THE SIEGEL TIMES

2025

YEAR IN REVIEW

SIEGEL FAMILY ENDOWMENT

SIEGEL FAMILY ENDOWMENT

DECEMBER 2025

FIRST

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Top left: CitizensNYC; Top Right: TechCongress; Middle Left: Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum; Middle Right: Big Thought; Bottom Left: Braven; Bottom Right: Black Tech Futures Research Institute

SPECIAL REPORT

The Quiet Work Shaping Tomorrow

Special report documents the blueprints, partnerships, and strategies behind 2025's most under-covered success stories

BY KATY KNIGHT
President and
Executive Director
Siegel Family
Endowment

ACCORDING TO INDUSTRY data, new AI tools were launched at a rate of more than three per week in 2025. Simultaneously, polls show that trust in institutions fell to levels last seen during the 2008 financial crisis. The volume and velocity of technological change has increased measurably across sectors. Entire conversations—about work, community, learning, and opportunity—are being reframed in real time. Even the language we use to understand technology has shifted, filled with terms that would have been unrecognizable just a year or two ago.

At the same time, a pattern has emerged in communities nationwide: sustained investments in community-driven infrastructure, computational literacy, and equitable technology governance are producing measurable outcomes, even as they receive limited media attention. This investigative report uncovers the organizations building infrastructure for more equitable technological futures—and also examines the patient investments and coordination strategies that are making this quiet work possible.

Under-Reported Developments With Lasting Impact

Several initiatives that launched or expanded this year represent significant developments in how technology serves public needs:

AI applications beyond consumer tools. Despite rhetoric about AI's potential for medical, scientific, and climate breakthroughs, much development has focused on general consumer applications. In 2025, AI startups captured 52.5% of all venture capital investment globally—$192.7 billion—with the majority directed toward generative AI application companies. These businesses build specialized software using third-party foundation models for consumer or enterprise use; they're not focused on hoped-for transformative advances in science.

Yet new platforms launched this year address the gap by targeting specific scientific and community needs. Open Athena closes the gap between academia and the AI frontier by integrating world-class engineering, computing, and open development practices directly into leading university labs. This year, Open Athena helped researchers at Stanford, MIT, NYU, Princeton, Cornell, and other institutions build and release scientific foundation models in genomics, climate, materials science, and general-purpose AI—tools that would not have been possible within traditional academic constraints. By transforming promising prototypes into open, reusable AI infrastructure, Open Athena is helping true scientific discovery in the age of AI.

Coalitions are shaping fairer, more transparent technology. Americans are much more concerned than excited about the increased use of AI in daily life, with a majority saying they want more control over AI, according to a 2025 Pew Research Study. Collaborative initiatives aim to reverse this pattern.

One major effort is Humanity AI, a broad coalition uniting leaders in philanthropy to invest in a more inclusive, prosperous future in which AI is shaped by and for the people. Communities most affected by technological change can be a part of the development of technology rather than just be on the receiving end of its deployment.

Opportunity AI brings together over 100 professionals from more than 50 philanthropies to accelerate economic mobility through strategic AI applications. The initiative addresses a gap in the impact sector, which has lagged behind for-profit entities in AI adoption due to limited capital.

The Public Interest Technology University Network (PIT-UN) is cultivating the next generation of civic-minded technologists through university collaboration. Since 2019, PIT-UN members, which include over 60 universities, colleges have created career pathway models for practitioners-in-training while supporting faculty in their efforts to make public interest technology a well-recognized and well-funded academic discipline. These coalitions represent infrastructure: building capacity, knowledge-sharing mechanisms, and coordinated funding models that extend beyond individual projects to create pathways for equitable technology development.

Computational thinking programs demonstrate sustained relevance amid technological shifts. Despite claims that AI is rendering coding and other technical skills obsolete, an estimated 92% of all jobs now require digital proficiency, according to a National Skills Coalition report. Higher-paying positions—particularly in AI development—continue to demand computer science knowledge. Computational thinking is a literacy that develops enduring skills beyond career preparation: creativity, problem-solving, logic, and persistence. These are foundational skills regardless of shifting technological trends.

Programs designed around this principle are achieving significant reach: Scratch, the programming platform built to inspire creative learning for young people, serves over 150 million users across every country, enabling children to build interactive stories, games, and animations. This work—from early computational thinking lessons through high school and college computer science courses—is and will remain one of the most important investments in the innovation age.

Progress made towards more intentional distribution of the benefits of AI. The Center on Rural Innovation (CORI) has implemented a community-centered approach to technology-based economic development in more than 40 communities across 25 states. CORI's model includes a mix of investments in digital infrastructure, local talent development, and startup support based on a community's assets and needs, creating what researchers describe as a self-reinforcing cycle. Skilled jobs attract new businesses, generating innovation, which, in turn, creates additional employment and entrepreneurial activity. The economic impact is measurable. Rural counties with high broadband usage experience 213% higher growth in new business establishments and 44% higher GDP growth compared to those with low usage, according to CORI's 2024 analysis. By prioritizing local entrepreneurship and skill development over recruitment of outside firms and talent, the framework ensures existing community members benefit first from emerging opportunities.

