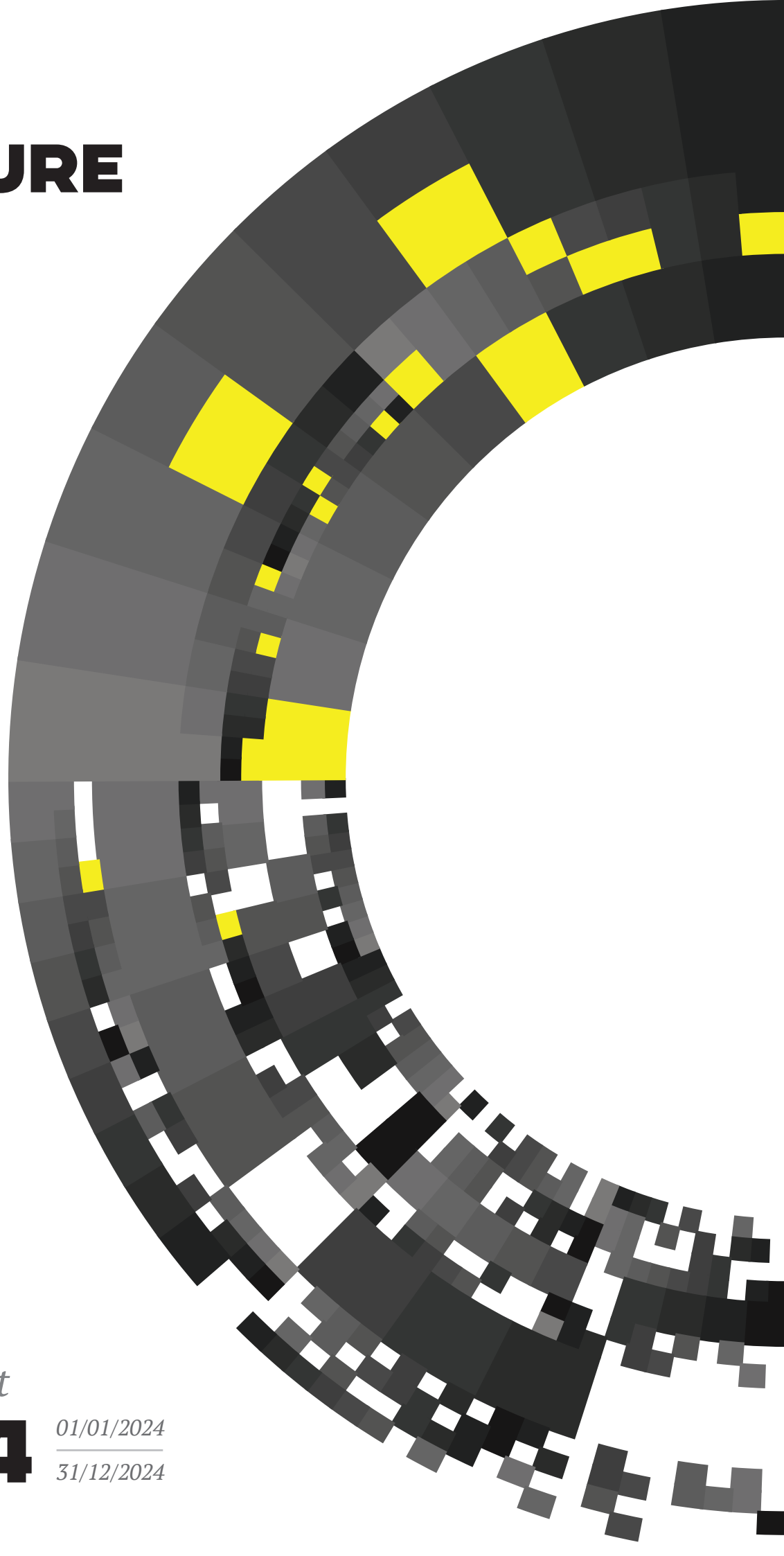


OPEN _FUTURE



annual report

2024

01/01/2024

31/12/2024

1. INTRODUCTION

This annual report covers the fourth full year of our operations and the final year of our four-year grant from Arcadia Fund. This year, we aimed to finish the work planned in our initial four-year strategy while developing a new funding framework and lines of work that will let our organization remain sustainable and develop further in the coming years. Our strategic goals remained largely the same as in the previous year.

