Meedan

Annual Report
2022

Meedan is a technology not-for-profit that builds tools and develops programs to strengthen global journalism, digital literacy, and accessibility of information. This Annual Report reflects the state of Meedan.

Pictured right is a town square in Dolores Hidalgo, Mexico, a city known widely as the birthplace of Mexican independence. Meedan means "gathering place" or "town square" in Arabic. Our not-for-profit was founded with a vision to serve many of the functions that town squares offer to people across the globe—to foster cultural, linguistic and ideological dialogue between different communities online and offline.

(Photo credit: Darren Tierney)

Contents

CEO's note

Information integrity is the challenge of our time. Today's world has four billion publishers creating and distributing rumors, news, narratives, and information. Misinformation is destabilizing global elections, hampering pandemic recovery, and fomenting civic unrest and violence around the world.

▲ Ed Bice, Chief Executive Officer, Meedan

At this critical moment in the history of the internet and society, the vision Meedan puts forward reflects the scope and complexity of the pursuit of information equity online.

We see the only path forward as working to better enable journalists, fact-checkers, human rights defenders, and both topic area and lived experts, to have impact across a changing information landscape.

Our vision is to build the infrastructure that helps organize and scale the efficiency of, access to, and integrity of information.

In the short term, we address crises of information, trust and harmful content by deploying fast-acting and scalable tools that help journalists verify content where their audiences are already communicating with each other — on messaging services like WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger and other challenging information environments.

In the medium term, we work with civil society organizations through capacity building efforts that help maximize their ability to engage with the new dynamics of the internet while ensuring their own sustainability as organizations.

In the long term, our work serves as ground truth for research, policy and the broader development of knowledge and truth. Our projects generate data and insights that shine a light on contemporary information environments, including both their challenges and potential solutions.

On the ground, this vision manifests as four distinct but interrelated priorities. The first is to turn Meedan's open-source app, which lets journalists investigate and distribute critical information to audiences at scale, into a world-class online system for the dynamic exchange of trusted information during political crises, elections, pandemics and other major events. We are building features that let communities share data both with each other and with social media channels.

Offering this product to a larger number of partners will allow us to more robustly build out features that:

1. Let journalists and fact-checkers bundle and exchange the most critical and urgent information with each other and their audiences regardless of that information's language, location, origin or other existing barriers to cross-cultural collaboration

2. Generate revenue for workers on the frontlines of today's information crisis by developing systems to independently monetize their exchange and distribution of trusted information with consumers

This brings us to Meedan's second priority. The success of the online system proposed above depends on Meedan's offline support of:

- Media literacy skill development
- Training and capacity building initiatives
- Emergency funds for crisis reporting
- Virtual and in-person events and retreats
- Physical and mental health safety funds
- Access to tools and technologies that support their work

To this end, the network of trusted information workers — journalists, fact-checkers, academics, citizens — are just as critical to this path forward as the software itself. The product relies on collaborations that are centered around the qualitative work involved in collecting, investigating and highlighting information in and from challenging environments: elections, epidemics, mis/disinformation, human rights violations, race, gender and class violence.

Together, the execution of our vision aims to promote an internet where communities can effectively create and share the context needed to promote civic, public, and individual health and safety. We think of our foundational goal as promoting digital environments grounded in information equity, and this notion is at the center of everything we do.

Our philosophy

We see Internet equity as an 'access' issue. We co-design, deploy and implement open-source tools and comprehensive programs that enable communities, especially those who have been historically underserved, to access the quality information they need to mobilize, organize and foster long-term social change. We prioritize this work during critical events, such as elections, democratic transitions, climate and health emergencies, conflict and social turmoil.

We are constantly reflecting on our positionality. It is at the heart of our strategy. We understand that our ability to work across community, technology and policy stakeholders is a privilege. We see ourselves as conveners, facilitators and enablers of change. We do this by:

a. Developing open-source software that incorporates state-of-the-art machine learning and artificial technologies.

b. Building coalitions that enable skills sharing and capacity building.