"The infrastructure being built today will shape what becomes possible in the next decade."

Media Analysis: The Visibility Gap

Clearly there's a lot to be excited about, but why has it not captured more attention? The visibility gap between news about big consumer AI and news about community-driven technology reflects structural imbalances in media attention and resource allocation. When AI makes headlines, it's typically a product launch from Big Tech—not tools designed to solve local or social problems.

Consider Code the Dream's work: MyFriendBen, a free benefit screener available in 16 languages, helps North Carolinians identify approximately $2,500 in monthly savings through a six-minute eligibility check covering 18+ programs. UpState, another Code the Dream tool, enables civil society stakeholders to track and analyze state legislation, democratizing access to and influence in the policymaking process. These applications address real needs—economic security and civic participation—yet generate minimal media attention. Siegel grantees across all issue areas report that this visibility gap affects their ability to attract diverse funding sources, creating a cycle where impactful work remains under-resourced and under-recognized.

This disparity isn't accidental: technology companies command massive PR budgets and cultivate relationships with many kinds of influencers, while social impact organizations operate with lean communications teams and compete for coverage on different beats entirely. The result is a public narrative about AI that centers corporate innovation rather than community-driven solutions.

The team at Siegel is funding and elevating this under-covered work, aiming to shift what counts as newsworthy innovation. As 2025 closes, the infrastructure being built today will shape what becomes possible in the next decade. This work, whether or not it generates headlines, represents the kind of patient investment that defines long-term outcomes.

Additional coverage of Siegel Family Endowment's 2025 grantmaking and research continues on page 7.

About Siegel

SIEGEL FAMILY ENDOWMENT employs an inquiry-driven approach to grantmaking that is informed by the scientific method and predicated on the belief that philanthropy is uniquely positioned to address some of the most pressing and complex issues facing society today. Our grantmaking strategy positions us to be society's risk capital. We support high-quality work that will help us derive insights to timely questions and has high potential for future scale. Our focus is on organizations doing work at the intersection of learning, workforce, and infrastructure. We aim to help build a world in which all people have the tools, skills, and context necessary to engage meaningfully in a rapidly changing society. Siegel Family Endowment was founded in 2011 by David Siegel, co-founder and co-chairman of financial sciences company Two Sigma.

We are a foundation focused on understanding and shaping the impact of technology on society.

Our Inquiry Areas

We believe the impact potential of a philanthropic organization goes beyond the individual impact of specific grants or even broader strategies. A well-functioning philanthropy is also a learning organization. It should learn from successes as well as failures, connect the dots between issue silos and sectors, be humble about what it knows, and identify gaps in knowledge that need to be filled. It is our goal that advancing knowledge in our grantmaking interest areas will lead to better decision making for ourselves and other funders, as well as for policy makers, and leaders in the private and nonprofit sectors.

LEARNING

Our work supports and shapes programs and solutions that build lifelong learning opportunities and envision an education system that works for everyone, by addressing long-standing social and economic inequities. We prioritize initiatives that pilot inventions and scale transformative interventions that incorporate flexibility and rigor, and enable all learners to thrive in a rapidly evolving society. This includes research, platforms, and programs that offer everyone the skills, tools, and opportunities they need to continue learning and adapting, and that are open, accessible, and innovative.

WORKFORCE

We prioritize advancing actionable insights into how AI and emerging technologies transform work and the work environment. While empirical research on AI and work is growing, AI's possible impacts on work and workers remain largely unknown. AI affects not just the content of jobs (tasks that might be replaced), but also the context—including the hiring, management, and monitoring of workers, as well as the worker experience. We seek to better understand both how employers are deploying AI in the workplace and how workers might harness new technologies to advance their livelihoods.

INFRASTRUCTURE

The internet and emerging technologies have changed the way we engage with one another and our institutions, and reshaped elements that underpin our civil society. The choices and values driving the building and maintenance of our infrastructure shape our future. It's essential that we rethink how to define, design, govern, and fund it. We apply our multidimensional framework for infrastructure to deliver positive community outcomes and address the urgent challenges facing American society. We prioritize practices that empower communities in co-creating sustainable digital, social, and physical infrastructure centered on their unique values, needs, and aspirations.

Talk to Us

Have a question, an idea, or a story to share? We'd love to hear from you.

- **Email:** hello@siegelendowment.org
- **Connect** Use our contact form: siegelendowment.org/contact
- **Explore Our Thinking** Insights, essays, and updates from across our work: siegelendowment.org/insights
- **Follow Along** LinkedIn: linkedin.com/company/siegel-family-endowment

Margaret Honey of the Scratch Foundation and An-Me Chung of New America engage in discussion at Tech Together.

