1. OpenCollective

Disclaimer: Most hyperlinks aren't working yet, we are in heavy development

For more information check out our Whitepaper: Deternet Whitepaper

Manifesto for a Global Digital Commons

Deternet's goal is to help build a global digital commons: a collaboratively developed, non-profit digital infrastructure that is accessible to everyone. Today, a significant share of the world’s digital systems is controlled by a small number of organizations. As automation and AI accelerate and more economic activity depends on this infrastructure, concentration of ownership increasingly translates into concentration of power. Some scholars even refer to it as digital feudalism or a world owned by kings and queens.

This concentration is not accidental. It emerges from the underlying rules of the current economic system, which reward capital accumulation, economies of scale, and network effects. In digital markets especially, these dynamics tend to favor centralization: the largest platforms become more valuable as they grow, attract more users, and accumulate more data and resources. Over time, this creates strong feedback loops that concentrate both economic value and control.

We refuse to accept this outcome as inevitable. While these dynamics are a logical consequence of the system as it is currently structured, they are not unchangeable. A shared, open digital commons can provide an alternative—one that distributes access, reduces dependency on centralized actors, and ensures that the benefits of technological progress are more broadly shared.

1. The Root Problem Is Structural Ownership

We live in a system that promises opportunity, yet in practice amplifies inequality. Starting points are unequal, and because wealth generates more wealth, advantages compound over time. Access to capital, knowledge, and networks determines who gets ahead—and who gets left behind. The issue is not merely wealthy individuals, but a **global system of capital and institutions designed to concentrate ownership over time**. This system operates through multiple reinforcing mechanisms:

- **Venture capital and angel investors** fund early-stage companies with the expectation of dominance and outsized returns
- **Private equity** acquires and consolidates critical infrastructure and services
- **Hedge funds and mutual funds** allocate capital toward the largest incumbents, reinforcing their position
- **Bond markets** allow large corporations to raise capital more easily and cheaply than smaller competitors
- Even **green bonds and ESG investing**, while well-intentioned, largely preserve existing ownership structures rather than transforming them

At the same time, corporate strategy reinforces concentration:

- Large firms can engage in **price wars**, undercutting competitors at a loss to eliminate them—only to consolidate power afterward. This is not theoretical; it is a recurring strategy in modern markets

Financial markets further entrench this system:

- **Public stock markets** often function as liquidity events for early investors, allowing them to exit and realize gains
- The general public participates later, largely **speculating on price movements**, rather than meaningfully influencing ownership or control

Finally, wealth preservation mechanisms ensure continuity:

- Sophisticated legal and financial structures enable wealthy individuals to **minimize taxation during their lifetime**
- Inheritance systems allow wealth to be **transferred across generations with limited redistribution**

Together, these mechanisms create a system that is not merely unequal, but **designed to remain unequal**.

Without changing ownership, inequality is not a side effect—it is the outcome.

2. Unequal Starting Points and Compounding Effects

Not everyone enters the system equally.

- Some begin with capital, assets, and access. Assets grow over time often (5-10%+)
- Others rely solely on wages and limited savings. Wages grow much slower (2–3%)
- Access to high-return opportunities is uneven
- Wealthy people can take risks since a loss won't ruin them

Over time, **compounding magnifies these differences**:

- Capital earns returns
- Returns are reinvested
- Ownership expands
- Control increases

Meanwhile, those without capital remain dependent on systems they do not own.

This is a **self-reinforcing dynamic**, not a temporary imbalance.

Merger and Acquisitions

Compounding for corporations also allows for merger and acquisitions i.e getting rid of competition and expanding product portfolios.

- A *significant share* of notable tech firms—especially startups in software, AI, social media, cloud services, and enterprise tools—have become parts of Big Tech
- Many **brands you know as independent** are actually owned by the big tech firms because of acquisitions (for example, Instagram and WhatsApp are owned by Meta; YouTube, Waymo is owned by Alphabet).
- In some academic estimates, companies like Google alone have been linked with ownership, investment, or control relationships with **thousands of smaller entities** across software, digital services, and infrastructure.

3. Access to Opportunity Is Structurally Restricted

The highest-return opportunities are often **not open to everyone**.

- Private investments are limited to **accredited investors**—those who already meet wealth thresholds

- Early-stage deals are concentrated within **elite social and professional networks**
- Venture capital and private equity operate through **closed circles of trust and access**

This creates a system where:

> The best opportunities to build wealth are systematically reserved for those who already have it.

Wealth is not just accumulated—it is **protected and compounded through exclusivity**.