Our two-faceted approach strengthens collaboration, and the ability for hyperlocal community perspectives and participation in addressing Internet information challenges at larger scales.

Community impact programs

Meedan supports journalists, fact-checkers and human rights groups investigate and distribute critical information to local audiences. We deploy messaging technology, training and emergency funds during elections, natural disasters, global crises and other major events.

In 2022, with a goal to offer cohesive programs across countries and partners, Meedan merged its approach to programming. After months of discussions about how to maximize our impact and offerings to partners we launched Meedan Community Impact Programs.

We are working to expand our network of partner organizations in over 50 countries to counter the rise of misinformation and harmful content online. We want to build safer, trustworthy and more inclusive media ecosystems online and offline.

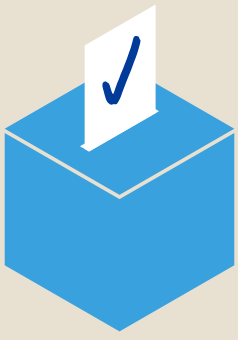**Our work is focused across three key verticals:**

Elections

Crisis responses

Engaging safe and inclusive online ecosystems

Elections

Since 2012 Meedan has supported newsrooms, fact-checking organizations and civil society groups on election initiatives designed to address misinformation and disinformation on social media and encrypted platforms. Check, our award-winning platform, has been at the center of each of our election initiatives. We bring together independent and mainstream newsrooms along with civil society groups, research institutions, and other experts to address election misinformation. As our partner Maria Ressa has eloquently summarized the challenge, "There is no election integrity without information integrity." The recent election in the Philippines was a case study in the efficacy of disinformation campaigns in election settings and only serves to reinforce the urgent need to create a Global Election Fund with the goal of standing up coalitions much earlier than what has been a typical four- to six-month pre-election start.

Case study

Brazil election

A Meedan analysis of anonymized audience data from our collaborative reporting project, Confirma 2022, shines a light on the information voters were exposed to, and the questions audiences had, in the lead up to the 2022 Brazilian presidential and runoff elections.

Between Aug. 16, 2022 and Dec. 12, 2022 five newsrooms—Agência Lupa, Aos Fatos, Projeto Comprova, Estadão Verifica, and Universo Online (UOL)— partnered with Brazil's top court, which is responsible for organizing all stages of the Brazilian electoral process. Together the partners collected 347,000 anonymous questions and requests for fact-checks from voters throughout six WhatsApp tiplines, and responded to those questions with fact-checks using Meedan's platform, Check.

Through this program, we used machine learning to uncover big picture trends about the questions people asked and claims they encountered online. The data provides a snapshot of the information landscape within WhatsApp audiences ahead of the elections.

Five trends we found on WhatsApp during the 2022 Brazil elections

meedan.com

▲ Blog post – **Read more**

Philippines election

Meedan worked with Rappler and the Google News Initiative to launch #FactsFirstPH, a first-of-its-kind initiative to fight for facts ahead of the May 2022 presidential elections in the Philippines. More than 100 civil society organizations, newsrooms, business groups, legal groups and research groups have come together to form the #FactsFirstPH coalition. The coalition is committed to promoting truth in the public space, and seeking accountability from those who spread misleading information and falsehoods.

> "
>
> Without facts, you can't have truth. Without truth, you can't have trust. Without trust, we have no shared reality, and no democracy.

Maria Ressa
Nobel laureate and Rappler CEO

The Battle For Facts In The Philippines: Launching #FactsFirstPH

#FactsFirstPH

↳ meedan.com

▲ Blog post – **Read more**

Crisis response

Moments of crisis are auspicious for the spread of mis/disinformation, propaganda and hate speech. Meedan distributes emergency resources for media covering wars, uprisings, social, political and economic turmoil, health and climate emergencies, and natural disasters. In 2022 Meedan co-designed and implemented a crisis response structure through:

1. Expanding the use of Meedan's technology, Check, to support systematic, fast, and targeted distribution of quality content through messaging networks.

