Luminate

Strategic Plan

2018–2022

In October 2018, The Omidyar Group launched Luminate, a global philanthropic organisation designed to empower people and institutions to build just and fair societies. As we begin the new year, we are pleased to continue our commitment to increased transparency through the publication of a summary version of our four-year strategic plan. A recent blog post provides additional context about our rationale for sharing publicly what has changed, what we've learned, where we're going, and how we will work to be more dynamic and open in the strategic planning process.

Our traditional strategy cycle has revolved around four-year plans and two-year mid-term reviews. Prior to Luminate's launch, our latest strategy was developed in 2014. Given the political changes we've seen over the past few years, it is safe to say that we were due for a refresh.

The changing context

Across the regions where we work, we've seen the pillars of strong societies – including press freedom, transparency and accountability, civic space, and the right to question authority – come under sustained attack.

The past decades have delivered significant prosperity in many countries, with poverty levels falling as life expectancy continues to rise. The governance sector has also experienced moments that encourage optimism: remarkable uprisings against undemocratic behaviour, rejections of alt-right leadership, a notable decline in apathy, and an increase in civic participation.

Yet, continued positive progress is not guaranteed; more than ever, now there is an urgency to stand by the courageous people working to protect rights and strengthen communities.

We recognise that today's challenges are not only due to recent geopolitical shocks, but also are symptoms of complex, interrelated trends building for many years, some of which are depicted on the following page.

Major challenges facing society

Rising populism is creating ruptures in historical party politics, with **rejections of globalisation** coming from both left and right. These disruptions have led to a near complete **erosion of the 'centre'.**

Civic space is shrinking, and civil society is under attack, both online and offline. Freedoms – notably of expression, the press, assembly, privacy – are being systematically taken away from those with dissenting views.

Insular, nationalist perspectives are resonating with more people, perhaps fuelled by fear and insecurity associated with demographic, economic, and geopolitical changes.

Communities are becoming more polarised, as the mechanics of social media continue to contribute to the solidification of filter bubbles, and the **amplification of extreme, negative voices**.

Fewer people believe that democracy is the best model for governance, perceiving that the system is failing to deliver on its core promise to improve their lives and translate popular will into good public policy.

The downsides of tech are accruing disproportionately to at-risk, underrepresented, dissenting populations. The **use of data by powerful actors has exacerbated power imbalances,** often at the expense of rights.

Counter forces to liberalism have gained strength. Russia's disruptive tactics have become commonplace, and China's state-centric alternative model has enabled significant control and influence.

'Illiberal democracies' are emerging. **Authoritarian practices are gradually seeping in, even where power was initially acquired through a democratic route.** External interference with the democratic process is also on the rise.