We want to begin by highlighting several key achievements from the last year:

- In 2024, we secured—together with four partners—an €880,000 grant from the European Commission to develop an EU Public repository of public domain and openly licensed works. This grant allows us to implement the vision from our 2021 white paper on Building a Public Repository of Public Domain and Openly Licensed Works. The [CommonsDB project](#) will be at the core of a new line of work on copyright infrastructure that we will launch in 2025.
- Throughout the year, we have worked with a range of organizations in the Open Movement to explore shared advocacy agendas. This included collaborating with Creative Commons, Open Knowledge, and Wikimedia on [an advocacy agenda for the commons](#); organizing [the Alignment Assembly on AI and the Commons](#) with Creative Commons; designing [a new Knowledge Sharing advocacy agenda](#) with SPARC Open; and exploring the intersection of [Open Data, data sharing and open-source AI development](#) with the Open Source Initiative.
- Our work on the interaction between the EU copyright framework and the AI Act, adopted in early 2024, continues to make an impact. We have been able to frame the discussions about implementing TDM opt-outs and the required level of training data transparency by being among the first stakeholders to publish substantive contributions on [considerations for opt-out policies](#) and the [forthcoming transparency template](#).
- At the beginning of 2024, we proposed six policy interventions that the EU could make to strengthen its support for Digital Commons and to develop European Public Digital Infrastructures. Several of the proposals, including those on a European Public Digital Infrastructure Fund, on public option for AI, and on other aspects of Public Digital Infrastructure policies, had an impact on policy debates about European digital infrastructure.

Below, we present a detailed account of our organizational strategy, including our two core objectives, as well as achievements and impact in each area. This is followed by an overview of our communications and engagement work, the organization's sustainability, and the financial outlook.

2. OUR STRATEGY

Our strategy continues to be based on our original objectives and the guiding principle of leveraging openness to design and build systems that maximize the societal benefits of information resources in the networked information economy. In 2024, we adapted again our overall strategy and identified three strategic objectives that guide our work:

1. Digital Public Space: to advance the idea that the online environment should entail digital public spaces governed by a different logic than the commercial internet, based on Public Digital Infrastructures governed democratically and sustainably.
2. Digital Commons: to develop civil society strategies and policies for cultivating resources shared in the public interest, governed democratically, and collectively overseen. This approach provides a viable alternative to the traditional proprietary ownership model.
3. Paradox of Open: to develop an updated theory of action for the open movement aimed at leveraging openness to design and build systems that maximize the societal benefits of information resources in the networked information economy—particularly by supporting digital commons solutions.

This change aimed to distinguish work on Digital Public Space and Public Digital Infrastructures from work related to the Digital Commons, a policy concept we have increasingly embraced this year. This objective also expands the scope of our work with commons-based approaches, which previously focused on Data Commons.

For each objective, we have aimed to strengthen the open movement's strategic advocacy capacity by advancing advocacy, conducting research, building narratives, and developing shared advocacy goals. We have also strived to be the voice expressing a public interest position in debates often dominated by commercial interests.

We continue focusing on European policymaking and advocating for a unique approach to digital policies with digital commons and public digital infrastructures at their heart. At the same time, we believe exchanging views with activists, experts, and stakeholders in other regions is crucial. And we observe that some of the policy debates that affect the European policy landscape have broader, and often global, scope. For this reason we have selectively engaged in policy debates and spaces beyond the European Union.