Siegel Pushes for Deeper Insights in a Rapidly Shifting Tech Future

GRANTMAKING SPOTLIGHT REPORT
with Insights from
Vice President and
Head of Grantmaking
Joshua Elder

SIEGEL FAMILY ENDOWMENT implemented significant changes to its grantmaking approach in 2025, responding to rapid developments in generative AI while maintaining its founding commitment to inclusive innovation and practical impact. The changes come as AI development accelerates across sectors. As Vice President & Head of Grantmaking Joshua Elder notes, "We're not here to chase technological trends. Our job is to stay rooted in the problems that matter most, and to support solutions that are feasible, equitable, and grounded in community needs." This perspective reflects the foundation's commitment to "technopragmatism"—prioritizing problems over solutions and feasibility over novelty—and its deliberate choice to view emerging technologies, including AI, through the lens of impact and equity rather than innovation for its own sake.

> "Our job is to stay rooted in the problems that matter most, and to support solutions that are feasible, equitable, and grounded in community needs."

Inquiry Over Activity Tracking

Inquiry has always been a hallmark of Siegel's approach, but in 2025 the foundation systematized that philosophy. The foundation's Knowledge & Impact team (K&I) completed its first full inquiry cycle, working with grantees to investigate shared questions rather than simply tracking grant activities. As Elder puts it, "This is about moving from intuition to intentionality—building an iterative, disciplined way to learn alongside our grantees." The effort marks a formalization of inquiry processes that previously operated informally within the organization.

"Grantees increasingly acted as thought partners, collaborating with us to surface blind spots, co-generate insights, and shape evolving hypotheses," reports Kyla Kasharian, who co-leads the foundation's K&I team. "Internal processes—including portfolio reviews, learning agendas for grantee meetings, and grant recommendations—were restructured to reflect this inquiry-driven model."

The shift emphasizes evidence generation over activity tracking, marking a departure from traditional philanthropic reporting focused primarily on outputs and deliverables.

Communities Positioned as Co-Designers

"Rapid AI development has increased urgency around community participation in technology design, deployment, and stewardship," observed Evan Trout, Siegel grantmaking manager. "Across our three interest areas—Learning, Workforce, and Infrastructure—we prioritize initiatives that position affected communities as active shapers of technology systems."

In the Learning portfolio, the foundation supported educator-centered education technology research and development pilots requiring meaningful input from classroom practitioners. A collaboration with Leanlab Education exemplifies this approach (see feature on page 11).

Infrastructure investments focused on models treating community members as active designers of the tools, products, and systems they want for their communities. A collaboration with Stanford's d.school demonstrates this framework in practice (see feature on page 17).

The Workforce portfolio advanced worker-informed research examining how AI and emerging technologies impact job quality and worker agency. Support for Jobs for the Future's entrepreneur-in-residence program represents one application of this strategy (see feature on page 23).

Backbone Infrastructure Prioritized

While consumer-facing AI applications dominated headlines in 2025, the foundation directed resources toward less visible infrastructure. Grantmaking prioritized what foundation staff describe as "unsexy tech"—data systems, research and development infrastructure, interoperability and testbeds that enable innovation to scale equitably.

The foundation also supported efforts to strengthen evidence bases and build repositories connecting fragmented ecosystems. These investments in connective tissue aim to make innovation trustworthy and scalable rather than merely novel.

SXSW EDU

Increased Strategic Discipline

The foundation adopted a plan for applying greater strategic discipline in our grantmaking, which now offers sharper long-term hypotheses and areas of impact.

As Elder explains, "Our goal is to make our priorities unmistakably clear, so grantees know exactly where we're headed and how we hope to partner." Developed in coordination with the Knowledge & Impact team, the framework focuses assessment on evidence generation, systems-level conditions, and meaningful outcomes for learners and workers. The foundation plans to use collected evidence to inform ongoing strategy adjustments.

The approach balances strategic clarity with flexibility. Foundation leadership acknowledged the need to adjust grant structures and priorities in response to new evidence and external changes—a departure from rigid, timebound funding plans common in institutional philanthropy.

Tailored Grantee Support Enhanced

The foundation reported increasing tailored support for grantees navigating technological change and an uncertain funding landscape. Rather than applying standardized approaches, staff developed support rooted in trust, transparency, and shared inquiry.

"We are deepening our relationships, and turning to our grantees as critical thought partners, rather than simply recipients of funds," stated Amanda Ahern, K&I team co-lead. "The shift reflects recognition that nonprofits face varied challenges requiring individualized responses."

The enhanced support comes as many nonprofits report difficulty attracting diverse funding sources and navigating rapid technological change without clear precedents or established best practices.