2. Provisioning training, network and capacity building, and emergency funds to independent media

This work involves meaningful collaborations between individuals, grassroot initiatives, civil society groups and mainstream media institutions; enhancing access to high-impact hyperlocal emergency funds; improving stakeholders' ability to influence policy and inform advocacy efforts through building common formats for documenting and tackling mis/disinformation, human rights violations and gender-based violence within crisis contexts; and through supporting fast and targeted distribution of credible and inclusive content on the open web, and in closed messaging networks.

Using AI to investigate war crimes

Two Meedan partners are working together to investigate conflict zones using a combination of artificial intelligence and on-the-ground citizen journalism.

The collaboration is part of Meedan's Check Global, a program of journalists, human rights investigators and fact-checkers working to improve information access and equity in four key regions across the Larger World.

Meedan partner VFRAME develops computer vision technology that allows human rights researchers and investigative journalists to scrutinize objects in war zones. Together with human rights and war crime investigators at Mnemonic, the collaborators are reaching breakthroughs in conflict zone investigative techniques.

In one project the partners were able to detect evidence of cluster munitions in around 1,000 videos. Cluster munitions are air-dropped bombs that release smaller bomblets and pose risks to civilians both during attacks and afterwards. They are prohibited under international humanitarian law.


Meedan Impact Story: Using AI to investigate weapons trafficking and human rights violations

meedan.com

▲   Blog post – **Read more**

Getting critical information to journalists during the COVID-19 pandemic

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic Meedan developed Health Desk, a rapid response product that delivers health information on-demand and on-deadline to journalists and fact-checkers. In 2022, Health Desk was selected from more than 8,000 publications for NewsGuard's Best of 2022 list of top publications.

In addition to this success the program's researchers also produced critical insights on interventions to end online violence against women in politics, identified major gaps in social media user reporting systems and found key gendered misinformation narratives on platforms like Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp.
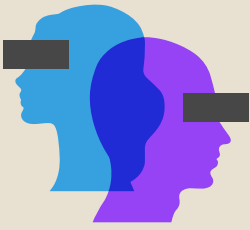
Safe and inclusive online ecosystems

There is a growing reliance on journalists, fact-checkers, topic-area experts and content moderation teams to evaluate and moderate online spaces. These groups risk experiencing secondary trauma through repeated exposure to viewing and interacting with challenging content. They face higher risks of being subjected to harassment and targeted threats.

We work to prioritize equity, safety, and a public health harm reduction approach to content moderation. We produce training sessions and design recommendations that support safer practices of fact-checking, archiving and content moderation. Our research investigates and addresses the negative impacts of exposure to harmful content.

Our research, data, and recommendations are open-source and, where possible, structured in formats that can be used by researchers, policy organizations, and other stakeholders. We do this to make sure diverse information gets integrated into AI systems for documentation, research investigation, archiving, and assessment of harmful content online.

Case study

Online violence against women in politics

Meedan partnered with the National Democratic Institute on a groundbreaking **report** that details a list of 26 interventions that technology platforms, governments, civil society organizations and the media can take to make meaningful progress towards ending online violence against women in politics.
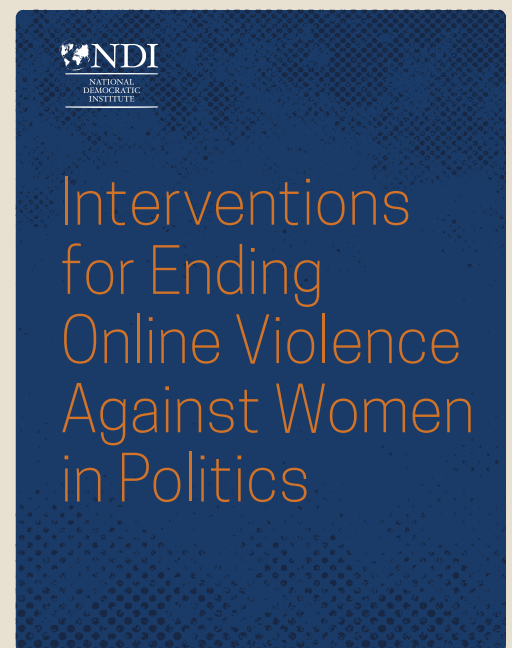
▲ Report – **Download here**