3. IMPACT

In this section, we provide an overview of the impact of the activities we have undertaken last year. The list of activities described is not exhaustive and is meant to highlight the activities that made the greatest impact in advancing our strategic objectives.

3.1 Paradox of Open

OPEN MOVEMENT STRATEGY

In this line of work, we focused on organizing a series of strategic and sensemaking workshops with various partners in the Open Movement, building on work (especially research projects) that we conducted in previous years.

In the first half of the year, we organized [the Alignment Assembly on AI and the Commons](#), a virtual assembly for the open movement to explore principles and considerations for regulating generative AI. The convening used a novel participatory methodology to bring together 260 experts and activists from 40 countries. We aimed to confirm the validity of principles for regulating generative AI that were drafted during the 2023 CC Summit, and the process confirmed their relevance.

In August, we co-organized [Common\(s\) Cause](#), a one-day side event to Wikimania 2024, hosted by Creative Commons, Wikimedia Europe, Open Knowledge Foundation, and Open Future. The event brought together over 50 participants from 20 countries, including activists, legal and technical experts, and policy advocates. The goal of the meeting was to create links between different advocacy efforts so that a shared advocacy strategy for the Knowledge Commons can be developed – [the report from the event](#) outlines such a strategy. We also organized several [advocacy-focused sessions at Wikimania](#).

In September, together with SPARC Open, we organized [a convening on Knowledge Sharing advocacy](#), bringing together around 20 representatives of various organizations working in this field. The meeting built on three virtual workshops focused on the issues of privacy, AI, and platformization. Through an exploration of these issues the [participants reached the conclusion](#) that stronger control of public infrastructure and better governance need to be key advocacy goals.

In November, we [joined the Digital Public Goods Alliance](#), with the aim of strengthening collaboration with partner organizations in the Open Movement and other stakeholders.

3.2 Digital Commons

AI AND THE COMMONS

In 2024, work on openness and generative AI systems continued to be one of the focal points of our work. This year, both the policy debates on AI regulation intensified, and new developments related to open AI systems took place. With our work, we continued to explore issues related to

data governance in AI training, defining openness in this space, and establishing community norms around AI and the commons.

At the beginning of the year, we organized—together with Creative Commons and Proteus Strategies—a series of online convenings that explored the feasibility of creating a [“Books Data Commons”](#): increasing the amount of books available for training Large Language Models (LLM), while respecting rights and ensuring sustainability of the collection.

In May, our [policy brief on democratic governance of AI systems and datasets](#) was published by Think7, the think tank of the Italian G7 Presidency. The brief was written together with Center for European Policies (CEP), MicroSave Consulting, Digital Public Goods Alliance, Eleuther AI and Open Knowledge Foundation. We also contributed to [a policy brief on democratizing AI for the Public Good](#), written for the Brazilian G20 Presidency think tank.

In the last quarter of the year, we collaborated with the Open Source Initiative and organized [a convening on Data Governance in Open Source AI development](#). The gathering brought together 20 experts who discussed how to strengthen access to data for AI training through Open Data measures and other forms of data sharing. This resulted in a white paper to be published in January 2025.

As part of this work, we also conducted two research projects. In June, we published [a study on Share Alike and Copyleft licensing](#) that we commissioned Dr. Kacper Szkalej and Prof. Martin Senftleben to write. And in November we published a case study of the development of open small language models in Poland, which demonstrated how open alternatives to commercial LLMs are being developed.

AI AND CREATIVE LABOR

Our work on AI and creative labor continued a series of interventions related to the relationship between AI training and copyright. The initial focus at the beginning of the year was on the copyright-related provisions of the AI Act. In line with the strategy that we had developed in 2023, we advocated for enshrining in the new AI Act the approach codified previously in the TDM exceptions in the Copyright in the Digital Single Market (CDSM) Directive. This was based on the analysis that the balance found in the TDM exceptions in 2019, while not perfect, provides a good framework for the use of copyrighted works for the purpose of training generative AI models.