This is not a free market. It is a **gated system of access**.

4. We Are All Locked Into the System

Participation in this system is not optional—it is structurally enforced.

Millions of people save for retirement through pension funds, mutual funds, and institutional investment vehicles.

These funds are then:

- Invested in public markets
- Allocated toward the largest and most profitable corporations
- Concentrated in companies that dominate digital infrastructure

This creates a paradox:

> People seeking financial security are, indirectly, funding the concentration of ownership that limits collective access and equality.

The system feeds itself:

- Retirement savings → invested in dominant firms
- Dominant firms → expand infrastructure control
- Control → generates higher returns
- Higher returns → attract more capital

This is not individual choice. It is **systemic design**.

5. Automation as an Inequality Multiplier

Automation fundamentally changes the economics of ownership.

- Labor is replaced by capital-intensive systems
- Output scales without proportional increases in workforce
- Returns shift from workers to infrastructure owners

This creates a powerful dynamic:

> The more automated a system becomes, the more value flows to those who own it.

Automation does not distribute gains evenly. It **amplifies existing ownership structures**:

- Companies with infrastructure scale faster
- Smaller competitors cannot keep up
- Wealth concentrates more rapidly

Automation is not neutral—it is a **force multiplier for capital**.

6. Digital Infrastructure as the Backbone of All Industries

No modern industry operates independently of digital infrastructure. Technology is no longer a sector—it is the **operating system of the entire economy**.

Retail, logistics, healthcare, finance, education, manufacturing, and media all rely on:

- Cloud platforms to run their operations
- Data infrastructure to make decisions, including analysis done by AI agents
- Communication networks to coordinate activity
- Digital platforms to reach customers

Without these systems, businesses cannot compete at scale—or in many cases, cannot function at all.

This creates a structural dependency:

> To participate in the economy, organizations must rely on infrastructure they do not own.

The Power of Platform Dependency

Customer access itself is increasingly mediated by digital platforms.

- Businesses depend on social platforms for visibility and marketing
- Sellers depend on digital marketplaces for distribution
- Developers depend on app ecosystems for reach
- Professionals depend on digital networks for communication and coordination

If a business chooses not to participate in these platforms, the consequences are immediate:

- Loss of visibility
- Loss of customers
- Loss of competitiveness

Participation is not optional—it is **economically enforced**.

Locked-In Ecosystems

These platforms are not neutral tools. They are **controlled ecosystems** designed to retain users and prevent exit.

Lock-in occurs through multiple mechanisms:

- **Network effects**: The value of the platform increases with the number of users, making it difficult to leave when everyone else remains
- **Data lock-in**: User data, customer relationships, and history are stored within the platform and are difficult to transfer elsewhere
- **Technical dependencies**: Applications and workflows are built on proprietary tools and APIs that do not easily interoperate with alternatives
- **Switching costs**: Moving to another platform requires time, money, and risk—often too high for businesses to justify
- **Social lock-in**: Communication happens where others already are, making exit socially and professionally isolating

The result is a system where:

> “ Users and businesses are not just customers—they are participants in ecosystems they cannot easily leave.

From Dependency to Control

Because entire industries depend on these systems, control over digital infrastructure translates directly into control over economic activity.

- Platforms can change rules, pricing, or visibility at any time
- Businesses must adapt or risk losing access to their customers
- Entire sectors become vulnerable to decisions made by a small number of infrastructure owners

This is not just market power—it is **structural leverage over the economy itself**.

Why This Matters

When digital infrastructure becomes unavoidable and inescapable:

- Ownership becomes more important than ever
- Dependency becomes systemic, not optional
- Inequality becomes embedded in the structure of participation

This is how digital infrastructure evolves from a tool into a **gatekeeper of economic life**.

This makes them the **primary accelerators of automated concentration**.

If ownership structures are not addressed here, the effects will spread:

- Other industries will adopt the same models
- Automation patterns will replicate across sectors
- Concentration will deepen system-wide

This is why the transformation must begin at the core of digital infrastructure.

Once ownership in big tech changes, it creates a **template for other sectors** to follow.

7. Digital Sovereignty Is Not Enough

Efforts to build regional alternatives—such as European Eurostack or national technology

stacks—are often presented as solutions. But they fail to address the root issue. Yes, they take away market share from Big Tech which is a good thing, however

Changing who owns the infrastructure geographically does not change how it is owned structurally.

