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policy and practice

Transparency and data sharing in philanthropy: towards a data commons

Lucia Gomez Teijeiro, luciagomez.geneva@gmail.com
Bern University of Applied Sciences, Switzerland
University of Geneva, Switzerland

Jack O'Neill, jack.oneill@philea.eu
Philanthropy Europe Association (Philea), Belgium

Giuseppe Ugazio, Giuseppe.Ugazio@unige.ch
University of Geneva, Switzerland

Philanthropic data remains fragmented across organisations, jurisdictions, and reporting systems, limiting transparency, learning, and coordination. Drawing on interdisciplinary discussions from the ERNOP SafeSpaces 2025 roundtable, we examine data-sharing barriers and existing initiatives, identifying lessons and opportunities for future data infrastructures. Building on these, we derive design principles for an Open Philanthropy Data Commons: input flexibility, AI assistance, interoperability, and federated governance. Finally, we suggest an operational pipeline for implementation and close formulating further directions.

Keywords transparency • philanthropy • data commons • collaboration

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This article emerged from discussions and collaborations in preparation for and during the ERNOP Safe Spaces for Philanthropy 2025.

Introduction[1]

Across Europe, and globally, philanthropy operates in complex and diverse legal, organisational, and cultural contexts, shaped by varying expectations. Researchers and practitioners have increasingly sought to understand the sector's structures, roles, and contributions to the public good, including questions of governance, accountability, and transparency (Harris and Neely, 2021; Yasmin and Ghafran, 2021). This growing interest reflects broader efforts to understand how philanthropy functions, how

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resources are allocated, how non-profit action contributes to addressing societal challenges, and how its impact could be better assessed.

Advancing knowledge in all of these areas relies fundamentally on the availability and quality of data. Yet, despite notable progress in documentation and reporting, knowledge of philanthropic projects, financial flows, decision-making processes, and organisational typologies remain fragmented across contexts. This dispersion of philanthropic activity documentation reflects the sector's heterogeneity and the varied institutional, legal, and cultural environments in which philanthropy operates. It also highlights scope for reflection on how transparency and data-sharing practices could evolve to better support philanthropy's public-purpose orientation and the visibility of its contribution (Yang et al, 2014; Reid, 2018; Ghoorah et al, 2025), while simultaneously support learning and coordination.

The European Network of Research on Philanthropy (ERNOP) SafeSpaces 2025 'Transparency and Data Sharing' roundtable embodied a cross-disciplinary dialogue where both philanthropy researcher and practitioner experts reflected on current transparency debates (Bekkers et al, 2025) and discussed the dynamics of philanthropy data sharing. This dialogue also encouraged participants to explore and discuss possibilities for a participatory Open Philanthropy Data Commons, co-created by philanthropy for philanthropy. In this article, we bring together these perspectives to examine transparency barriers in philanthropy and their systemic consequences. We then review existing initiatives congregating philanthropy data and, drawing on this mapping, derive a set of design and governance principles for an Open Philanthropy Data Commons. Building on these principles, we operationalise a pipeline for its functionality and conclude formulating guiding directions and questions that require collective sector participation towards the materialisation of a sustainable and participatory Open Philanthropy Data Commons.[2]

Context

Research on philanthropy frequently recognises that transparency is central to accountability and legitimacy (Harris and Neely, 2021). However, data-sharing practices tend to focus on selected aspects of philanthropic activity. Information on organisational missions and grant allocations is commonly shared, while areas such as performance assessment, organisational learning, or internal decision making are communicated more selectively. As a result, external audiences are typically exposed to a partial view of philanthropic work, which may limit opportunities for shared learning and informed engagement. Moreover, regulatory variation results in fragmented information environments that make cross-border analysis and comparisons difficult. Even where registries and reporting requirements exist, they often rely on non-standardised, non-machine-readable formats, which limit aggregation, comparability, and automated analysis and can result in data that is abundant but difficult to translate into actionable insight. While standardisation, interoperability and machine-readable disclosure are preconditions for effective reuse data, agreeing on common sector-wide standards remains challenging; these need to be negotiated and determined among stakeholders.

