition.

At the same time, many people, in particular those from underrepresented groups, face barriers to participating in civic and political life. Exclusion impacts their ability to influence the decisions that affect their lives and society more broadly. In turn, this can fuel disillusionment and polarisation, further undermining participation and increasing the power of illiberal leaders and ideas.

Yet, there are glimmers of hope. Even when restrictions to freedom of assembly were put in place during the Covid-19 pandemic, people around the world continued to mobilise and challenge power. Now many young people are protesting for the first time, rallying around topics such as climate change, systemic racism, and police brutality.

We believe the participation of everyone in civic life is critical. Online and offline spaces that enable participation and dissent need to be protected. And the information that fuels and informs discussion and debate must be accurate and trustworthy.

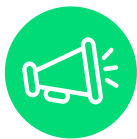Our 2022-2027 strategy addresses these challenges and opportunities.

What we do

Luminate envisions a future where everyone has power to shape society.

Our mission is to ensure that everyone – especially those who are underrepresented - has the information, rights, and power to influence the decisions that affect us all.

We seek to increase the participation of underrepresented groups in civic and political life, to ensure those who challenge power can do so safely and effectively, and to improve the integrity of information and public debate. Across our work, we seek to ensure that technology works for, not against, democracy.

To advance this mission, we work on two themes:

Participation & Dissent

Why?

Many groups across the societies where we work are excluded from fully participating in civic and political life. The voices and perspectives of these groups are not adequately represented in institutions of power or in the decisions these institutions make. This limits their ability to fully participate in and to shape the decisions that affect them and society as a whole.

In addition, in many countries, the spaces where people can dissent and challenge power, both offline and online, are being closed down. Repressive tactics such as increased surveillance, censorship, and attacks on journalists and activists are threatening the safety of those who seek to participate and hold power to account.

What?

Our Participation & Dissent theme is focused on ensuring everyone, especially those who are underrepresented in civic and political life, is able to challenge power and influence the decisions that shape society. We work to protect those who dissent and support them to be more effective in their pursuit of change.

How?

To achieve this, we support work to increase participation and to make decision-making bodies more representative. This includes supporting the removal of systemic barriers, such as discriminatory laws around legal documentation, which prevent groups from accessing and engaging with power. We also support efforts that protect journalists and activists, that expose the tactics of repression, and that help those challenging power to avoid, withstand, and counter attacks on civic space.

Information Ecosystems

Why?   Accessing and using reliable and accurate information helps to shape civic participation and is critical in building just and fair societies. Threats to independent media and public interest journalism, and the spread of misleading information and divisive content, have eroded the quality of public debate in many countries. The algorithmic amplification of harmful content on tech platforms accelerates this, distorting how people use information to make decisions and informing how they participate in society.

What?   We build and support healthy information ecosystems, where the information that shapes people's lives is more accurate, independent, and inclusive of everyone's viewpoints. And where the platforms responsible for spreading misinformation, hate, and harmful content are held accountable. As a result, public debate will be better informed and less polarised.

How?   We support work to tackle the spread of mis- and disinformation, protect freedom of expression, and challenge the data practices and algorithmic systems that underpin many digital media platforms. We also support evidence-based, investigative journalism that holds power to account.

A digital lens: the role of technology in our work

Across our work, technology can be used to both enhance and hinder the change we want to see. Digital technologies are used by those in power to surveil opponents, suppress dissent, and spread misinformation. But they can also be used to facilitate participation, enabling people to engage in civic life. We pay close attention to issues such as the growing influence of Big Tech companies and social media platforms on democratic processes, the use of digital tools and regulation to control information and expression online, legislation around data privacy and protection, and the impact of technology on social justice.

The outcomes we are working towards

To enable us to track our progress, we have set four outcomes for our work over the next five years.

Participation & Dissent

- Underrepresented groups have greater voice on and influence over the issues that affect our societies

- People can safely and effectively express their political views, organise, and challenge power

Information Ecosystems

- The information that shapes people's views is more accurate, independent, and inclusive of the perspectives of underrepresented groups

- Public debate is better informed, less polarised, and less divisive

Each team (Africa, Asia, Latin America, Global Programmes, and Luminate Strategic Initiatives) sets its own priorities to work towards these outcomes. These priorities are based on the specific needs, opportunities, and barriers in each context and the role we are best placed to play there.

A systems change approach

When deciding how to pursue impact, we look at whole systems – with a sector-based and/or geographic lens – and support multiple organisations and approaches that are mutually reinforcing.

As the context of each region is unique, and our experience is different in each location, the priorities, activities, and work we support will be slightly different.

Pursuing change within complex systems and contexts means that we must be adaptive and opportunistic, responding as conditions change and as we learn about what does and does not work. We believe that how we operate gives us a distinctive agility in response to new opportunities.

Where we work

Our regional work is focused on Africa, Asia, and Latin America. We support transregional work and initiatives that complement, enable, and strengthen our partners' work in the regions. Our work to address digital threats to democracy – which is undertaken by Luminate Strategic Initiatives – is primarily focused on Europe and the US.

OUR GLOBAL THEMATIC WORK

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Global Programmes

The Global Programmes team tackles our two themes at a transregional level, carrying out work that complements and enables our work in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. This includes transregional grants and operational initiatives, as well as best practice or knowledge building. It also works to change the 'rules of the game', such as international norms, funding flows, and global governance mechanisms.