Awareness of corruption and cronyism across the public and private sectors has increased, but without substantial enforcement of a corresponding fix for the underlying causes. This has opened the door for **populist leaders to co-opt the anti-corruption agenda**.
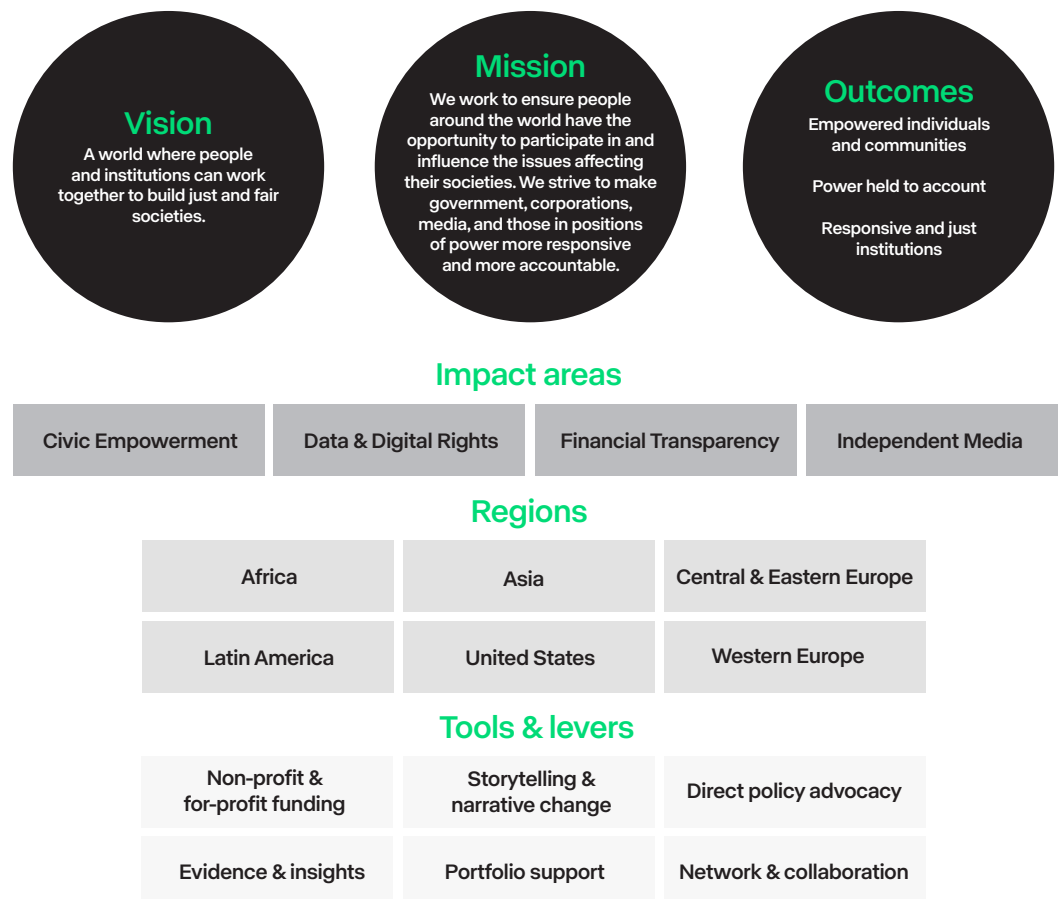
A new organisation

In this challenging governance environment, we believe our track record in our evolving impact areas (Civic Empowerment, Data & Digital Rights, Financial Transparency, and Independent Media),[1] our global presence and network, and our willingness to experiment and take risks will help us to achieve impact.

With the launch of Luminate, we had an opportunity not only to develop a refreshed strategy, but also to take a fresh look at our work and, where appropriate, do things differently. Through this strategy refresh, we have endeavoured to be more assertive, taking new risks and using new tools to pursue impact in more creative ways. To this end:

– We evolved our Vision and Mission, underpinned by a crisp set of values and priorities, and brought to life through a new brand.

– We learned from, and built on, our experience across four impact areas. Our approaches and priorities evolved based on our reflections about what changed, what went well, and where our assumptions were incorrect.

– We tailored our toolkit. We will continue to provide funding and investment capital, as well as engage in direct advocacy, but we will also use new levers such as storytelling and strategic litigation, and will continue to test new approaches.

Luminate strategic framework

Vision
A world where people and institutions can work together to build just and fair societies.

Mission
We work to ensure people around the world have the opportunity to participate in and influence the issues affecting their societies. We strive to make government, corporations, media, and those in positions of power more responsive and more accountable.

Outcomes
Empowered individuals and communities

Power held to account

Responsive and just institutions

Impact areas

Civic Empowerment	Data & Digital Rights	Financial Transparency	Independent Media

Regions

Africa	Asia	Central & Eastern Europe
Latin America	United States	Western Europe

Tools & levers

Non-profit & for-profit funding	Storytelling & narrative change	Direct policy advocacy
Evidence & insights	Portfolio support	Network & collaboration

1 Luminate's four impact areas are Civic Empowerment (formerly Civic Tech), Data & Digital Rights (formerly Data Governance), Financial Transparency (formerly Fiscal Governance), and Independent Media.