These conditions have downstream effects on the operational environment in which philanthropies work. A lack of comparable data on grants, strategies, and outcomes can constrain evidence-informed decision making and increase the risk of overlapping or duplicative efforts. At the same time, empirical research with donors and grantees

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indicates that higher perceived levels of data sharing are associated with stronger funder–grantee relationships and greater trust, suggesting that increased visibility can support the legitimacy and effectiveness of philanthropic action (Becker, 2018; Neely et al, 2023; Ghoorah et al, 2025).

Barriers and opportunities for philanthropy data sharing

While the benefits of improved transparency are increasingly acknowledged in philanthropy research (Bekkers et al, 2025), progress remains hindered by obstacles that are not just operational or technical, but are also reflected in the broader legal, institutional, and cultural structures of the sector.

Technical barriers

Philanthropy data remains fragmented: inconsistently collected, scattered across disconnected systems, and packaged in a multitude of formats, often unstructured and aggregated. While many of these barriers could potentially be alleviated by leveraging artificial intelligence (AI), another barrier is the digital divide of the sector (Vogelsang et al, 2021; Cipriano and Za, 2025). Many philanthropic organisations, particularly smaller or volunteer-led ones, have limited access to the tools, infrastructure, and skills required for digital reporting and data analysis.

Recent advances in AI systems offer new user-friendly solutions for simplifying data safety screening, structuring, and ensuring interoperability. However, technology is not sufficient, realising its potential depends on broad participatory processes to support shared standards, incentive structures, and agreement around common approaches to philanthropic data infrastructures. Until sectorial alignment is achieved, and participatory efforts materialise, sustainable philanthropy data sharing will remain unrealised.

Regulatory variation and inconsistent governance barriers

Philanthropic regulatory frameworks vary widely across jurisdictions (O'Neill and Kilicalp, 2025), resulting in differentiated governance environments that shape how data is reported, stored and accessed. From the authors' observations, even where disclosure is mandatory, information appears to be frequently submitted in non-interoperable formats, limiting comparative processing. As a result, comparative analysis is limited in scope, as there is an inability to identify at a granular level the characteristics of philanthropic sectors across borders.

In the absence of harmonised guidance, common standards and shared governance frameworks, achieving global sectoral data unification, meaningful comparison and data reuse remains a significant challenge for philanthropy. Recent research on European foundations highlights that philanthropic data remains largely non-standardised across jurisdictions, limiting comparability and consistency. Initiatives such as the 360Giving Data Standard demonstrate the value of agreed data formats, enabling grant-making data to be easily collated, analysed, and compared across organisations. The emerging Philanthropy Data Commons offers a potential model for harmonising data governance and interoperability through a shared, sector-governed infrastructure. A universally accepted approach to submitting philanthropic

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data that recognises sectoral diversity while maintaining common criteria for comparison would substantially enhance the ability to generate cross-border and cross-sector insights.

Normative and ethical considerations

Normative and ethical considerations play a significant role in shaping how philanthropy approaches data sharing. These considerations are rooted in longstanding institutional norms and value frameworks that influence how philanthropic organisations understand responsibility, legitimacy, and risk. Institutional research highlights that organisational practices are shaped not only by formal incentives, but also by shared norms and historically embedded understandings of appropriate conduct (March and Olsen, 1998).

Where shared data-sharing practices are not yet broadly established or visibly recognised, individual organisations may find it difficult to assess the relative risks and benefits of extending their disclosure practices. As a result, progress in data sharing is closely tied to the development of shared frameworks that combine ethical guidance, technical support, and collective recognition (Taddeo, 2016). Strengthening these enabling conditions can support data-sharing practices that are both responsible and adapted to the diverse contexts in which philanthropy operates.

Challenges in philanthropy data sharing

Limited data availability in philanthropy has a range of systemic internal and external effects. Internally, the lack of usable data acts as a barrier to organisational learning, affecting evidence-informed decision making, and limits the sector's ability to assess effectiveness and identify opportunities to scale impact. Externally, it reduces the visibility of philanthropy's contributions, complicates collaboration, and makes coordination across actors more difficult.