Technopragmatism as Guiding Philosophy

"As we navigated these changes, we kept returning to a simple question: what problem are we actually trying to solve? That's the heart of our technopragmatic approach. We make intentional choices to focus on problems first and technology second, pursuing practical solutions grounded in real needs rather than treating tech as the automatic answer," says Elder.

The philosophy represents continuity with founding principles even as specific strategies evolve. By viewing emerging technologies including AI through lenses of impact, feasibility, and equity rather than novelty, the foundation aims to maintain consistent values amid rapid external change.

Foundation leadership indicated these approaches will continue into 2026, with ongoing refinement based on evidence gathered through inquiry-based grantmaking and community partnerships.

Siegel Strengthens Commitment to Research as Funding Pulls Back

Foundation Affirms Rigorous Research as a Prerequisite for Systemic Change

RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT REPORT WITH
with Insights from Senior Vice President & Head of Research
John Irons

SIEGEL FAMILY ENDOWMENT is expanding its research investments at a moment when federal support for academic and independent research faces unprecedented cuts. The foundation announced it has eased grant requirements to provide more flexible support and doubled down on advocacy, positioning itself as a defender of the research enterprise more broadly.

The decision comes as federal research agencies experience funding cuts, layoffs, and political pressure to reshape priorities and findings. Research efforts at academic and non-academic institutions have seen cuts from multiple federal sources, alongside threats to academic freedom and attempted censorship.

"Nearly all" of Siegel's research grantees have had funding stopped or cancelled for existing projects, or expect funding opportunities to diminish in future years, reports John Irons, Senior Vice President at Siegel. The scale of federal cuts—measured in billions of dollars—dwarfs private foundation support, which operates in the millions.

Research as Mission-Critical Investment

Since its founding, Siegel Family Endowment has funded research aligned with its mission to understand and shape technology's impact on society. Early grants supported work on how human cognition informs AI development and, conversely, how AI behavior illuminates human thought processes (MIT Quest). Other funding supported research to better understand how digital technologies are impacting a range of societal issues from privacy and security, to employment and media platforms (Princeton Center for Information Technology Policy).

Current research investments have expanded to examine information flows in the social media era, with grants to NYU's Center for Social Media and Politics and the Santa Fe Institute. The foundation supports work on technology policy and societal impact through grants to the Center for Democracy & Technology, Data & Society, Aspen Digital, and the Black Tech Futures Research Institute.

Workplace AI research represents a growing focus, with support for the Washington Center for Equitable Growth, the AFL-CIO Tech Institute, Harvard researchers, the Economic Policy Institute, and MIT's Work of the Future Initiative, among others. The foundation also convenes a cohort of early-career Research Fellows at these institutions to explore interdisciplinary perspectives. (see more on page 15).

In recent years, the foundation built an internal research team to develop capacity and engage with broader research communities.

> **"We don't just fund research because we are intellectually curious...but because we believe that this understanding is a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for positive change."**

Measuring AI's Workplace Impact

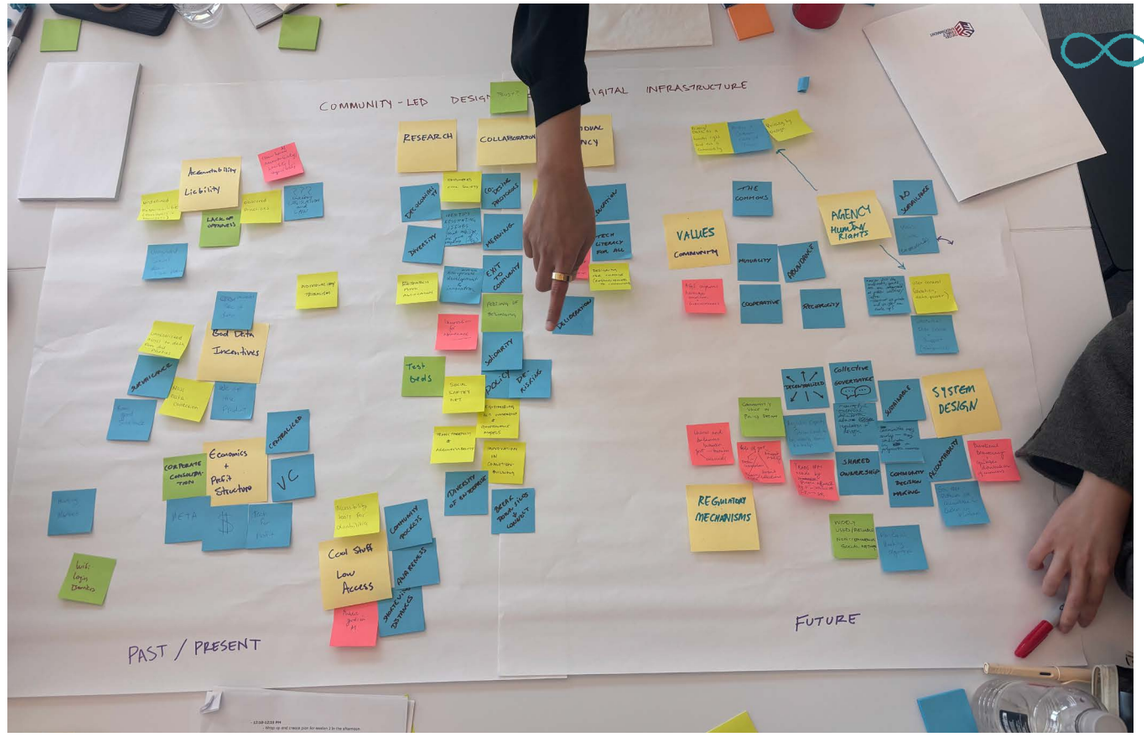
Recent grants demonstrate the foundation's commitment to evidence-based understanding of technological change. With Siegel support, the Washington Center for Equitable Growth announced funding for research projects analyzing AI's impact across various workplaces.

