

Bold New People-Centered Initiative on AI Launched by Major Foundations

10.17.25 | Linda J. Rosenthal, JD



“Artificial intelligence is a matter of design — not destiny.”

That’s the message behind Humanity AI: an ambitious new initiative formally announced on Tuesday, August 14, 2025, by a core coalition of ten of America’s leading philanthropic foundations. With \$500 million already promised and a five-year timeline, Humanity AI is “dedicated to making sure people beyond Silicon Valley have a stake in the future of artificial intelligence (AI).”

The Coalition

The founding participants, representing a broad range of philanthropies, are led by the MacArthur Foundation and Omidyar Network. The additional eight are: the Doris Duke Foundation, Ford Foundation, Lumina Foundation, Kapor Foundation, Mellon Foundation, Mozilla Foundation, the David and Lucille Packard Foundation, and Siegel Family Endowment.

John Palfrey, president of the MacArthur Foundation, explained: “Every day, people learn more about the ways AI is impacting their lives, and it can often feel like this technology is happening to us rather than with us and for us.” He added: “The stakes are too high to defer decisions to a handful of companies and leaders within them.” See 10 Funders, \$500 Million Targeting AI and Humanity (October 16, 2025), *The NonProfit Times*.

Michele L. Jawando, president of Omidyar Network, elaborated: “There are no inevitabilities. There is no set future. Tech has incredible potential, but must be steered by humans, not the other way around. The future will not be written by algorithms – it will be written by people as a collective force. We are at a crossroads.” See Humanity AI launches \$500 million commitment to mobilize civil



[society in shaping the future of AI](#) (October 14, 2025) *omidyar.com*.

“The future belongs to those who actively create it, and that shan’t be a few leaders in Silicon Valley. It’s all of us,” added Mozilla Foundation Executive Director Nabiha Syed. “The systems shaping our lives must be powered by people, open by design, and fueled by imagination.” See [Foundations want to curb AI developers’ influence with \\$500 million aimed at centering human needs](#) (October 14, 2025, 9:02 am; updated 2:28 pm) James Pollard, *AP*.

The Vision

“Ten major US foundations are investing \$500 million in Humanity AI to ensure that AI strengthens communities and creativity instead of concentrating power in a few corporations. See [Humanity AI launches \\$500M initiative to build a people-centred future](#) (October 16, 2025) *dig.watch*.

“Digital technologies have already changed how we work, connect, and even find love. Now, we are told AI is on a similar but much faster, more pervasive, and inescapable trajectory in terms of the impact it will have on our lives.” The coalition’s aims are “to loosen the grip” of AI’s “moneyed developers, fueled by an investing frenzy,” on the development of this nascent and critical technology, and “to place human interests at the forefront of the technology’s rapid integration into daily life.”

The Humanity AI website explains that the purpose of this initiative is to unite “... philanthropy in a broad coalition to build a more human(e) future in which AI is shaped by and for people.”

Acknowledging that artificial intelligence is “neither a poison nor a panacea,” and cannot be ignored, the coalition members have asserted that the “choice in front of all of us is clear: will we allow AI to be designed only for profit, or will we invest in a future where people get to decide how, whether, and to what ends AI is used?”

Mozilla’s Nabiha Syed elaborated: “... Humanity AI’s role is identifying what ‘flourishing’ looks like in a world with artificial intelligence. Right now we’re being offered ‘efficiency’ but that is not equivalent to ‘flourishing.’ She added: “I don’t want my life to be efficient. I want my life to flourish. I want it to feel rich and robust and healthy and safe.”

Each of the core group of ten foundations has promised to make grants in at least one of five priority areas: (1) advancing democracy; (2) strengthening education; (3) protecting artists; (4) enhancing work; or (5) defending personal security.

“The coalition will continue to grow, bringing in additional voices focused on the social and cultural impact of AI. Humanity AI welcomes and continues to invite new funders to advance its mission and expand its work toward building a society where people and communities have greater opportunity and agency to shape their lives by shaping AI.”

A Bold “Big Bet”

Launching Humanity AI is an uplifting and optimistic move during these tumultuous times when so many norms and standards are being shattered and institutions are having difficulty withstanding aggressive crosswinds from the federal government.



The ten philanthropies that created this initiative are bold and innovative, not shying away from forward thinking and action.

The MacArthur Foundation, for example, is no stranger to the idea of “big bets.” See our earlier series including [MacArthur \\$100-Million Grant Contest](#) (July 7, 2016) *FPLG Blog* and [Five Years Later – Has MacArthur’s \\$100-Million “Big Bet” Paid Off?](#) (October 25, 2023) *FPLG Blog*.

More generally, see [The “Big Bet” Social Change Movement](#) (April 15, 2019) *FPLG Blog*, highlighting the Winter 2016 issue of the Stanford Social Innovation Review and the lengthy article by the SSIR editors titled [Making Big Bets for Social Change](#).

MacArthur’s new web page dedicated to its upcoming participation in the *Humanity AI* initiative is titled: [AI Opportunity](#) and listed under its “Big Bets” category. In addition to contributing to the \$500-million pool, AI Opportunity “will focus on the intersection of AI, the economy, and the workforce—with a focus on young people in Chicago; community-centered AI development and use; and nonprofit AI applications.” MacArthur welcomes readers who want to “stay connected” while the Foundation officials are still “in the early stages of developing a grantmaking strategy and are not accepting unsolicited proposals” yet. However, [they] welcome the chance to learn about new ideas and perspectives related to this work.”

Conclusion

According to information on the [Humanity AI](#) website, its “partners will [begin aligned grantmaking ... in fall 2025](#), driving new investments across their respective portfolios and Humanity AI’s areas of focus.”

The fiscal sponsor for [Humanity AI](#) is Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors (RPA), who are gearing up so they “can make grants from the pooled fund beginning in 2026.”

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