Where activities and funding flows are not easily visible, funders, policy makers, practitioners, and the wider public may struggle to understand how resources are allocated. This can obscure unmet needs, lead to unintentional duplication, and reduce opportunities for alignment across initiatives. For philanthropic organisations themselves, limited visibility into the priorities or approaches of peers can restrict learning and slow the diffusion of effective practices. In the absence of mechanisms that allow knowledge to accumulate and circulate, insights about what works, what does not, and under which conditions remain fragmented.

Where structured and accessible data is limited, empirical analysis of philanthropic activity is more difficult, which can weaken the evidence base available to policy makers and researchers. This contributes to gaps in comparative and longitudinal research and limits the integration of philanthropy into broader social-science analyses (Bekkers et al, 2025; O'Neill and Kilicalp, 2025).

Finally, where public data infrastructures are limited, philanthropic information is often mediated through commercial data providers. While these actors can play a useful role, reliance on proprietary data aggregation may introduce inefficiencies, uneven access to information, and challenges for coherent sector-level data governance.

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Opportunities of data sharing in philanthropy

Improved data sharing and transparency offer important opportunities to strengthen philanthropy at organisational, sectoral, and cross-border levels (Harris and Neely, 2021). For individual organisations, access to comparable, sector-wide information can support benchmarking, help identify gaps or overlaps in funding, and inform more strategic allocation of resources. Where information is shared in ways that allow comparison and reuse, it can facilitate coordination across initiatives and reduce unintentional duplication, supporting more effective collective action (Holzer et al, 2024, Tudor et al, 2024).

At a broader level, improved visibility of philanthropic activities can support alignment in transnational and multi-stakeholder initiatives and create conditions for experimentation, innovation, and longer-term sustainability (Tudor et al, 2024). Over time, more accessible and structured data can enable learning loops between philanthropic strategies and societal outcomes, allowing actors to reflect on what works, under which conditions, and why. This can strengthen the openness of the sector to research and learning and support its capacity to adapt as social challenges evolve.

Data sharing and transparency are also associated with philanthropic legitimacy (Yasmin and Ghafran, 2021). By making information about missions, activities, and outcomes accessible, philanthropies can support accountability and informed engagement, contributing to perceptions of integrity and trust (Yang et al, 2014). Greater visibility can also strengthen relationships with grantees and communities by supporting more balanced dialogue and opportunities for participation, without prescribing uniform approaches to governance or decision making.

Importantly, with appropriate data infrastructures in place, reporting does not necessarily increase administrative burden. Automated extraction, classification, and formatting tools can reduce manual effort and allow organisations to focus resources on their core activities. Interoperability standards can further support scalable and sustainable disclosure practices. Advancing transparency in this sense does not imply the indiscriminate sharing of all information; rather, it involves identifying which data are most useful, for whom, and under what governance and privacy conditions. Achieving this requires collaboration between philanthropy practitioners, researchers, and communities to develop responsible, context-sensitive data-sharing approaches.

Towards an Open Philanthropy Data Commons

Learning from existing initiatives

Over the past decades, several initiatives have sought to alleviate the philanthropy transparency challenge, whose implementations provide useful lessons and insights for the design of a future data commons. This article adopts a qualitative, exploratory approach grounded in comparative review and expert dialogue. The authors, in exchange with ERNOP SafeSpaces 2025 roundtable discussants, have identified and characterised a number of philanthropy data initiatives, diverse in terms of structural approaches, organisational leadership, geographical coverage, data type and resolution provided (mapping results in Tables 1–3).

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This exercise, rather than providing an exhaustive inventory, aimed to identify recurrent and divergent design patterns, governance arrangements, and structural limitations across the most known and used initiatives by researchers and practitioners. The mapping illustrates strengths and limitations of each initiative and concludes transferable lessons, highlighting systemic gaps, and informing design and governance principles for an Open Philanthropy Data Commons: federated, flexible, interoperable, and participatory. The resulting design and governance principles should be interpreted as analytically informed propositions, not as empirically-tested claims.