Replacing one set of dominant corporations with another—American, European, or otherwise—simply reproduces the same system:

- Concentrated ownership
- Profit-maximizing control
- Dependency for everyone else

While Eurostack, Indiastack, Chinastack etcetera aims to reduce dependence on foreign providers, they **do not open up the most critical layers of infrastructure** but instead remain privately controlled, proprietary, and closed. Their technologies, designs, and operational systems are not part of a shared commons but are instead protected as competitive advantages.

As a result, these efforts do not democratize infrastructure; they merely **re centralize it within a different geopolitical boundary**. Without opening and collectively owning these foundational systems, national stacks risk reinforcing the same dependency and concentration they claim to solve—substituting one set of gatekeepers for another rather than eliminating gatekeeping itself.

Digital sovereignty without shared ownership is not liberation—it is substitution.

It replaces one group of gatekeepers with another, leaving the structure of dependency intact. This is not progress. It is **digital feudalism under a different flag**.

8. The Expansion of the Commons Must Go Deeper

To truly break this system, the commons must extend beyond software and platforms.

It must include the **entire technological stack**, including:

- Datacenters and cloud infrastructure
- Telecommunications networks
- Semiconductor design and manufacturing
- Advanced industrial systems

As long as these capabilities remain privately controlled, they can be leveraged to concentrate power.

The long-term goal must be clear: T**he knowledge, designs, and infrastructure of critical**

technologies should evolve toward open, shared, and collectively governed systems.

9. The Commons Requires a Break from Return-on-Investment Logic

A true digital commons **cannot be built on the expectation of financial return**. As long as infrastructure is funded with the expectation of ROI:

- Investors demand control
- Returns must be maximized
- Access becomes restricted
- Power concentrates again

This recreates the same system under a different name. **We cannot solve concentration with the same incentives that created it.**

Instead, the digital commons must be funded as:

- A **public good**
- A **shared utility**
- A **long-term societal investment without profit extraction**

Returns must be **social**, not financial.

10. Redirecting Existing Capital Toward the Commons

The resources to build a digital commons already exist. They are simply allocated differently. Take retirement capital for instance. Instead of being funneled into dominant corporations, a portion of global retirement savings can be redirected into:

- Commons-owned infrastructure
- Public-interest compute and networks
- Long-term, non-extractive digital assets

The Great Wealth Transfer

A historic shift is underway: the **inter generational transfer of wealth** from older generations to younger ones. (Estimated to be 12 Trillion Dollars)

If left unchanged:

- Wealth continues to concentrate

- Inequality is reinforced

But it could instead be directed toward:

- Public digital infrastructure funds
- Commons-based trusts
- Collective ownership systems

This is a rare opportunity to **reshape ownership at scale**.

11. We Demand a Global Digital Commons

We call for the creation of a **global digital commons**—infrastructure that is:

- **Collectively owned** through pension funds, sovereign funds, inheritance-based trusts, and cooperatives
- **Universally accessible**, enabling anyone to build, deploy, and scale technology
- **Operated for long-term public benefit**, not profit maximization
- **Funded without extractive return requirements**, ensuring independence from capital accumulation
- **Supported by aligned partners**, including energy providers and manufacturers
- Redistributes ownership of critical asset
- Removes the pressure of profit extraction
- Expands access to opportunity
- Creates a durable counterbalance to private dominance

This is not about eliminating markets. It is about ensuring that the **foundation of the digital economy is not exclusively owned by them**.

11. We Reject Digital Feudalism

A world where essential infrastructure is controlled by a small number of entities—regardless of nationality—is a world of dependency.

It is a system where:

- Access is granted, not guaranteed
- Opportunity is gated, not shared
- Innovation is permitted, not empowered
- Wealth compounds upward, not outward

We reject this future.

We fight at the root: **ownership, incentives, access, and compounding power**.

Conclusion

The question is not whether digital infrastructure will shape the future—it already does. The question is **who will own it—and who will be allowed to participate in that ownership**. Today, access to opportunity is gated, capital compounds unequally, and even collective savings are funneled into systems that reinforce concentration.

A **global digital commons** offers another path.

Without it, automation will deepen inequality.
With it, technology can become a shared foundation for human progress.

We will build it.
We will fund it.
We will govern it—together.

Mission

The Deternet initiative seeks to build a global digital commons—one that is decentralized, open source, and collectively owned. This ecosystem would span hardware, software, telecommunications, hosting, and power infrastructure on a worldwide scale. Its approach centers on empowering a network of interconnected local hubs by providing them with the resources, knowledge, and support needed to grow and sustain this shared infrastructure.