Luminate's positioning

Luminate will strive to build on our legacy as the Governance & Citizen Engagement initiative at Omidyar Network and to identify new ways to amplify the impact of our work and our portfolio.

We have developed strong partnerships with our peers and colleagues, globally and regionally, and will seek to build on those relationships to ensure our role and approach are additive. In many cases – such as with the civic tech and open data sectors – we have crowded in other funders and helped to build ecosystems to scale innovation.

Governance & Citizen Engagement legacy **Where we've been …**	Luminate positioning **Where we're going …**
10+ years of experience in our impact areas, benefiting from the **regional presence & proximity** of our team	Keep tailoring approaches and priorities to local contexts, while **surfacing regional trends and insights to inform global strategy**
'Tech DNA', which translated into pioneerism in tech for transparency, for civic engagement, and for service delivery	Acknowledge and explore the **downsides of technology**, engaging meaningfully on countering the digital threats to democracy
Flexible approach to funding, including the ability to make both non-profit grants and for-profit investments, and to provide both core and project support	Continue to use both types of funding, while also exploring **new routes to impact**, including non-financial support
Experience **advocating for policy change** both by supporting campaigners, and by getting involved directly	Build direct advocacy capacity, as well as explore and experiment with **new influence levers** (e.g., storytelling and strategic litigation)
Experience **seeding young organisations**, taking risks to partner with them early in their journeys, with the goal of catalysing others to replicate, improve upon, or fund their work	Double down on this legacy; identify ways to make greater impact by **taking risks on, and providing support to, our partners**
Freedom, and privilege, to take risks, push frontiers, and develop new solutions	Take advantage of ability to invest in **early stage opportunities** across impact areas
Committed to investing based on our values, supporting our investees **'behind the scenes'**	**Be more assertive** in our points of view, standing beside our partners and identifying opportunities where our voice or presence may be additive
Learned as we went, experimenting with best approaches to measure impact in our sector	Strengthen our approach to **impact measurement** and build our **learning culture**, both internally and in partnership across our networks

Our new approach

Accordingly, our approach will have four common goals:

1 **Reimagine the rules of the road**, proposing alternative models for the norms governing relationships between individuals and institutions (e.g., regarding data ownership)

2 **Equip civil society** to anticipate and proactively manage what's coming (e.g., facilitating knowledge sharing and capacity-building on digital threats to democracy)

3 **Protect and advance the gains** we have made in the last decade (e.g., build on open data policies in 60+ countries; support cross-border work on illicit financial flows)

4 **Prevent further retrenchment** of core elements of healthy democracies (e.g., shrinking civic space; declining press freedom)

Regional presence and priorities

Our work is primarily organised by the four impact areas detailed below, with regional teams empowered to dial up or down the degree of focus based on local needs and available resources. This approach balances the need to test Impact Area hypotheses across regions with the flexibility to tailor local approaches. Recent examples include work on immigrant rights in the US, youth engagement in Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa, and citizen security across Latin America.

Typically, we select regional priorities for one of three strategic reasons:

– **To fill a regional 'governance gap'** when the outcomes we desire are materially hindered by a complementary governance issue beyond the areas we typically work. For example, our Latin America team has found that those working to enhance citizen security, such as Instituto Igarapé, play a critical role in creating an enabling environment for other facets of our work.

– **To experiment with a new theme in response to a changed context,** or to test a new facet of an impact area. In Western Europe, experimental investments in groups focussed on access to democratic participation, such as Campaign Bootcamp, have contributed to an expanded understanding of the role of organising in Civic Empowerment.

– **To engage in 'Countries in Transition'** where a potential inflection point and evidence of reform leads us to believe our support could catalyse significant change in an accelerated timeframe. Our goal for this work is to provide critical support to courageous individuals and organisations seeking democratic gains in settings where civil society has been suppressed and where media has been circumscribed. We also work with government reformers post-transition to achieve positive policy outcomes which benefit large populations.