Table 1: Global philanthropy data initiatives: names, references, strengths and weaknesses

Global initiatives	
GPEI (IU Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, 2025) Assesses the enabling environment for philanthropy across 95 countries, analysing the economic, political, and regulatory factors. Built through large-scale expert partnership (173 contributors) and structured composite indicators.	
Strengths: Robust expert-driven methodology, strong cross-country comparability, rigorous review process, clear conceptual framework.	Weaknesses: Resource-intensive data collection, relies on subjective expert judgement, provides aggregated indicators with limited machine-readable granularity, not optimised for data reuse.
Regional giving dashboards (Candid, nd) Summarises institutional philanthropy in various regions. Data sourced from governments, non-profits, funders, giving portals, websites, and press releases. Integrates Candid's *Philanthropy Classification System* for standardized coding.	
Strengths: High data diversity, strong classification standard, effective data harmonisation, visually accessible outputs.	Weaknesses: Significant portions behind paywall, limited metadata transparency, constrained interoperability for automated bulk analysis.
The State of Global Foundation Grantmaking (Candid et al, nd) Maps global human rights grant making using data from Candid's database and direct submissions, covering 46 countries.	
Strengths: Uses machine learning and rule search to identify relevant funding. View of allocations by region, year, or issue area. Interactive dashboards connecting views. Data accessible to members of the network.	Weaknesses: Data is not open, only aggregated insights, limited reusability.
Giving Tuesday Datasets (Giving Tuesday, nd) Compilation of open access datasets covering different aspects of philanthropy, such as individual giving or survey results.	
Strengths: Open governance, flexible to diverse data formats and types, high resolution, multiple providers.	Weaknesses: Interaction with data is not user friendly; using it requires data and analytic skills.
Fundraiso (InternetTime, nd) Commercial philanthropy platform listing foundations across the globe and built from public sources and manually curated. Allow searching by a multitude of characteristics and includes relationship data on who sponsors whom.	
Strengths: Combines public data with manual curation, provides practical tools for practitioners seeking grant opportunities, provides relationship network mapping, regularly expanded and updated.	Weaknesses: Has a free tier with basic search but advanced features require paid subscription, not made for open data reuse.

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Table 2: European philanthropy data initiatives: names, references, strengths and weaknesses

European initiatives	
The Fabric of Giving – Philea (O'Neill and Kilicalp, 2025) Aggregated level reporting of public-benefit foundations (numbers, assets, expenditures, qualitative assessment). 34 countries covered.	
Strengths: Data is obtained directly from national associations (trusted providers representing organisations from each country), broad geographic coverage, multidimensional view of the sector.	Weaknesses: Underlying data is not publicly available, high aggregation of figures, limited analytical depth, limited reusability.
Giving in Europe knowledge portal (Hoolwerf and Schuyt, nd) Country level reports with main numbers on diverse forms of giving (23 countries covered).	
Strengths: Data is provided by research institutions representing ERNOP experts of each country. Consistent conceptual structure across countries.	Weaknesses: Access to full reports is restricted to members (for the broad public, summaries available). Data is aggregated, limited reusability, heterogeneity in national methodologies.

Design and governance principles

These mapped initiatives reveal the diversity of approaches to collecting, structuring, sharing, and governing data that have been outlined in existing philanthropy platforms; illuminating what works and what could be improved.

Drawing on the strengths and accounting for the shortcomings of existing initiatives (fragmented standards, constrained interoperability, uneven governance arrangements, rigid structuring, and limited incentives for participation), we articulate below core principles that an Open Philanthropy Data Commons should inherit, strengthen, or introduce to effectively support sectorial transparency. Each principle corresponds to concrete structural challenges and represents an attempt to align technical possibilities with the regulatory, ethical, and organisational realities of the philanthropic sector. For each principle (P1–5), we declare first its evidence-based motivation and then its functional role within the commons.

P1 – Data standards, interoperability, ownership, and infrastructure

Motivation: this principle responds to the structural contradiction between over-standardisation at ingestion, heterogeneity of philanthropy data, and lack of interoperability across existing initiatives. Rigid standardisation at the point of data submission can discourage participation, while insufficient standardisation undermines data reuse and comparability. We seek to reconcile these tensions by formulating that the commons must allow input flexibility, leverage AI for deidentification and flexible structuring, and ensure output interoperability.