Each hub would take responsibility for developing and maintaining systems within its region, while also helping individuals transition toward open-source tools and services in their everyday digital lives. The broader vision is to create ecosystems that function like open internet protocols—accessible to anyone, shaped by contributors everywhere, and free from centralized control. In this sense, it mirrors technologies like HTTPS, IPFS, Bittorent and DNS: universal standards that remain open rather than being owned by large tech corporations.

While much of the necessary infrastructure already exists, it is currently concentrated in the hands of a few dominant players. Part of the initiative’s mission, therefore, is to encourage established companies to participate in and support this shift. This may be challenging, but with enough momentum, a decentralized movement could reach a tipping point—where organizations are faced with a choice: adapt and join, or risk becoming irrelevant.

Note!

- Check out our global hub map to find out which hub is responsible for your region. Once found, there will be a link to the open collectives funding page for that hub e.g Deternet Groningen.

Organization

At the moment, Deternet is mainly set up to act as a Fiscal Host to get new hubs started as quick and smooth as possible. Fiscal hosts enable Collectives (local hubs in this case) to transact financially without needing to be legally incorporated. That means handling the accounting, taxes, invoices, contracts etcetera, while your hub stays in full control. Eventually, it is up to each hub to stay a collective or to become their own fiscal host if they receive an official non profit status. If you are interested in joining Deternet as your hub's fiscal host then please apply here -> Deternet Fiscal Host

Donations

Considering this technological disruption, it appears that ultimately, the only individuals capable of earning a livelihood will be those who own the digital infrastructure. Therefore, our project is volunteer only (no paid contributors) and will remain free as in lunch and free as in speech for eternity ;). However, if you want to give a volunteer a tip for any kind of service they helped you with then that's always appreciated of course ;)

Currently, in addition to serving as a fiscal host for its hubs, Deternet will allocate donations towards projects that either encompass multiple hubs or fall outside the financing capabilities of a single hub. One might consider initiatives such as undersea and transatlantic cables, dark fiber cables, internet exchange points, data centers, points of presence, among others. Just as for smaller hub projects, these larger projects get their own funding page. In this way the community can decide decide where it will be best to allocate the resources at a particular moment in time.

Day to Day Expenses

- Hosting a Deternet Summit each year (Even though there will be a event page for that as well)
- Domains & Emails
- Our self hosted websites, forums, blog, documentation page
- Merchandise, stickers, flyers, t-shirts, etc.
- Legal expenses for our Non-Profit
- Administrative expenses that might come up

- Travel sponsorship for contributors for conferences, meetups or lectures at educational institutions.

Ways to contribute

- **Install open software:** Try to remove as much for profit apps as possible and replace them with open source alternatives. Check out or website or join a local hub where you can bring any of your devices and we help you install open source alternatives to almost anything.
- **Buy open hardware:** There are actually corporations at this moment that sell open hardware (to a certain extend ;)) in the form of phones, laptops, pc's, smart watches, tablets, camera's, TV's and much more. Check out our website for the ones that exist already today. This will put a huge strain on the major companies that dominate the market today. They will either need to become open as well or face the consequences of becoming obsolete
- **Human Labor**: In all honesty next to financial contributions we mainly need human labor. The largest expense of a digital infrastructure is not the materials themselves but the people that build it. All the cables that need to be laid, racks that need to be build, cell towers that need to be put up and installers installing networks and servers in people's homes. Hence, the best way to contribute is look for a hub in your region, go to one of their meetings and before you know it you will be part of the crew ;)
- **Space:** If you are an owner of a space that could be used for a hub, a point of presence, storage unit or anything else please let us know! If you already know to which region you want to donate your space then simply contact the hub straight away. If not let us now at Deternet Spaces and we will make sure it ends up in the right hands.
- **Physical Goods**: We also need lots of hardware, tools and machines. Yes we can buy this with financial contributions but why would we do that if we can get these items straight away. We are all about recycling and giving old hardware a new life and purpose ! Now, hardware is mainly donated straight to the hub that needs a particular item. Simply go to their website and they will have a section that will state what hardware/tools they are looking for at this moment.
- **Spread the word:** Provide guest lectures at educational institutions. On our documentation page there is enough information you can use to inspire others about the project.
- **Setup a Hub:** Reach out to us if you want to setup your own hub in your city or region! Then we will make sure you will be guided and obtain exposure on our global blog

Online Community

If you want to get involved and stay up to date please join one of our open source social pages ;)

- Mastadon

- Mobilizon
- PeerTube
- PixelFed
- Discourse
- Blog
- Matrix Chat
- IRC

Hope to see you join the project in any shape or form such that together we can shape the world into a collaborative and open society

Cheers, now let's get to work ;)

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