Impact areas

The impact areas in which we work have evolved substantially over time, as has our operating context and approach in each. These four areas (*Civic Empowerment, Data & Digital Rights, Financial Transparency,* and *Independent Media*) remain the best anchors for our work, given our expertise, networks, the funding landscape, and the evolving global challenges and opportunities in governance. Each area also has a meaningful role to play in the face of the headwinds previously discussed.

In a world where …

… democracy is in recession and civic space is under threat, we must continue our work to empower individuals and communities, especially the underserved, with the tools and capacity they need to participate in governance. (Civic Empowerment)

… the risks posed by technology to democracy and individual rights continue to grow and manifest in actual harm, we must continue to challenge the existing rules of the road related to the collection, use, and management of data. (Data & Digital Rights)

… corrupt practices and illicit financial flows have become the expectation, rather than the exception, and calls to "drain the swamp" get populists elected, we must continue to fight for increased transparency and accountability in the use of public funds. (Financial Transparency)

… opposition voices are silenced, journalists jailed, and misinformation trusted, we must continue our work to defend the freedom of the press and support robust media ecosystems. (Independent Media)

The following pages provide a snapshot of the refreshed strategy for each impact area.

Civic Empowerment

During the last strategy period (May 2014 – October 2018):

$65M
investment capital deployed

52
organisations supported

18
for-profit investments (35%)

What has changed?

Increased civic engagement presents an opportunity for new solutions, but we recognise that technology is not a panacea for engagement or service delivery. Confronted with constricting civic space and a growing backlash against tech, we broadened the frame of this impact area from what we used to call 'Civic Technology' to 'Civic Empowerment.' We have learned that technologies must be coupled with organising strategies (such as campaigning techniques), as well as capacity building and process improvements, to help communities engage government and to help government use technology to deliver services more effectively and equitably.

What will we do about it?

Observation	›	New strategy
Governments curtailing space for participation, rendering tech tools irrelevant		Support complementary offline, real-world organising and campaigning
Tech alone has proven insufficient to affect sustained change		
Under-represented voices are not being heard or are being actively silenced		Support groups/initiatives prioritising those voices
Tech tools and data have been misused to curtail individual rights		Shift strategic focus; prioritise safeguards over new innovations
More needs to be done to prove business models for civic engagement and to grow the limited funder landscape		Support experimentation with business models; work to crowd in new funders
Earned income models for service delivery getting traction; investor landscape growing		Participate in funds; catalyse more hybrid for-profit investment with new vehicles
Demand for GovTech solutions shifting in some cases from national to local level		Engage with organisations providing tools and capacity building at the municipal level
Civic tech increasingly politicised; tools can be misused, co-opted to cause harm		Ensure values alignment; avoid investment in 'neutral platforms' that could be used to organise for harmful causes

What's next?[2]

Our goal

We will support civic empowerment to enable people to participate in governance, receive the services they need, and hold the powerful to account.

Hypothesis	Investing in civic tech and digital services which disrupt government IT systems and processes will contribute to improvements in responsiveness, so long as we also put increased attention on protecting individual rights.	Providing support to organisations that build tech and offline processes which empower people to engage in governance will drive higher rates of more meaningful participation.	Supporting ecosystem-building activities will create and sustain sector learning and experimentation (e.g., with business models, policy interventions, and combinations of digital and analogue approaches).
Success	E.g., governments change policy and practice to enable tech-driven service delivery while protecting rights.	E.g., channels and tools provided or inspired by our portfolio allow more voices to be heard in decision-making.	E.g., new ideas and solutions come out of a diverse, vibrant community of technologists, entrepreneurs, and policymakers.
Disconfirm	E.g., governments increasingly use tech in ways that violate individual rights in service of efficiency or a 'greater' public cause.	E.g., individuals choose not to engage despite access to better tools and channels; governments disregard or ignore inputs.	E.g., ecosystem growth leads to increased supply of tools and strategies but without sufficient corresponding demand or funding.