Operating under P1 minimises entry barriers while enabling a structured layer that can be adapted flexibly for interoperability and comparability (front end interface that displays data following an interoperable structure; this facilitates comparison of different datasets and reuse in combination with other sources). With flexible input and interoperability standards, providers can upload data in their native formats

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Table 3: National philanthropy data initiatives: names, references, strengths and weaknesses

National initiatives	
GrantNav 360Giving (360Giving, nd) UK-based initiative compiling grant data provided by charities, and offering it in an open format, following careful structuring for input. Enables the extraction of transparent insights for the country.	
Strengths: Strong emphasis on open standards, direct data input from funders, API-friendly, highly reusable.	Weaknesses: Complex data schemas, requires data literacy, rigid and complex formatting for input (limits flexibility).
Spheriq Directory (Stiftungschweiz) (Spheriq, nd) Commercial Swiss philanthropy platform providing a directory of foundations, fundraising tools (including AI tools), and aggregated giving data both from public sources and owner-submitted.	
Strengths: Broad coverage of Swiss foundations, easy to navigate interface, frequently updated, integrates donor-recipient matching functions.	Weaknesses: Largely paywalled, data not open or bulk downloadable, limited granular information on methodology.
Geven in Nederland (Centrum voor Filantropische Studies, nd) The Netherlands' national giving survey, providing macro-level data on household, corporate, and foundation donations.	
Strengths: Long time-series and research-led methodology.	Weaknesses: Aggregated data displayed publicly, survey data available upon request for research, limited interoperability with other data ecosystems.

together with a set of descriptive information about it as well as instructions for deidentification/anonymisation (see P2).

In practice, AI helps populate the structured layer (Figure 1) of the Open Philanthropy Data Commons by identifying the format of incoming data and automatically restructuring it to meet the layer's standards. Providers retain full ownership and independent control of their data, its licence, version control, which user types can access it, and under which level of aggregation. A raw anonymised version persists in the commons under provider privacy preferences. All platform components use open-source technologies, enabling external audit, reuse, bug identification and fixing, and contribution at large upon federated approval.

P2 – Hybrid: human governed, AI-assisted

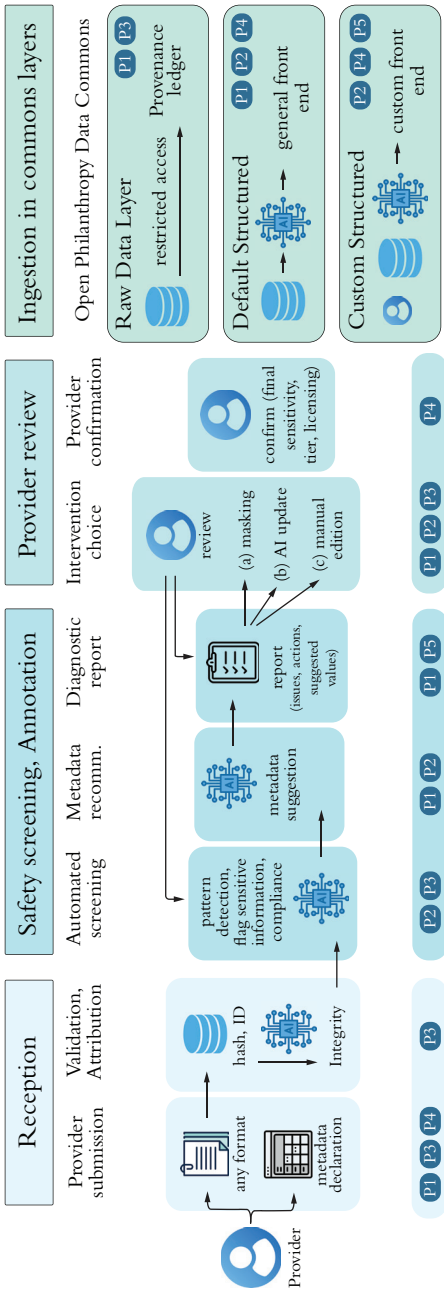
Motivation: ethical and regulatory concerns around privacy, misuse, supervision, and accountability remain central barriers to data sharing in philanthropy. At the same time, the mapping of existing initiatives reveals limitations in approaches to data structuring, querying flexibility, and reuse. This second principle emerges from the need to balance scalability with trust by combining algorithmic support with human oversight. Considering P2, an Open Philanthropy Data Commons should provide a federated, AI–human collaborative solution creating a resilient ecosystem for integrating, validating, and reusing data.