The public health impacts of misinformation: Assessing the harm of a U.S. Supreme Court decision

Over the course of three months Meedan accessed and sorted thousands of Twitter posts to identify conversations about abortion in May and June 2022 surrounding the leak and decision. We closely reviewed information in 400 of the posts to understand the evolving online narratives surrounding the Supreme Court's decision on abortion.

As both stories about Roe v. Wade broke in May and then in June, the overall online conversation about abortion in the United States skyrocketed—with tweets about abortion increasing between four and six-fold just after the leak, and then again just after the decision.

Rather than being diluted by growing online noise after the historic decision made headlines, the misinformation instead persisted. Despite the boom in conversation, we found that the percentage of posts marked as misinformation (by two qualitative coders trained in public health and internet studies) remained consistent.

● Report

Misinformation about abortion

A Meedan analysis of social media data surrounding the two monumental Supreme Court events in the summer of 2022

meedan.com

▲   Report – **Read more**

Training at-a-glance

Meedan trains media organizations on digital safety, innovations in fact-checking, and other capacity building topics for newsrooms and fact-checkers.

Journalists and activists trained on strategies for mitigating secondary trauma

50+

People involved in Check Global training sessions

270

Participants in themed fact-checking courses

102

Participants trained during political misinformation masterclasses

30

Fact-checkers trained in mental health interventions

20

Product and technology

Over a decade ago, Meedan launched Check, a software platform used to verify citizen-generated content during the 2012 Egyptian presidential election. Check was created as an open-source media analysis platform for collaborative news verification and fact-checking, and we have continued to develop the software based on feedback from media and human-rights partners. Since its inception Meedan's Check has supported major fact-checking initiatives around elections in Brazil, the Philippines, Mexico, France, the United States, and India as well as general day-to-day fact-checking efforts and human rights investigations with partners.

Our technology currently facilitates over 45 fact-checking organizations to run always-on misinformation "tiplines" on end-to-end encrypted messaging platforms such as WhatsApp. We are working on new infrastructure to allow these organizations to easily share data with each other for their day-to-day fact-checking work.

Product workflow

Collect questions and media from users
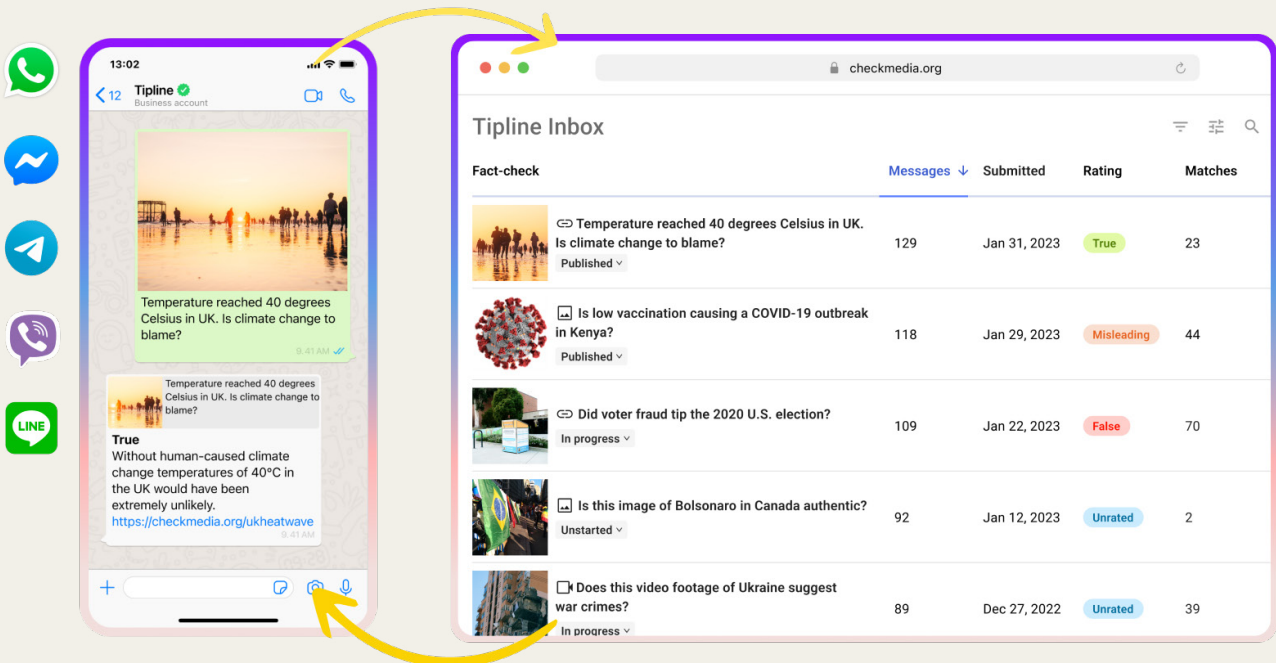
Instantly deliver articles and fact-checks