With the adoption of the AI Act looming, we re-started our work on addressing the practical implementation of the machine-readable opt-outs from TDM. Starting in April, we organized a series of closed-door stakeholder workshops that brought together leading AI model developers, representatives of right holders, providers of opt-out solutions, and public interest organizations. These conversations fed into the publication, in June, of a policy brief on [Considerations for Implementing Rightholder Opt-Outs by AI Model Developers](#). The brief has become an influential document for subsequent discussions in various fora: elements of our analysis have been picked up by the European Commission, in the context of [the Code of Practice for General](#)

[Purpose AI providers](#); and in discussion about AI control mechanisms hosted by the IETF. Over the summer, the work with stakeholders has become more focused on developing a standardized vocabulary for opting out from AI training, which we intend to publish in early 2025.

This year, we have also been advocating for a strong transparency requirement for content used to train General Purpose AI models: A sufficiently detailed summary of the content used for training general-purpose AI models. In June, we co-authored a white paper outlining a “sufficiently detailed summary” of training data required by the AI Act with the Mozilla Foundation. Our aim was to clarify the categories of rights and legitimate interests that justify access to information about training data, and to provide a blueprint for a template that serves these interests while respecting the rights of all parties concerned. In September, we published [an updated version of the blueprint for the template](#), and in November, we organized [a policy event on this issue](#) with Mozilla in Brussels.

In September, we joined the Stakeholder process aimed at developing [the Code of Practice for GPAI models developers](#), where we actively contribute to the Copyright and transparency working group. We also continue to work closely with the EU AI Office and other parts of the Commission on questions related to the implementation of the copyright-related provisions of the AI Act. Our work continues to be driven by the analysis that the current EU copyright framework provides safeguards for access to information for the purpose of TDM that we will only be able to defend if there is a functioning practical implementation of the opt-out and training data transparency provisions.

In late 2024, we also started a sensemaking process around the broader question of how we can ensure sustainable information production in an information environment that is increasingly influenced by the availability of powerful AI models and tools. In 2025, we intend research into this topic to become an additional focus on our work related to AI and creative labor.

3.3 Digital Public Space

PUBLIC DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE

In 2024, we continued our work on Public Digital Infrastructures (PDI). Building on the foundations of our established policy narrative around Digital Public Spaces, Digital Commons, and the need for EU investment in PDI, we worked to ensure these priorities are included in the next European Commission’s work program. We collaborated with other civil society organizations and think tanks [to advocate for PDI to become a central part of EU digital policy](#) and the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework. We [contributed to the European Commission’s White Paper consultation on digital infrastructure needs](#) and released a [policy brief on supporting PDI](#) during an event on the EuroStack at the European Parliament. Additionally, we published several pieces mapping the evolving debates of [EU digital infrastructure needs](#) and [industrial policy](#).

We led the policy work for the [Next Generation Internet \(NGI\) Commons project](#). As part of this work, we conducted mapping research to identify policies that have supported digital commons

in the European Union and globally over the last 20 years. We have set up a Strategic Advisory Panel to inform the development of a strategic agenda for supporting European digital sovereignty through investment in digital commons. In this context, we also collaborated with the “[Digital Commons European Digital Infrastructure Consortium \(DC EDIC\)](#)” by providing feedback on technical issues and proposals. As part of this project, we published a paper titled “[Digital Commons as Providers of Public Digital Infrastructures](#),” presented during the 2024 Open Forum Academy Symposium at Harvard, which offers an in-depth analysis of the relationship between Digital Commons and public digital infrastructures through case studies.

Our research fellow Clément Perarnaud wrote the report “[Finding the Path to a More Open Internet](#),” which explores EU policies supporting Open Internet principles.

Finally, we [researched issues related to the environmental sustainability of PDI](#), focusing on the use of resources (energy and water) by data centers. Based on this work, we will publish a report on how to ensure the environmental impact of digital infrastructure is minimized while serving the public interest and addressing societal needs.