One project will continue and enhance the Real-Time Population Survey, described as the first nationally representative survey tracking generative AI adoption in U.S. workplaces. Researchers will develop questions examining how generative AI interacts with work tasks, providing insights into which workers use the technology, how frequently, and which tasks it complements or automates.

Findings will inform theories of labor market impacts and shape public policies affecting productivity growth and social safety net programs, according to the foundation.

The Case for Funding Research

The foundation emphasized that rollbacks extend beyond programs typically associated with diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. Medical and scientific advancements, historical research, and social science understanding all face threats as data and knowledge infrastructures are dismantled.



2024-2025 Siegel Research Fellows Convening

"These cuts are not popular nor are they supported by economic data, but have made their way into current policy," Irons stated. Polling consistently shows broad bipartisan support for research investment,[1] and evidence demonstrates substantial return on investment for federal spending.[2] However, demonstrated benefits and public support have not translated to adequate funding or countered hostility toward research appropriations.

Foundation leadership attributed the disconnect partly to misinformation sowing distrust in research, but also to assumptions that the case for public research support is self-evident and requires no articulation. The focus has remained on individual projects rather than addressing the broader funding landscape.

Foundations as Research Advocates

The foundation argues that private funders should both support research and defend the research enterprise itself. For example, Siegel supports the Coalition for Independent Technology Research, which "works to advance, defend, and sustain the right to study the impact of technology on society."

The foundation emphasized research benefits extending beyond knowledge creation: good job creation, community support and inspiration, enhanced global competitiveness and national security, and life-saving applications.

"We don't just fund (and conduct) research because we are intellectually curious—though we are," Irons stated. "We do so because we believe that this understanding is a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for positive change."

Research-Informed Strategy

The foundation positions its research investments as both intellectually motivated and strategically essential. Research findings inform grantmaking decisions while contributing to broader understanding of technology's societal impacts.

The foundation emphasized that research represents a precondition for positive change rather than an end in itself. As private support becomes more critical amid federal rollbacks, the foundation views expanded research funding as a response to both immediate need and long-term strategic priorities.

Foundation leadership indicated the expanded research commitment will continue as federal funding uncertainty persists, with the foundation working to fill gaps while advocating for renewed public investment in independent research.

1. "New National Poll Finds Strong Bipartisan Support for Federal Investments in Scientific Research." The Science Coalition, 2024.
2. "New Research Suggests Returns on Federal Investments in R&D Are Much Higher Than Current Estimates." Association of American Universities, 2023.

LEARNING

‘The way we’ve been doing research isn’t sustainable anymore.’

How Leanlab is Changing Education R&D through Co-Design with School Communities

THERE'S ALWAYS BEEN a disconnect between research and practice in education," says Katie Boody Adorno, the founder and CEO of Leanlab Education. "But with the development of genAI in 2022, that disconnect became exponential. These emerging technologies are evolving much faster than traditional research methods can keep up with."

Boody Adorno explains that in the fast-moving era of genAI, the original technology underlying an edtech product often becomes obsolete in the time that it takes to establish a research partnership with an organization or university, secure funding, recruit participating schools, conduct a study, and publish results.

"The way we've been doing research isn't sustainable anymore," Boody Adorno says.

That reality gave new urgency to Leanlab Education's work over the last year. Leanlab compresses the timeline for education R&D by involving school communities as co-designers. Much of that work occurs via Leanlab's AGILE Network, which launched in 2023 with the support of Siegel Family Endowment. The AGILE Network is a group of public school districts, charter schools, independent schools, educators, and other learning environments around the country that Leanlab engages to participate in co-design studies with edtech companies.

The AGILE Network accelerates the education R&D process in two critical ways. First, by drawing on a ready network of participants from a variety of backgrounds and contexts, Leanlab is able to match school communities and companies quickly, cutting study recruitment time substantially. Second, by engaging in co-design in real learning environments, Leanlab combines the design and testing process, ensuring that initial design takes real-world circumstances into account.