Let AI Organize organize your content

Effortlessly group similar content, pair, pair them with fact-checks, and uncover emerging trends faster.

Product statistics

Organizations using Check's direct messaging feature

45

Conversations between fact-checkers and audiences

419,183

Audience members served by fact-checks

237,120

Partners active on Check

49

Fact-checks sent to end users

199,993

Software feature versions released

19

Changes, fixes and feature improvements

612

New user-facing features implemented

66

Performance and code improvements

32

Claims matched to existing fact-checks

43,548

Uptime

99.82%

Security incidents

0

Number of fact-checks available in Check

88,804

Research and development

Our research focuses on increasing equitable access to quality information. We serve as a bridge between practitioners, community organizations, and academic researchers. Here are our published works from 2022:

Tiplines to uncover misinformation on encrypted platforms: A case study of the 2019 Indian general election on WhatsApp

View the paper

HARVARD Kennedy School
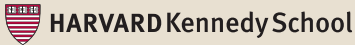
Information ecosystem threats in minoritized communities: Challenges, open problems and research directions

View the paper

acm Association for Computing Machinery

Tackling racial bias in automated online hate detection: Towards fair and accurate detection of hateful users with geometric deep learning

View the paper

EPJ.org

Is more data better? Re-thinking the importance of efficiency in language detection with transformers-based active learning

View the paper

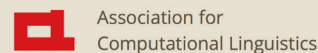Association for Computational Linguistics
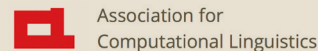
Matching tweets with applicable fact-checks across languages

View the paper

AAAI Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence

SemEval-2022 Task 8: Multilingual news article similarity

View the paper

Association for Computational Linguistics

Gendered Health Misinformation: Addressing gendered health misinformation related to Pregnancy and Infant Care, Gender-Affirming Care and Abortion

View the paper

Meedan

Interventions for Ending Online Violence Against Women in Politics

View the paper

NDI

Press and communications

Press mentions in 2022	Homepage visits
98	19,000+

Media highlights

Immigrant groups face 'impossible' job of fighting election lies on apps

View the article

The Washington Post

"Meedan, a nonprofit that builds software for newsrooms, has partnered with four media outlets, including Telemundo and Univision, to combat Spanish-language misinformation ahead of the midterms. Their software connects a newsroom's WhatsApp account to a central database. The news organizations publicize a number which readers can call, text or send images or audio messages to, seeing if an article they've received is real or not, Meedan chief executive Ed Bice said."

The rise of misleading and bad information about abortion

View the video

PBS NEWS HOUR

Elon Musk's Bot Problem on Twitter Is Extraordinary

View the article

WSJ

"'Mr. Musk is 'an outlier among outliers,'' said Darius Kazemi, a computer programmer who has spent a decade creating and studying bots and is currently a senior software engineer at Meedan, a technology nonprofit that aims to combat misinformation. 'His experience is going to be different from not just the average user, but the average celebrity.'"