In practice, we propose the commons to have a human-governed, AI-assisted pipeline in which automated processes operate under predefined human rules and are subject to human validation. This includes: (1) Supervision and Privacy Protection: upon upload, AI identifies and anonymises sensitive information (entity recognition), adapting to providers' declared privacy rules and levels (AI refuses ingestion under

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rules not meeting EU legal standards). Additionally, AI supervises whether imputed data contains, inconsistencies, or anomalies, and proposes action for correction. Humans validate or correct AI decisions and outputs prior ingestion: (2) Structuring and Querying: users can leverage AI to dynamically restructure the data and adapt its default display and analysis in their personal dashboard (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Operationalisation proposal for the Open Philanthropy Data Commons: pipeline stages and associated design principles



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P3 – Community governance and curation

Motivation: philanthropic transparency is modulated by regulatory variation, uneven oversight, and limited coordination across jurisdictions. We observed that centralised governance models may struggle to accommodate regional specificities and maintain sectoral legitimacy. This principle moves forward from centralised governance solutions and introduces community oversight. A federated, multi-stakeholder, community-driven governance design should advance legitimacy, facilitate the identification and correction of systemic biases, and allow the ecosystem to respond dynamically to evolving legal and ethical standards. We combine coordination with contextual sensitivity and distributed accountability.

An Open Philanthropy Data Commons following this principle could be governed through a multi-stakeholder model where responsibility is shared/distributed across: (1) data providers (retain ownership and define privacy, access conditions, and licensing), (2) civil society organisations (ensuring orientation toward public benefit, bringing applied value to data), (3) academia (methodological rigour, technical robustness, critical review, training of users in data and analytics), (4) public authorities (alignment with ethical and regulatory standards, promotion, legitimacy). For this, community governance could operate through a steering council (representing all stakeholder groups, with rotational membership, and guided by international ethics principles), national nodes (that curate country specifics on requirements and standards such as classification systems), an AI layer (that suggests equivalence mappings across data schemas and structures, automatises privacy protection, and which decisions are validated or rejected by human experts), and shared curation responsibilities (community reviewers flag errors and anomalies, identify biases, and help validate AI outputs).

P4 – Machine-readable exports and API-based reuse

Motivation: The availability of philanthropy data does not automatically translate into analytical and strategic insights for the sector; an entry requirement for this is data sharing in standard and reusable formats. P4 responds by foregrounding machine-readable exports and APIs as prerequisites and therefore facilitates accessibility regardless of the level of data expertise of the requester.

In practice, the commons must ensure that structured data consented for public sharing is accessible for reuse considering inclusion, through: (1) bulk download in standard open formats; (2) API programmatic access; and (3) standard or custom-built structured reports. For security, accountability, and regulatory compliance, data access should be traced (recording who downloaded what, and for which declared purpose). When accessing data, licensing rules will be highlighted transparently, according to each provider's conditions. If the data requested belongs to protected tiers, access decision will be taken by the provider.

P5 – Public incentives and capacity building

Motivation: we previously highlighted the existence of capacity asymmetries and a resulting limited participation in data sharing. This principle addresses the need by coupling data infrastructure with capacity building, and by providing incentive

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structures that lower barriers to engagement and digitalisation. Under P5, the commons for philanthropy should be a digital collaboration-incentivised space uniting philanthropy.

In practice, the commons should build capacity for the philanthropic sector through training programmes and workshops. Moreover, the use of the data commons should be accompanied by transparency and participation incentives, such as contribution badges or transparency scores.

Operationalising the Open Philanthropy Data Commons

A concrete pipeline proposal for operationalising the Open Philanthropy Data Commons would begin in stage 1 with data reception. Providers (for example philanthropic organisations) submit data in any format, accompanied by metadata specifying its sensitivity tier and applicable licensing model, with an optional description of the data. Each file is hashed and linked to the provider's ownership ID, and the system then validates file integrity.

In stage 2, AI screens the data for safety and privacy concerns and suggests or requests additional metadata. Here, (1) automated tools flag and report sensitive or non-publishable information based on the provider's sensitivity declaration and considering relevant legal requirements; and (2) AI suggests metadata fields for the provider to review and provide. The provider receives a report detailing detected issues, recommended corrective actions, and potential values for specific metadata fields.