"Our hope is that co-designing with schools actually accelerates breakthroughs."

Efficiency isn't the only goal, though. "Our hope is that co-designing with schools actually accelerates breakthroughs. In the long term we want to see if companies that engage in co-design processes are building better products for teachers and students," Boody Adorno says.

Boody Adorno cautions that it will take time to answer that question fully. But early indications are positive. Leanlab's co-design processes have generated more than 450 recommendations from school communities to support edtech products. Leanlab Education has begun certifying products in co-design, attesting to the fact that they have implemented more than half of the recommendations that have been given to them during the co-design process.

Beyond these numbers are individual stories of how products have evolved as a result of co-design processes with Leanlab's AGILE Network. "Sometimes products radically change direction, particularly if they're early stage," Boody Adorno says.

In one case, a company named LitLab planned to design a product to help early primary educators generate decodable texts of different levels for early readers. However, after engaging teachers as co-designers via Leanlab's AGILE Network, LitLab learned that educators also wanted the tool to provide feedback on how well students were doing with the decodables.

Boody Adorno says, "It went from this nice aid to the teacher to a more dynamic platform that helps kids practice these essential skills and gives us really rich and meaningful data that we need to guide the classroom."

That's typical of a larger trend that Leanlab's AGILE Network is surfacing: Educators look to edtech to help them make better decisions, but edtech tools are not often designed with that goal in mind. Nor do educators typically have a vote on whether to use them.

Boody Adorno says that elevating educators as co-designers changes that power equation—an outcome that ultimately benefits students.

"Educators are able to voice frustration through the co-design process, and that voiced frustration is actually acted upon. They can see that change, and typically that's actually really empowering. They realize that they have some real agency," Boody Adorno says. "Oftentimes [the typical design process] misses the richness of experiences, and is built for the average. We want to push beyond that and meet the needs of kids and teachers and students from all different places."

The Thinkfluencers of 2025

The People Who Changed Our Minds This Year

MEET THE 2024–2025 Siegel Research Fellows—the researchers, academics, and policy thinkers redefining how we understand technology's impact on society.

From AI governance to worker power, social media dynamics to science diplomacy, these fourteen fellows are expanding what research can be: rigorous, creative, and deeply connected to the world it serves. Their ideas strengthened our insights, deepened connections across portfolios, and opened new doors for collaboration and inquiry.

Some fellows will continue their work with us, while we prepare to welcome the 2025–2026 cohort this December.

Alexandra Mateescu
Data & Society

Ben Zipperer
Economic Policy Institute

Caroline Sinders
Convocation Research and Design Labs

Deb Donig
All Tech is Human

Emma Zajdela
Santa Fe Institute

Júlia Martins Rodrigues
University of Colorado Boulder

Kylan Rutherford
New York University

Megan E. Rivera
Washington Center for Equitable Growth

Michaela Henley
Black Tech Futures Research Institute

Nicole Alvarez
Center for American Progress

Pegah Moradi
Cornell Tech

Ruchika Joshi
Center for Democracy and Technology

Shanthi Bolla
Aspen Digital

Sohyeon Hwang
Princeton University

Explore our YouTube channel for interviews where this year's cohort reflects on the questions at the heart of their research—and of our work. https://www.youtube.com/@SiegelEndowment

INFRASTRUCTURE

‘Communities deserve to have a role in shaping the future.’

How Stanford’s d.school is Building and Mobilizing Communities to Design a Better World

A COFFEE BAR WITH COACHES to guide participants through their creative challenges. An opportunity to play with physical artifacts that illustrate how machine learning algorithms work. A mystery machine that guides entrants to engage with virtual characters in futuristic scenarios.

These are not scenes from a typical education conference. Instead, they're scenes from the Public House, an immersive experience produced by the Stanford University's d.school with the support of Siegel Family Endowment at the 2025 SXSW conference. Named for the pubs that have historically served as community gathering places in the UK, the Public House builds on previous SXSW collaborations between Siegel and the d.school.

"Education conferences are typically a bunch of panels," reflects sam seidel, K12 Lab co-director at the Stanford d.school and a member of the SXSW Advisory Board. "But communities deserve to have a role in shaping the future. They deserve to be immersed in an experience, not just to be talked at. Our charge is to engage people in the making of things, to give a sense of joy, agency, and imagination."

"We want to engage community members, not just as consumers but as creators."

Laura McBain, managing director at the Stanford d.school and co-director of the K12 Lab says that that charge does not end with the final day of SXSW. Instead, the Public House was intended to equip participants with the resources to make change in their own communities. "Our work at SXSW is not a show-and-tell. It's about an application-based future where people are thinking through their own values, their own visions, and making something in real life that allows them to take action at home," McBain says.

What that next step is will depend on the attendee and the ways that they engaged with the Public House.