As Covid-19 Continues to Spread, So Does Misinformation About It

[View the article](#)

The New York Times

"The ideas still thrive on social media platforms, and the constant barrage, now a yearslong accumulation, has made it increasingly difficult for accurate advice to break through, misinformation researchers say. That leaves people already suffering from pandemic fatigue to become further inured to Covid's continuing dangers and susceptible to other harmful medical content. 'It's easy to forget that health misinformation, including about Covid, can still contribute to people not getting vaccinated or creating stigmas,' said Megan Marrelli, the editorial director of Meedan, a nonprofit focused on digital literacy and information access. 'We know for a fact that health misinformation contributes to the spread of real-world disease.'"

China's WeChat Is a Hot New Venue for U.S. Election Misinformation

[View the article](#)

WIRED

"Meedan recently received funding from the U.S. National Science Foundation to develop tools powered by machine learning to help Asian American and Pacific Islander communities look for phrases and topics associated with misinformation across different languages and platforms."

Abortion misinformation in the United States of America

[View the video](#)

ALJAZEERA

JENNA SHERMAN
SCIENCE WRITER, MEEDAN

How a private message gets you sent to prison

[View the article](#)

Prospect

"One particularly successful tip line was Verificado, a platform run by technology company Meedan in partnership with a coalition of Mexican journalism organisations. Verificado investigated WhatsApp messages spread during Mexico's 2018 election and published debunkings of misinformation through their news outlets. Meedan has gone on to run similar tip lines at other moments when disinformation was likely to spread, such as India's 2019 general election."

Event highlights

May

World Press Freedom Day: Journalism Under Surveillance

Meedan - **View the event**

Using memes as an effective tool in campaigns

Palestine Digital Activism Forum - **View the event**

June

Moderating non-English content: Challenges and solutions for platforms operating globally

Atlantic Council - **View the event**

Augmented harms in augmented reality

Atlantic Council - **View the event**

August

Ripple effects: How abortion misinformation impacts health decisions, the media, and political discourse

Media Party - **View the event**

Playing Your Part: Tips for Identifying, Covering, and Tackling Gendered Health Misinformation Online

Media Party - **View the event**

Fact-checking on WhatsApp: New revenue models

Media Party - **View the event**

September

The right age for media literacy

Trusted Media Summit - **View the event**

Trusted Media Summit
APAC 2022

October

Yelling into the Void: What Stops People from Reporting and How Can We Support Actionable, Contextualized Reporting at Scale?

TrustCon 2022

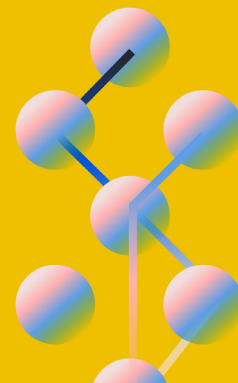TRUST CON 2022 SEPTEMBER 27-28 PALO ALTO, CA

December

Trust and safety on the fediverse

Meedan - **View the event**

● Webinar

Trust and safety on the fediverse

December 8, 2022
12pm Eastern US

December

Health rights as human rights: An online conversation on gendered health misinformation

Meedan - **View the event**

● Webinar

Health rights as human rights

Join us on #HumanRightsDay, December 10 to discuss gendered health misinformation and share your insights and experiences around the topic

Organizational analytics

Gender distribution of the team

Female	Male	Non-binary
20	17	1

Geographical distribution of the team

Full-time team members in the United States	Global team members	Team members residing in Larger World countries
19	19	14

Staff satisfaction

These statistics are taken from the 2022 staff team survey.

