

# DIGITAL EQUALITY: An open web for a more equal world

World Wide Web Foundation Strategy: 2017 - 2022 — Over the next five years, we will focus on the growing challenge of digital inequality... We are a policy advocacy organisation, and everything we do is designed to facilitate, drive or reinforce positive policy change. Over the next five years, we will work towards results in three broad areas [documented as goals in this StratML rendition]

Re-focusing our work on an open web for an equal world means that we will:

- Prioritise the interests and rights of women, the poor and other excluded and silenced groups in all we do.
- Go beyond access to the internet, to promote equal digital opportunities, skills and assets for all.
- Go beyond access to data, to fight for citizen control over how data is collected, processed and used.
- Help others to make positive use of the web to strengthen people power, particularly by exposing and reducing secrecy, discrimination and corruption in resource use, and promoting diverse and decentralised participation in civic life.

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## World Wide Web Foundation (WWWF)

### Description:

The World Wide Web Foundation (Web Foundation) was established in 2009 by the inventor of the World Wide Web, Sir Tim Berners-Lee. We believe that the web is a public good and a basic right, which should benefit all of humanity equally.

### Vision

An open web for a more equal world.

### Mission

To build alliances, evidence and action globally and locally to achieve equal digital rights for all, backed by the vision and voice of Sir Tim Berners-Lee.

### Values

**Integration:** We will work in strategic geographies across two integrated programme areas, namely: Digital Inclusion & Digital Citizenship

**Digital Inclusion:** to ensure that everyone, regardless of gender, income or location, benefits equally from the internet and the economic and social opportunities it creates.

**Digital Citizenship:** to ensure that the web remains truly open and affords everyone the rights and information they need to participate fully in civic life.

**Values:** OUR VALUES: At the Web Foundation, we:

**Human Rights:** Champion human rights, dignity and justice for all This value is the foundation of all we do.

**Dignity**

**Justice**

**Collaboration:** Foster collaboration -- We are most successful in changing the world when we work together.

**Independence:** Maintain our independence -- We take positions on the basis of evidence and rigorous analysis, even if this means swimming against the tide.

**Diversity:** Embrace diversity -- We value each individual, and our differences make us a happier, more creative and more effective team. We challenge discrimination in our own daily interactions, and the practices of those we encounter.

**Community:** Nurture our communities -- We are inspired and sustained by the collective support of those around us, and we endeavour to repay their support by striking a balance between working hard and participating fully in our families and communities.

**Work/Life Balance**

**Learning:** Learn as much from our failures as our successes -- While always striving for excellence, we acknowledge our failures and our successes, and let both shape our future decisions.

**Excellence**

**Practice:** Practice what we preach -- We will be as open and honest as we demand others to be.

**Openness**

**Honesty**

**Stewardship:** Steward resources wisely -- We will take care in our use of resources, avoiding unnecessary or ineffective consumption of donor funds, environmental resources, and our own and our colleagues' time.

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## A. Power

### *All People Can Make Their Voices Heard Equally*

#### Stakeholder(s)

##### **Citizens :**

*Citizenship, in its broadest sense, is the revolutionary idea that overturned feudal monarchies.*

##### **Political Communities :**

*It means that all members of a political community have equal rights, freedoms, and responsibilities. In the 21st century, we cannot be equal as citizens if we don't enjoy universal, unfettered use of the internet. More than that, the open web – particularly when universally accessible (our Goal 3) and complemented by open access to public interest data and information online (our Goal 2) – enables us to make full use of the powers we have as equal citizens, and realise our potential to effect change within our political communities. It can enable us to seek knowledge and think critically about issues in our society, and provide powerful tools to hold both ourselves and others accountable for the impact that our actions have on the common good.*

##### **Civic Spaces :**

*This empowering potential is more important than ever in a context of shrinking civic space, declining public trust, and growing authoritarianism.*

##### **Frank LaRue :**

*As Frank LaRue, former UN Special Rapporteur, points out, “to combat situations of inequality it is critical to ensure that marginalized or disadvantaged sections of society can express their grievances effectively and that their voices are heard...”*

##### **Marginalized Sections of Society :**

*... The Internet offers a key means by which such groups can obtain information, assert their rights, and participate in public debates concerning social, economic and political changes to improve their situation.”*

##### **Disadvantaged Sections of Society**

##### **Freedom House :**

*However, trends towards a more centralised network make it easier for governments to constrain and control what people do online. Freedom House has reported six consecutive years of deterioration in online rights... Between 2013 and 2016, laws increasing surveillance powers and data retention requirements were passed in over half of countries surveyed by Freedom House.*

##### **Brookings Institution :**

*The Brookings Institution tracked 81 partial or complete government-ordered internet shutdowns across 19 countries in a 12-month period, leading to an estimated \$2.4 billion in GDP losses.*

##### **Journalists :**

*In many cases, journalists and activists face harassment or arrest if they dare to use the web to question their government, criticise powerful figures or share data and facts that challenge official versions of reality – jeopardising the web's contribution to accountable and responsive governance (our Goal 2).*

##### **Activists**

##### **Tanzania :**

*In Tanzania, for example, new laws make it illegal to spread “false” information online, or to publish or communicate data without official sanction. Several people have been prosecuted for criticising the President on social media, and an environmental group decided not to release data relating to the ivory trade.*

##### **Ethiopia :**

*New techniques and tools for intercepting private communications, now widely exported, coupled with concentration of internet traffic and services in the hands of a few companies, make it trivially easy for governments to monitor everyone all the time. In Ethiopia, for example, mass surveillance technology was found to be regularly used to arrest and detain dissenters, particularly the ethnic Oromo population.*

### A1. Rights

*Stronger legal protection of people's rights on and to the open web.*

For example:

- Freedom of expression and privacy.
- Enhanced control over personal data collection and use.