An attendee who talks through a creative challenge with a coach emerges with a plan for getting unstuck. An attendee who enters the Public House's confession-like "commitment booth" feels a greater sense of urgency in implementing a project after the conference is over. An attendee who collaborates on the "headlines for tomorrow" project thinks through the change they want to see and the steps for getting there, building on what others have contributed. However they participate, attendees take home material resources produced by the d.school that offer blueprints for unlocking creativity in concrete ways.

Over the years, the d.school team has refined the structure of their offerings at SXSW in order to better support participants in taking real actions in their own communities. For example, McBain says that she and her colleagues have learned the importance of offering self-guided, on-demand, one-off activities and experiences that can be completed in a short amount of time.

This makes the experience more approachable and less intimidating than structured workshops that participants aren't always able to attend in-full. Further, participants are able to engage in activities that best meet their current needs, and to build community through informal conversation with others who are experiencing common challenges.

These are lessons that seidel and McBain are excited to bring to their next collaboration with Siegel Family Endowment, which is currently ramping up. In this new project, the d.school will use community-centered design practices in a set of regional learning ecosystems to identify opportunities and challenges related to emerging technologies. "The driving question is how we can best collaborate with communities in designing the social, digital, and physical infrastructure to engage proactively with emerging technologies in their particular contexts," seidel says.

McBain and seidel are excited for this opportunity to move the work of the Public House forward. seidel says, "Public House offered a space and set of activities and way of connecting people that served as a small version of what we're developing and prototyping at a bigger level in this new collaboration with Siegel."

In addition to building on the work, fun, and connections from the Public House, the collaboration with Siegel will allow the d.school to lean into co-creation in and with communities. The new project will offer more sustained chances to engage with educators and other members of communities than is afforded by a short conference, allowing for greater impact and learning on how to support communities through co-design processes.

McBain says, "We want to engage community members, not just as consumers but as creators. We're excited to help communities build things and think about what they want their relationship with technology to be."

EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT

Around the Town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1. JANUARY

Navigating AI's Workforce Revolution: A Call for New Philanthropic Strategies

In-House Research Fellow Owen Davis and Vice President Joshua Elder presented to the New York City Workforce Funders Collaborative on AI and the future of work.

2. FEBRUARY

HBCU EdTech Summit

Vice President Joshua Elder and In-House Research Fellow Symone Campbell attended the HBCU EdTech Summit, hosted by Innovation for Equity. Their panel discussion explored the ongoing challenges in the edtech landscape, particularly the need for stronger coordination and innovation systems.

3. MARCH

SXSW EDU and Interactive

Siegel had a strong presence at SXSW EDU and Interactive, with Joshua Elder, Katy Knight, Laura Maher, Evan Trout, Ellery Wong, and Symone Campbell attending. We partnered with the Stanford d.school to produce the Public House, an immersive space designed to spark bold ideas, reimagine better futures, and build connections across fields and disciplines.

4. APRIL

ASU+GSV Summit

At ASU+GSV, President Katy Knight, Vice President Joshua Elder, and In-House Research Fellow Symone Campbell engaged broadly, collaborating with Walton Family Foundation on an event featuring the Learning Landscape Challenge, hosting breakfasts and lunches to discuss learning and innovation, and hosting our annual grantee happy hour.

5. MAY

Asia Leadership Conference

President Katy Knight and Vice President & Chief Operating Officer Jumee Song attended the 2025 Asian Leadership Conference in Seoul, sharing Siegel's work and learning from global leaders and innovators. They explored how to rethink AI R&D systems for public good and grow the next generation of problem-solvers—bringing back insights and inspiration to strengthen our own Public Interest Tech community.

6. JUNE

Sloss.Tech

Vice President Joshua Elder joined peers from Kapor Foundation and Omidyar Network on stage at Sloss.Tech, in Birmingham, Alabama. They discussed philanthropy's role in building a responsible and inclusive tech ecosystem, and underscored how Birmingham is shaping an alternative model that strengthens local community and drives meaningful change.

7. JULY

Learning Landscapes Demo Day

At Cornell Tech's Verizon Executive Education Center, Vice President Joshua Elder announced New Visions for Public Schools and Xchange Chicago as the grand-prize winners of the Learning Landscape Challenge, concluding the two year challenge. At the event, the challenge's Phase 3 teams presented their education infrastructure solutions to an audience of funders, innovators, policymakers, and advocates, and each grand-prize winner received $500,000 to support implementation and scaling.

8. AUGUST

Tech on the Vineyard

President Katy Knight and Vice President Joshua Elder co-hosted Tech on the Vineyard, during which foundation and industry peers laid the groundwork for collaboration on a number of topics, including AI education, innovation, and governance.

9. SEPTEMBER

Tech Together

Tech Together is our annual convergence point for stakeholders in the public interest technology ecosystem. We were honored to be joined by keynote speaker Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, who reminded us that digital rights are human rights.