4. COMMUNICATION

Our website remains our primary publishing platform, complemented by active social media engagement and a monthly newsletter. We strategically adapt our media presence by joining and leaving platforms as their relevance evolves. We also maintained an active speaking schedule, presenting at events and organizing sessions aligned with our objectives. These activities will continue to be core elements of our communication work.

4.1 Publishing and dissemination

In 2024, we published 18 publications (research papers and policy reports) and 31 shorter pieces (opinions and analyses), demonstrating our commitment to frequent and transparent blogging. We also sent 10 issues of our monthly newsletter, which reached over a thousand subscribers—double the number from 2023—while maintaining a strong 50% average open rate. The publication “[Alignment Assembly on AI and the Commons – outcomes and learnings](#)” became one of our most-read pieces, highlighting the significance of our collaboration with AI and Digital Commons experts and activists. We enhanced our dynamic blogging approach by [publicly sharing short notes about our work and progress](#).

Aligning with our values of openness, we revised our social media strategy: we joined BlueSky while discontinuing our presence on X/Twitter. We maintain active communication across [LinkedIn](#), [Mastodon](#), and [BlueSky](#), where our following continues to grow—in 2024, we saw a 2.5x increase in LinkedIn followers and 1.7x growth on Mastodon. Given the evolving social media landscape, we’re exploring new approaches for 2025 to manage our presence across these fragmented platforms effectively.

4.2 Events and Public Speaking

In 2024, we participated in 50 media events, including 10 press coverages, 3 media appearances, and interviews in 2 podcasts. Our work on the AI Act, internet standards, copyright, or the open movement has been covered by regional and international papers (such as DGP and Rzeczpospolita-Poland, Tagesspiegel-Germany or The New York Times-US) and specialized platforms (such as Politico Pro—EU, MLEx-UK or MIT Technology Review-US).

In-person events (last year, we attended 29) and online events (we took part in 4) are very important in our work process. We are a small team, and it is crucial to connect, exchange, and conceptualize our policy recommendations with peers. In 2024, we participated in large policy and activist events like the PublicSpaces conference and Mozfest in Amsterdam, Wikimania in Katowice or re:Publica in Berlin, in several targetted policy debates – mainly in Brussels, and a range of smaller workshops, some of which we organized (we highlight them in the Impact section of this report).

5. ORGANISATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

In terms of organizational development, we hired Jan Krewer for the position of senior Policy Analyst, leading our work on Digital Commons policies and our work in the NGI Commons project. Throughout the year, we worked as a five-person team consisting of the three co-directors supported by the Senior Policy Analyst and Engagement Lead. We also had four new fellows as part of our fellowship program: Melissa Hagemann, Sam Moore, Mila Samdub and Mala Kumar.

We continue functioning as a remote team and aim to meet, on average, every two months for meetings that focus on planning, strategy, and team integration.

5.1 Sustainability

We are committed to running Open Future in an environmentally friendly and sustainable way. Our operation as a remote organization allowed us to produce relatively few emissions that would be directly related to our daily operations¹.

Our most relevant sources of emissions are those related to travel by team members for either team meetings or in-person events attendance. To minimize the CO₂ emissions generated by travel, we follow our travel policy, which encourages rail travel over other means of transportation,² and requires us to track and compensate for travel-related CO₂ emissions. Furthermore, all international travel is reviewed by the directors, with the aim of reducing the amount of travel that we do.

¹ To minimise the emissions related to the products or services we consume, we select, wherever possible, vendors that provide carbon-neutral products or services – such as our hosting provider, [greenhost](#).

² By banning air travel for trips that take 5 hours or less by train and encouraging rail travel by paying for first-class train tickets for trips longer than 300 km.