### A2. Diversity

*Greater diversity of voices and content online.*

For example:

- Rights of women and excluded groups are protected to participate in online life without harassment, intimidation or surveillance.
- Net neutrality policies enable independent websites and small start-ups to thrive.

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## B. Accountability

### *Citizens Hold Governments and Companies to Account*

#### Stakeholder(s)

##### **Citizens :**

*Keeping political power in the hands of the people in the digital era requires that privacy is inversely proportional to power. The privacy of individual citizens must be protected from the state, and the use of personal data to make decisions for and about us must be subject to transparency and accountability safeguards. At the same time, data of public interest must be freely and easily available to everyone.*

##### **Governments :**

*When key public interest data (such as government budgets and contracts and company ownership) is freely downloadable in machine-readable formats, this gives citizens and public interest organizations powerful tools to fight corrup-*

*tion, secrecy and bias. Yet to date fewer than 10% of such datasets have been opened up.*

#### Companies

##### **Emily Bell :**

*As Columbia University's Emily Bell has argued, "We are handing the controls of important parts of our public and private lives to a very small number of people, who are unelected and unaccountable. We need regulation to make sure all citizens gain equal access to the net works of opportunity and services they need. We also need to know that all public speech and expression will be treated transparently, even if they cannot be treated equally. This is a basic requirement for a functioning democracy."*

The 'first generation' of the open internet decentralised power, and maximised freedom, driving many of the socio-economic benefits attributed to the web. Yet current trends are introducing new control points into the network, threatening to concentrate power into the hands of a few and jeopardising the web's equalising potential. Such trends include the rise of proprietary, controlled devices and standards, the growing control of social media platforms over the news and information we receive, the development of new surveillance technologies and powers, and the largely unregulated and unaccountable use of big data. The data we generate online is used not only to track our behaviour, but increasingly to shape our beliefs and actions, and even to take decisions for and about us, mostly without our informed consent. In some cases, the outcomes are highly discriminatory, as has recently been shown of the algorithms used for policing and determining prison sentences in parts of the US.

### B1. Information

*Open up key information online, and equip public interest groups to use this data to hold governments and companies accountable.*

For example:

- Reduced corruption and better public spending decisions based on the uptake and use of open data.
- Gender data is collected, analysed and leads to more equitable policymaking decisions.

#### Stakeholder(s):

##### **Public Interest Groups**

### B2. Resources & Tools

*Stronger transparency and accountability in the use of digital resources and tools.*

For example:

- Computer models (algorithms) that help determine the information and opportunities available to citizens.
- Collection and use of personal data by governments and companies.

## C. Opportunity

### *Women and Other Excluded Group Gain Economic and Social Opportunities and Resources*

#### Stakeholder(s)

##### Women :

*Our research found that women in poor urban communities are 50% less likely to be connected than men.*

##### Frank LaRue :

*As the former UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Frank LaRue, has noted: “Without Internet access, which facilitates economic development and the enjoyment of a range of human rights, marginalized groups and developing States remain trapped in a disadvantaged situation, thereby perpetuating inequality both within and between States.”*

##### Excluded Groups :

*Beyond basic connectivity, there are increasing disparities in the extent to which different social groups gain from digital technologies. The spread of digital work is helping well-educated women in some countries to close the pay gap with men. On the other hand, job losses due to artificial intelligence-powered automation will disproportionately impact low and medium skilled workers everywhere – and are predicted to be most devastating among agricultural workers in the developing world, the majority of whom are female and live in poverty.*

##### Search Providers :

*Market concentration — especially among search and content providers and social networking platforms — can further skew the distribution of opportunities in the digital economy, and the race to acquire artificial intelligence capacities is likely to lead to further concentration in the tech sector in the coming years.*

##### Google :

*Already, just one company (Google) controls a third of global advertising revenue; only 30 companies account for more than half of US internet traffic ...*

##### Facebook :

*... while Facebook’s suite of properties (Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram) account for over a fifth of all internet traffic in the Middle East.*

##### Middle East

##### Content Providers :

*Tie-ups between dominant content providers and large ISPs or mobile operators not only violate net neutrality but also stifle competition and further disadvantage small and medium-sized players. We need to move beyond the concept of a static “digital divide” that can be “closed”, to the reality that fast-evolving technologies will continue to throw up new forms of discrimination and disadvantage that markets alone cannot solve. We must be bold and creative in seeking new technical approaches and policy and regulatory solutions to promote equity without stopping innovation.*

##### ISPs

##### Mobile Operators

##### Social Networking Platforms

##### Chris Gilliard :

*As Professor Chris Gilliard writes, “You are either attempting to design bias out or you are necessarily designing bias in.”*

Our research shows that in countries around the world, a sizeable minority are gaining from the digital revolution. Employment and business opportunities are opening up for them, and they are using the web and open data to express their views and press for improvements in basic services – even, on occasion, to organise for change, or to step in and solve problems themselves when governments are incapable. However, so far, this minority are well-educated, urban, male and relatively affluent – further marginalising those who can’t afford or lack the skills to take to the web to claim their rights. Today, more than 50% of the world remains offline. The connectivity gap between countries remains enormous, with access rates in low-income countries stagnating beneath 20%, while middle income countries are moving quite fast up the curve towards 50% and beyond. Connectivity gaps within countries are also very high. While in-country gaps are partly driven by coverage deficiencies in rural areas, socioeconomic factors (e.g., gender, education, and income) play a far greater role.

### C1. Services & Opportunities

*More inclusive public services and fair opportunities in the digital economy.*

For example:

- Affordable broadband for all.
- Scale-up of free public wi-fi schemes and digital skills programmes.
- Increased financial inclusion for women through digital financial services.

### Administrative Information

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