Our priorities:

- Making political power more inclusive
- Ensuring those who challenge power can do so safely and effectively
- Building resilient, inclusive media organisations
- Creating strong information ecosystems

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Luminate Strategic Initiatives

This team conducts our global work to tackle digital threats to democracy. It carries out grant-making and operational initiatives, and it builds partnerships with other funders. Through this we aim to foster a healthier information ecosystem, strengthening the integrity of digital media. This team focuses primarily on Europe and the US and has four integrated workstreams: Policy (Reset), Campaigns & Media, Litigation, and Ecosystems & Partnerships.
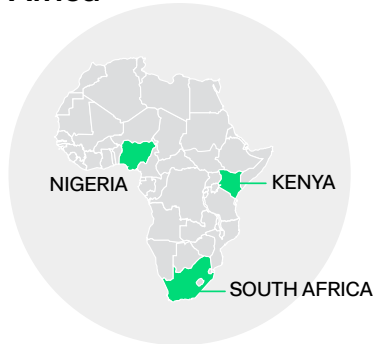
Our priorities:

- Setting and enforcing rules and standards that promote a healthier digital public sphere
- Raising public expectations for how Big Tech should operate

Our regional teams lead our grant-making and operational work in each location.

Africa

NIGERIA — KENYA

SOUTH AFRICA

—

Our work focuses on people most affected by discriminatory laws, policies, and practices. This includes underrepresented groups, including women, youth, and religious, ethnic, and other minorities. We recognise the structural barriers they face in having the agency, voice, and freedom to participate in civic life. We work to help these groups challenge and build power.

Our priorities:

- Supporting youth civic participation and leadership that is inclusive and representative

- Ensuring underrepresented groups can freely express their civic and political concerns

- Supporting media and digital platforms to ensure information is accurate and inclusive

- Protecting civic space and dissent and enabling groups to challenge and build power

Asia

MALAYSIA

INDONESIA

—

We support activism and social movements, with a focus on helping to build more inclusive and less polarised societies, where civic space and dissent are protected and supported.

Our priorities:

- Increasing inclusion and representation

- Protecting civic space and strengthening civil society

- Tackling misinformation and disinformation

Latin America

MEXICO

COLOMBIA

BRAZIL

ARGENTINA

—

We work alongside activists and journalists, particularly those from underrepresented groups, to help challenge power and ensure they can shape society. These groups are defending human rights, changing traditional narratives, producing quality journalism, advocating for freedom of expression, and pushing for better political representation and participation.

Our priorities:

- Driving greater representation in political institutions and policy-making

- Enabling civil society to navigate threats and operate effectively

- Extending the reach and impact of independent journalism

- Protecting freedom of speech while countering disinformation and hate speech

How we work: Our Model of Philanthropy

Our Model of Philanthropy outlines how we pursue our mission and outcomes. It seeks to take advantage of our flexibility, using a range of approaches depending on what will be most appropriate, additive, and impactful for a given issue or place.

> **We have four modes of operating:**
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> - **Supporting the work of existing projects and organisations** with restricted and programmatic funding, together with non-financial partner support (e.g., advising, coaching, consultants, gatherings).
> - **Collaborating with others on new ideas and initiatives** (e.g., working with and funding legal and data rights experts to set up AWO, a data rights agency).
> - **Seeding new solutions where none currently exist** (e.g., the International Fund for Public Interest Media, which we created with BBC Media Action and others to rapidly increase funding for independent media in low- and middle-income countries).
> - **Undertaking our own projects and initiatives, drawing on the experience and expertise of our team** (e.g., advocacy, campaigns, and strategic litigation to address digital threats to democracy).

All four modes lead us to engage in and cultivate two types of partnership: grant-making and operating. Given this emphasis on partnerships, our partner support work is a key part of our Model of Philanthropy and cuts across everything we do.

In addition to funding and partner support, we use tools such as narrative change, litigation, and policy and advocacy to pursue change.

Along with using our resources to deliver the greatest possible impact, we believe we must always responsibly exercise the power inherent in our position as a philanthropy. We consider power dynamics carefully in everything we do.

Our commitment to partner support

We believe it's important to build strong, trusting relationships with our partners. In order to achieve our shared aspirations for impact, everyone at Luminate plays a critical role in creating a robust culture of partner support. Our teams assess our partners' needs and acquire support to help them be more resilient, healthy, inclusive, and well-networked. The beyond-the-grant support we provide includes:

- Stipends for wellness, coaching, and organisational effectiveness
- Events to encourage peer learning
- Tailored support for individual organisations
- Luminate staff serving as in-house advisors
- Ongoing expert support from our team

Learning and adapting

Continually learning, reflecting, and adapting is central to our approach. This informs all of our activities and decisions and enables us to adapt our work as we go and achieve more impact.

Our approach to monitoring change is based in setting and testing hypotheses related to our organisational outcomes, and collecting confirming and disconfirming evidence over time. Whenever we can, we strive to share our learnings with others.

Luminate's evolution

Luminate was established in 2018 by philanthropists Pierre and Pam Omidyar. It was formerly the Governance & Citizen Engagement initiative within Omidyar Network. Our strategy was previously centred around four Impact Areas: Civic Empowerment; Data & Digital Rights; Financial Transparency; and Independent Media.

In June 2021, Luminate started to develop a new organisational strategy. The aim of this process was to focus our aims and consolidate our work. We completed this in 2022. Our strategy continues to promote the need for just and fair societies, but with an even greater emphasis on ensuring that everyone – especially those who are underrepresented – has the information, rights, and power to influence the decisions that affect us all. Our current strategy cycle ends in 2027.