By implementing such a policy, in 2024 we caused the following CO₂ emissions³ by travel undertaken by our team members. The amounts of saved CO₂ account for train trips where the duration is longer than 5 hours calculated as the difference between emissions for train and air travel:

Type	Number of Trips	CO ₂ emitted (in kg)	CO ₂ saved (in kg)
Air travel	24	8440	0
Rail Travel	48	899	489
Total	72	9339	489

Despite a bigger team and more traveling, we managed to keep our travel-related CO₂ emissions in 2024 at the same level as in 2023, by flying less (24 trips compared to 26 in 2023) and by traveling by train more often (48 trips compared to 21 in 2023).

We have compensated for these 9339 kgs of CO₂ emissions by purchasing Fair Trade Gold standard certificates for 10 tons of verified emission reductions through the [Fair Climate Funds](#)⁴.

6. FINANCIAL

In 2024 the Arcadia Fund grant remained Open Future's biggest source of funding covering 44% of our expenses. This percentage has steadily come down from 70% in 2021, reflecting a steady diversification of our fundraising sources. Given our fundraising performance in 2024 we are confident that we can continue to operate with a similar size after the end of the grant period at the end of 2024.

In 2024 our total expenses (and corresponding income) have increased significantly from €451K in 2023 to €572K in 2026. This amounts to a 27% increase year over year which is mainly due to the expansion of our team for the NGI commons project. This falls short of the €620K budget target that we had formulated for 2024. As outlined above, we have nevertheless managed to achieve the objectives formulated in our 2024 workplan.

In the following section, we will highlight the key differences between the 2024 budget and our actual spending over the past 12 months.

6.1 Budget vs. Actual

The following table provides an overview of budget versus actual expenses during 2024. Our overall budget projected expenses of €620.000 and income to match. Of this income, €495.000 was pledged at the beginning of the year, and €125.000 was a fundraising goal.

³ Calculation based on search results returned by ecopassenger.org.

⁴ See the purchase certificate in the Annex.

Our total expenses and income (€572.595) are 8% below the budget target. This is due to underspending on activity costs, which are explained in the next section. In 2024, we raised €137.828 from the following sources:

- A USD 50.000 grant from the Mozilla Foundation for our AI and transparency work
- €20.000 from the Bertelsmann Stiftung for a report on Public AI (with another €15.000 to follow in 2025)
- A USD 10.000 contribution from the Open Source Initiative for a white paper on Data governance in the context of Open Source AI
- €45.000 in contributions to the costs of a series of workshops on the implementation of AI training opt-outs from participating AI model developers (Open AI, Google, Microsoft, Anthropic, Github, AWS)
- A €11.000 contribution from SPARC to the costs of an open movement knowledge sharing workshop.
- Various smaller amounts, including a contribution of €4500 from the Green screen catalyst funds for reports and workshops

Together with €156.158 in income from the NGI commons project, €7.124 in interest and a €21.484 drawdown from our 2023 OSI grant, this covers the remainder of our operating costs.

	2024 (Budget)	2024 (Actual)
Expenses	€620.000	€572.595
Personnel Costs	€ 459.000	€ 456.752
Activity Costs	€ 129.000	€ 93.616
Overhead Costs	€ 32.000	€ 22.226
Income	€620.000	€572.595
Arcadia	€250.000	€250.000
Open Society Foundations	€ 95.000	€ 21.484
NGI commons	€150.000	€156.158
Interest	0	€ 7.124
Other (see above)	0	€137.828
To raise	€125.000	€0

6.2 Outlook & Sustainability

With the end of 2024, our Arcadia grant has come to an end. The contribution from Arcadia initially amounted to 70% of our overall budget and has been crucial in allowing us to build out and establish the organisation. In the past year the contribution from the Arcadia Grant has for the first time amounted to less than half (44%) of our operating budget, which reflects the successful diversification of our funding sources.

Our 2025 budget, which was approved by the supervisory board on December 16, 2024, foresees operating expenses of €720.000 against €555.000 of secured income at the time of writing this report. We are confident that we can raise the remaining funds and build on the successful foundation established with the support of Arcadia in the years to come.