2 For each impact area, we have listed our working hypotheses, which inform our investment decisions, as well as examples of what evidence might lead us to believe our theory of change is on track ("success") and examples of what evidence or occurrences might lead us to believe we were wrong and should change course ("disconfirmation").

Data & Digital Rights

During the last strategy period (May 2014 – October 2018):

$48M

investment capital deployed

36

non-profit organisations supported

What has changed?

Over the previous strategy period, data privacy has come of age as a policy and consumer issue, popular sentiment towards the tech platforms has shifted, and specific harms – disinformation, hate speech, manipulation – are better understood and more prevalent. At the same time, we have seen crackdowns on civic space by authoritarian regimes threatening freedom online. Thus, we continue evolving this area, which expanded from Open Data (2014) to Data Governance (2016), and now to Data & Digital Rights.

Through a combination of tools (e.g., funding for NGOs and universities, direct advocacy, litigation, proofs of concept), we will help to build stronger data and digital infrastructure, giving people a voice in the design of technology and holding accountable those who control it.

What will we do about it?

Observation	>	New strategy
Openness and privacy arise from the same impulse for control and agency (e.g., the ability to act independently, freedom of choice)		Move beyond sole focus on open data to data rights (including privacy & AI ethics)
Digital threats to democracy (e.g., cyberattacks, dangerous speech, polarisation) continue across the world and are a feature of nearly every election		Include digital threats to democracy (e.g., dis/misinformation) as a campaign within our Data & Digital Rights impact area, and add a focus on digital rights to our data rights work (e.g., internet shutdowns and encryption)
Data and tech are not neutral; they reflect existing concentrations of power		Support groups that give the public a voice in the ways data and technology are used and affect their lives, and a chance to participate in the design of norms and standards. Advocate to influence policymakers to improve regulation and institutions
The race is on to shape the norms and standards that will underpin the governance of data		

What's next?

Our goal

We will support people and communities to exercise their human rights in the design and use of data and technology.

Hypothesis	If people are given the opportunity to express their voice and articulate their needs, the design and use of data and digital technologies will strengthen their rights and affect their lives in more positive ways.	If the power held by those who control data and tech is better understood and acknowledged, and if smart policy solutions are made available, policymakers will be more willing and able to make meaningful regulatory change.	If we strengthen the institutions that underpin our societies' data and digital infrastructure, we will ensure they are more responsive to people and communities, as well as listened to by policymakers, politicians, and companies.
Success	E.g., norms and standards defining the use of data in societies respect and strengthen human rights, and are designed for and by the people.	E.g., growing demand for evidence base and policy alternatives; governments' adoption of the policy proposals drafted by our grantees.	E.g., creation of institutions and norms that are resilient through political change; orgs we support become anchor institutions in the field.
Disconfirm	E.g., people exercise their voice but institutions do not respond, and thus they become less likely to engage in the future.	E.g., policies enacted in Europe are not followed elsewhere; companies ignore regulation, pay fines, and go on with business as usual.	E.g., institutions are neither resilient nor representative of people's interests; anchor institutions fail to scale sustainably and eventually collapse.

Financial Transparency

During the last strategy period (May 2014 – October 2018):

$35M
investment capital deployed

32
non-profit organisations supported

What has changed?

Historically, our Fiscal Governance work was focussed on advocating for disclosure of government revenues, for citizens to have a voice in resource allocation, and for openness of procurement processes. In the last several years, there have been many changes within the field, including significant positive progress (e.g., adoption of open contracting standards, beneficial ownership rules). We've also seen, however, that shifts in national political context can quickly erode gains in compliance and that transparency alone is not enough.

What will we do about it?