Team members would recommend the organization as a place to work	Team members feel enriched by the working environment
95.6%	95.6%

Team members feel included and that their opinions count	Team members feel they have an opportunity to do their best work every day
95.6%	95.7%

How we measure success

Community impact programs

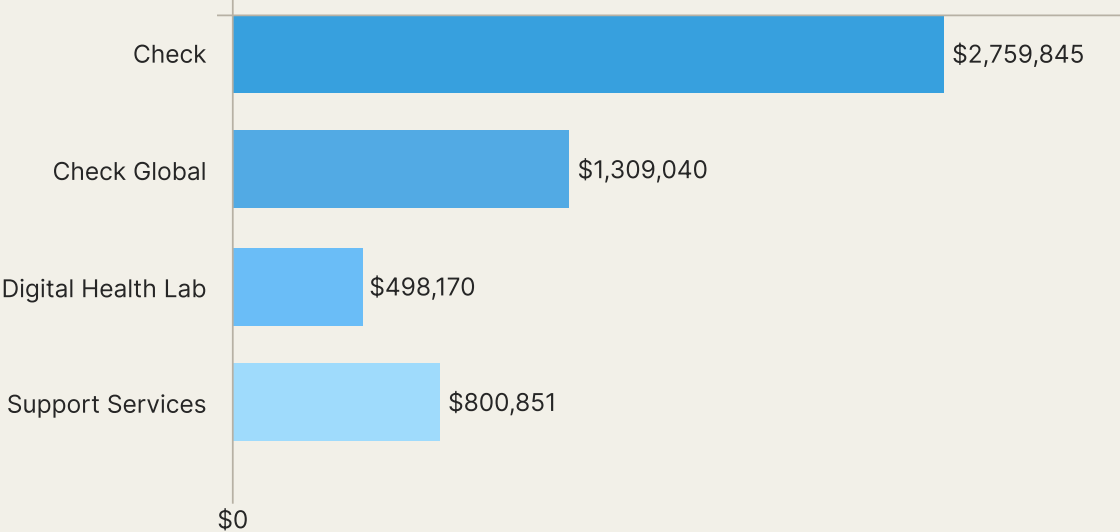| Quantitative indicators	Qualitative indicators
Number of coalitions, networks and communities created	Impact of the networks, coalitions, communities assessed through surveys, case studies, interviews with partners; Equity, Diversity and Inclusion data
Number of networking events and retreats	Reporting on in-person and offline events and activities; engagement pre/post-events; Equity, Diversity and Inclusion data
Number of training sessions and workshops	Feedback from the attendees, impact on knowledge/skills assessed through qualitative Monitoring and Evaluation methods; Equity, Diversity and Inclusion data
Number of partners and beneficiaries involved in our program activities	Reporting on partner/community engagement assessed through surveys, ongoing Monitoring and Evaluation tools; Equity, Diversity and Inclusion data
Number of funds and micro-funds Number of grantees	Reporting on the impact of the activities funded through interviews and surveys
Number of program partners attending our events and engaged through our networks	Reporting on representation from the Global South, Global North, Official Development Assistance (ODA) and Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries
Number of languages we support	Reporting on representation from Global South, Global North and OECD countries
Number of tools and methods, documents, playbooks, guidelines, toolkits and resources created	Reporting on how helpful these resources are to those who download them
Number of meetings with partners, fund beneficiaries and funders	Ongoing qualitative assessment of outward facing and public engagement activities
Number of partners using our platform for data building and response efforts	Feedback from partners and impact assessment through qualitative Monitoring and Evaluation methods

Product and technology

Quantitative indicators	Qualitative indicators
Number of collaborative datasets created	Reporting on the reach and impact of data projects
Number of tiplines, shared feeds and automated solutions developed	Impact assessed through qualitative Monitoring and Evaluation tools, including surveys, case studies, interviews; trend reports
Number of 'clients': journalists, civil society organizations and fact-checking groups using and satisfied with Check	Impact assessed through qualitative Monitoring and Evaluation tools, including surveys, case studies, interviews and ongoing comms with 'clients'
Number of contracts or agreements with technology companies Number of partners involved in agreements with technology companies	Size and longevity of contracts and agreements with tech companies Case studies of impact of coalitions between key community stakeholders and tech companies