During stage 3, providers engage in review and confirmation by examining the AI-generated report, flagging encountered issues, and choosing how to intervene – manually, automatically, or both. Intervention options could include applying AI-based masking, updating metadata safety rules, or carrying out manual data editing. At the end, the provider confirms the final sensitivity tier and the licensing choice for the reviewed dataset.

Once confirmed, the data proceed to AI-assisted ingestion into the commons data repository and gets structured towards user view. The commons preserves the anonymized raw data (Figure 1 raw layer), applies a default structuring process, and offers the result for front-end consultation by users (Figure 1 default structured layer). Every transformation of the original dataset that occurs in response to custom user requests (Figure 1 custom structured layer) is traced. A provenance ledger maintains a record of each ingestion event, transformation, and access.

This architecture comprises three layers. The raw layer stores the dataset in its original submission format, with its content modified as required by the sanitisation process. The raw dataset is tagged with a unique dataset provider tier ID that serves as the anchor for all derivative transformations. Access to this raw layer is restricted to the provider and any parties they explicitly authorise.

The default structured layer, or general front-end, contains a structured dataset aimed at interoperability, produced when AI recognises, extracts, and organises specific information from the raw data. This structured dataset, still linked to the dataset ID, feeds the general user interface and can be accessed according to tier limits through dashboards, downloads, or APIs.

Finally, the custom structured layer is generated on demand for specific user needs – such as tailored subsets, integrations, or ontologies. In these cases, the Open

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Philanthropy Data Commons retrieves the relevant portions of the raw or default structured data and processes them in a dedicated workspace. The resulting custom dataset is stored temporarily in a dynamic cache associated with the original dataset-provider-tier ID and is assigned a new transformation instance ID, while inheriting the original licensing and sensitivity tier. Users can access this custom data through dashboards, downloads, or APIs, and they may also choose to share their transformation templates with others for reuse.

Implications and conclusions: building a collaborative future

This article has outlined the benefits of data transparency for philanthropy and identified some of the barriers preventing philanthropic organisations from sharing data. To illustrate how these organisations could share data, we propose an Open Philanthropy Data Commons: a technical and collective governance proposal that requires shared ownership and direction. The principles outlined provide an initial foundation, but a truly functional commons will only emerge through deliberate community dialogue and negotiated agreement among all stakeholders involved, particularly in areas such as design, operation, incentivisation, and responsibility, among others. A promising structure involves the co-creation of a tiered sensitivity framework, including clearly defined thresholds, criteria, and review procedures that are collectively understood and trusted. Equally important is the joint identification of useful taxonomies (including hybrid models), data highlight buckets, categories and granularity, impact labels, and other classes that will structure the default dashboard of the data commons, since these choices will shape what becomes visible by default and whose realities are foregrounded.

The broader implication is that philanthropy could move decisively towards a more open means of sharing data and shared infrastructures. This would allow the sector to be more adaptive and strategically effective in the digital age. Without a collective data architecture, the sector will miss out on insights offered by more coordinated data collection efforts and constrain its own capacity to learn and drive the sector forward towards more digitally advanced data utilisation. The path forward is therefore inherently cooperative and depends on the collaborative effort of the sector at large. The call to action is clear: philanthropic organisations, networks, researchers, regulators, and civil society actors should now convene, experiment, and formalise the governance arrangements, standards, and incentives that can bring an Open Philanthropy Data Commons into being. A shared data future is both possible and urgently needed to sustain a transparent, trusted, and strategically aligned philanthropic ecosystem.

Notes

[1] This article was developed as part of the ERNOP Safe Spaces for Philanthropy2025 initiative.

[2] The opinions expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position, policy, or views of the authors' affiliated organisations.

ORCiD IDs

Lucia Gomez Teijeiro https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3914-8868
Giuseppe Ugazio https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6912-806X

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LGT and GU crafted the article outline and methodology. Subsequently, LGT wrote the initial draft with support from JON. All authors participated in the review process, providing feedback and applying necessary changes to the best of their respective expertise. LGT further edited the content of the article, followed by edits to the source materials by GU and an overall review from JON.

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Conflict of interest
The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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