Observation	New strategy
After a decade of progress, there have been substantial drops in transparency compliance	Fund research to better understand incentives/disincentives of public institution compliance; pair standards for openness with increased focus on accountability and enforcement
Pursuing 'total resource flow transparency' may result in superficial rather than meaningful change; must be linked to work that drives the uptake of the data	Take targeted approaches rather than chase full visibility; support efforts to ensure uptake of data and to drive accountability and responsiveness
Despite improved transparency, the prevalence of corruption does not appear to be declining; we are wary of 'scandal fatigue'	Support efforts to couple anti-corruption movements with strong infrastructure and ecosystems; work with local organisations who engage citizens directly in accountability campaigns
Organisations and civil society actors are confronted with shrinking civic spaces and the 'weaponisation' of the anti-corruption agenda where those fighting corruption end up being targets of the State	

What's next?

Our goal

We empower citizens by promoting transparency, accountability, and participation around the flow of public resources and by supporting efforts to combat corruption.

Hypothesis	Continuing to support transparency efforts will help individuals and intermediaries understand public resource flows, and will reinforce the foundations of financial transparency.	By explicitly targeting corruption with a focus on enforcement actions (e.g., sanctions), we can help to drive enhanced responsiveness at an institutional level.	Pushing for accountability at the regional and local level can be an important pathway to pursue improvements in service delivery - especially for marginalised populations - and to establish linkages across borders and sectors.
Success	E.g., increased transparency at country and global levels about receipt and uses of government revenue.	E.g., increase in prosecution and penalties for financial crimes such as money laundering and bribery.	E.g., rise in prevalence of local groups participating in decision-making about public finance and the delivery of services.
Disconfirm	E.g., backsliding progress on government disclosure; increased distrust of government or "informed disenchantment."	E.g., influence of money in politics becomes so pervasive that only very powerful actors can counter-balance.	E.g., citizens know more about where money is going, but struggle to translate this knowledge into service delivery improvements.

Independent Media

During the last strategy period (May 2014 – October 2018):

$32M
investment capital deployed

41
organisations supported

9
for-profit investments (22%)

What has changed?

The past four years have been a challenging time for independent media. Trust in the media is in decline, freedom of the press is under greater attack, and ad-dependent models of digital content are increasingly destructive to the quality of journalism, while fuelling the spread of misinformation. We seek new routes to impact, including supporting more non-profit cross-border collaborative investigative journalism, filling important evidence gaps (e.g., on the efficacy of fact checking), and testing specific narrower hypotheses around sustainable journalism models, such as membership-driven platforms.

What will we do about it?

Observation	New strategy
Coordinated, cross-border, collaborative investigative journalism has an impact	Support non-profit organisations and collaborations, including partnerships between journalists, data scientists, and advocates (e.g., ICIJ)
Trust in the media is good for business	Invest in new membership models (e.g., The Correspondent, Membership Puzzle Project)
There are very few proven solutions to reducing mis and disinformation	Invest in research and experimentation to foster innovation and improve the efficacy of existing solutions
Press freedom is often suppressed, even where rights are guaranteed by law	Find new ways to support press freedom, including through strategic litigation
Scarcity of mission-aligned investors across Latin America, Asia, and Africa	Invest in bringing new philanthropic and for-profit capital into the sector

What's next?

Our goal

We will support independent media where media plurality is under threat, to promote journalism that holds power to account and informs individuals' beliefs, attitudes, and actions.

	Hypothesis	Success	Disconfirm
	Directly supporting non-profit investigative journalism initiatives will allow us to have an outsized impact on accountability of those in power.	E.g., original, ground-breaking pieces of journalism that hold power to account.	E.g., expensive investigative journalism fails to result in attributable impacts on those in power.
	Investing in experimental financial models will enable sustainability and increased editorial independence.	E.g., profitable businesses producing quality journalism; models replicated by others.	E.g., in 2022, we have the same number of, or fewer, profitable portfolio companies than in 2018.
	We can begin to restore trust by ensuring that audiences have confidence in and feel represented by the media they consume.	E.g., more field-based evidence from outside the US and Europe on 'what works' in addressing mis and disinformation.	E.g., no impactful new or significantly improved solutions to the misinformation problem.
	We can help to defend press freedom through strategically chosen campaigns/ investments.	E.g., winning several landmark cases that change legal precedent or policy.	E.g., a high loss rate in the cases we support.
	Providing venture support, investing in ecosystems and attracting new funders will stimulate innovation and scale the impact of our investees.	E.g., more abundant capital alongside which we can co-invest on media deals; successful follow-on funding for portfolio companies.	E.g., failure to attract additional capital to the independent media sector.