Research and development

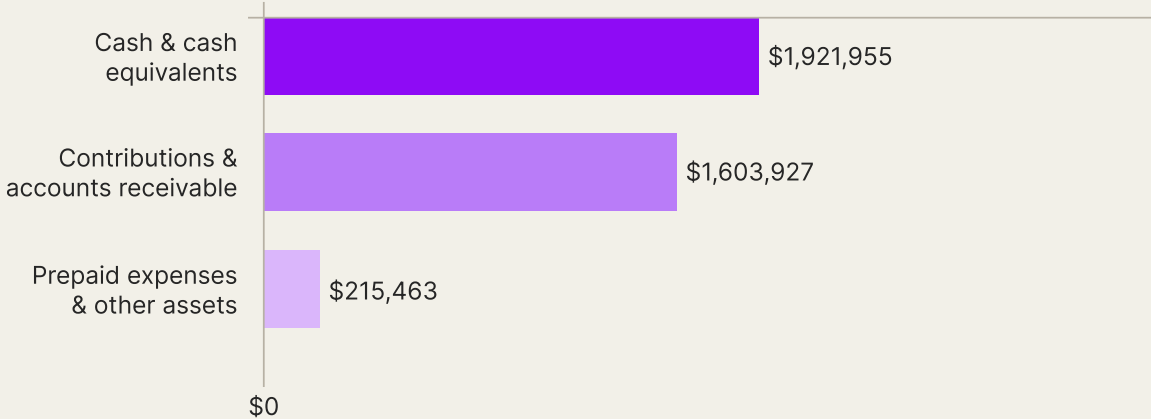| Quantitative indicators	Qualitative indicators
Number of publications in peer reviewed journals and beyond Number of citations Number of research grants secured	Reach and impact of our published research
Number of policy papers and white papers produced	Impact on policy assessed through qualitative assessment; mainstream and social media mentions
Number of partners involved in our research activities including interns, students and community partners	Impact assessed through qualitative Monitoring and Evaluation tools, including surveys, case studies, interviews and ongoing communications with partners and students
Number of annotation tooling and processes integrated into Check	Feedback from annotators; impact on mental health assessed through qualitative Monitoring and Evaluation tools including surveys and interviews

Financials

Expenditures

Category	Amount
Check	$2,759,845
Check Global	$1,309,040
Digital Health Lab	$498,170
Support Services	$800,851

$0

Total expenditures: $5,367,906

Assets

Category	Amount
Cash & cash equivalents	$1,921,955
Contributions & accounts receivable	$1,603,927
Prepaid expenses & other assets	$215,463

$0

Total assets: $3,741,345

Liabilities

Accounts payable	$272,211
Accrued payroll & vacation pay	$6,690
Deferred revenue	$207,163

$0

Total liabilities: $486,064

Net assets

With donor restrictions	$1,569,379
Without donor restrictions	$1,685,902

$0
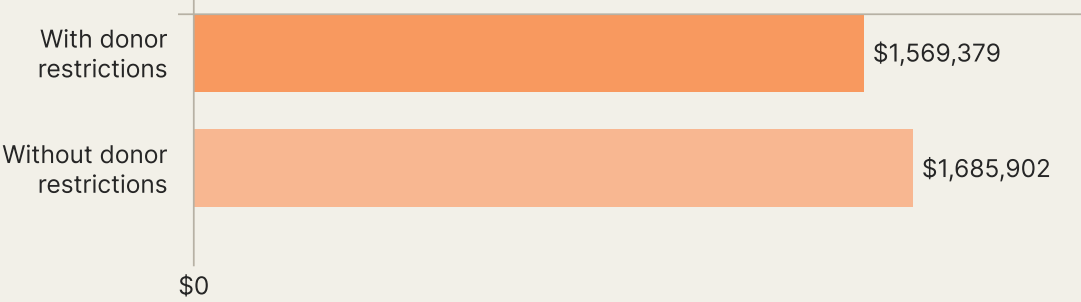
Total net assets: $3,255,281