Operationalising the strategy

A refined toolkit

We have a history of deploying more than financial capital in pursuit of impact. As we consider the best paths to achieve our refined goals, Luminate will continue to push the boundaries of the typical 'how' of philanthropy. Through additions to and adaptations of our existing toolkit, we will:

– Become more operational, dedicating time to direct advocacy for targeted policy goals (e.g., new regulations on targeted online political advertising);

– Experiment with new entry points for change, including engagement with the law (i.e., strategic litigation) and attempts to shift narratives (i.e., storytelling);

– Support academic institutions and researchers establishing stronger evidence bases to inform our – and others' – understanding of evolving dynamics;

– Be more assertive in our points of view, sharing our ideas and positions publicly;

– Increase our participation in donor collaboratives and funds which allow us to pool knowledge, resources, and/or influence with like-minded funders.

Collaborating across The Omidyar Group

As we begin to operationalise our first strategy as an independent organisation, collaboration and learning across the broader Omidyar Group will be even more valuable, broadening our network and amplifying our impact. Among others, we will build on our close partnerships with Democracy Fund in the US - including on combatting misinformation, confronting 'digital threats to democracy', and supporting innovative business models for media; with Omidyar Network - including at the intersection of our work on Data & Digital Rights and GovTech and their programmes on Digital ID and the Tech and Society Solutions Lab; and with First Look Media - in our work to defend press freedom, as well as in our efforts to use storytelling to shape social narratives on issues of relevance to our mission.

Improving practices and processes

Over the past year we have gathered feedback – both from staff and portfolio organisations – about how we work and how we might better support our partners and maximise impact.

Though these efforts are ongoing, we have identified several clear areas for improvement, including increasing transparency, enhancing communication, improving impact measurement, and reducing the complexity and increasing the speed of our investment process. We are working to unwind old norms and habits which limit our agility and creativity.

Ongoing efforts to ensure that our operations serve our strategy and values include:

1 The prioritisation of portfolio health, including an assessment of the needs of portfolio organisations and effort to identify scalable ways to provide venture support for common needs (e.g., digital security audits, impact evaluation, fundraising support).

2 [An examination of how best to support diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplaces](#) – both for our own staff and for our portfolio organisations. This includes the [introduction of new policies](#) and practices relating to how we operate and how we make investment choices.

3 An overhaul of a number of internal processes and tools to ensure that we are able to perform our jobs effectively, efficiently, and accountably, in service to our portfolio.

4 An internal effort to reflect on our organisational culture and propose improvements, including to encourage and support risk-taking and experimentation, to build stronger learning practices, and to facilitate collaboration and connection across a highly geographically dispersed team.

Thinking differently about strategy, impact, and learning

Factors shaping the governance sector are not limited to elections and political protests. External dynamics, peripheral trends, and dynamics beyond our control can have substantial implications for the evolution of our operating context. Over the course of the coming year, Luminate will make several investments to strengthen our strategic planning – and adapting – capacity:

– Whilst we will not attempt prediction, during this strategy period, Luminate will explore how to **introduce foresight techniques to our work**.

– Further, we will establish practices and partnerships that help us to open up to broader, more diverse sources of signals and insights, including by **bringing together a diverse group of advisors** and by experimenting with new ways to **deeply listen to the experiences of our portfolio and their beneficiaries.**

– We are near hiring for a new Director of Learning & Impact who will work with our team to **develop and strengthen the feedback loops** between our investing, measurement, and strategic planning functions. We look forward to increasing our capacity to evaluate our impact and share what we're learning, even when we get it wrong.

This is not business as usual; these challenging times demand unconventional approaches and greater tolerance for risk and experimentation, but with more ambition for impact.