Special thanks to co-hosts and sponsors—the GitLab Foundation, Heising-Simons Foundation, Patrick J. McGovern Foundation, Omidyar Network, and the Public Interest Tech Fund.

10. OCTOBER

Trust Conference

Chief of Staff Laura Maher spoke about *Responsible AI: A Corporate Imperative* panel at the Thomson Reuters Foundation's Trust Conference in London, drawing on examples from our grantee partner Upwardly Global and from Research Fellow Pegah Moradi at Cornell Tech. She highlighted both the power of directing AI toward highly specific, community-informed problems and the profound ways technology is reshaping the nature of work.

11. NOVEMBER

Tech for Us Screening

The screening at CUNY City Tech brought together New York City's growing public interest technology community—alongside partners CUNY 2X, BetaNYC, the CUNY PIT Lab, and the NYC PIT Pop-Up—to view the new Roadtrip Nation series Tech for Us. After the film, attendees joined a panel discussion and live Q&A with Vice President Joshula Elder, roadtripper Anthoni Garcia, and local PIT leaders about real-world pathways, partnerships, and opportunities in the field.

WORKFORCE

‘We want to learn what works for workers.’

How Jobs for the Future’s Incubation Program is Empowering AI Entrepreneurs to Center Worker Voice in Product Design

THERE WAS A LOT OF EXCITEMENT at Jobs for the Future as JFF Labs and the Center for AI got their selection process underway for the first-ever AI and Worker-Informed Design Entrepreneur-in-Residence program this fall. With support from Siegel Family Endowment, the incubator helps entrepreneurs who plan to use worker-centered design principles to scale AI-powered solutions that promote job quality, skill development, and equitable outcomes.

"There's a lot of focus on AI solutions now. But what is harder to do is to shape solutions inclusively at their inception," says Alex Swartsel, associate vice president at JFFLabs. "Too often these are technologies that are not developed with the full consideration of their potential audiences or users in mind. With this entrepreneur-in-residence program, we have an opportunity to change that."

"Too often technologies are not developed with the full potential of their users in mind. This entrepreneur-in-residence program has an opportunity to change that."

The six-month incubator is the first within JFF to focus directly on AI, but it follows a structure and playbook that JFFLabs has used for other cohorts. The incubator helps entrepreneurs identify and understand the perspectives of users and customers for their product. "Most investors will ask you what feedback you got from your 100 interviews with potential customers before they'll invest any money," Heather Terenzio, JFFLabs's director of partnerships and entrepreneurial initiatives, explains. "For the incubator, those potential users are workers, and it's important that entrepreneurs incorporate their feedback." Terenzio continues, "We also hope to include entrepreneurs building companies that serve workers who have distinct needs in their communities. Close interactions between the workers and the companies that the entrepreneurs are building is very important."

Terenzio says that the opportunity for entrepreneurs to connect with one another is equally important to the accelerator's formal curriculum, which focuses on topics such as sales, operations, raising capital, and marketing. "The biggest piece of what we do is the peer-to-peer learning component," Terenzio says. "Being an entrepreneur can be a very lonely process, so we make sure everybody shares what is working and not working."

Swartsel explains that learning from the incubator doesn't end with the participants. Swartsel and her colleagues hope that the cohort will uncover important insights about how to incorporate worker needs and voice in AI product development.

Swartsel explains, "We want to be able to say, 'This is how we can use AI to connect people to economic mobility, with the voices of workers and learners at the center.'" Those learnings will be critical to future JFFLabs entrepreneur-in-residence cohorts and the ongoing work of the Center for AI.

They're also important for the larger field at a time when genAI is still in its infancy.

"AI is only going to get bigger and bigger. The more opportunities that we have to meet founders where they are and to put our thumb on the scale about what 'good' looks like, the better," Swartsel says. "That allows for a greater proliferation in the marketplace of solutions that are built smartly, with workers at the center. We are trying to identify opportunities to help shape the field at-scale."

Swartsel acknowledges that this work is not easy, and that tensions abound. JFF survey findings from late 2024 indicate that while interest in and use of AI are growing in learning, at work, and for career advancement—especially among people of color—notable gaps, barriers to access, and challenges remain.

"The goal of the cohort is to engage and design for the very people who are potentially at risk of displacement by the very solutions—in some cases—that are being built here," Swartsel says. "That's something we need to test, to find out where resistance lies, and where there's excitement and opportunity."

It's too soon to say exactly what the outcomes of that work will be, but Terenzio says that JFF staff have already learned a lot from the entrepreneur-in-residence application process. The number of applications received and the range of proposed projects signal that entrepreneurs are eager to place workers at the center of their work.

"We're seeing a lot of reskilling and skill mapping products, which are going to be important, but we are also seeing innovative solutions and interesting ways to leverage AI to help the next generation of workers," Terenzio says. "It's really exciting to see how entrepreneurs are pushing on what AI tools designed with worker input can look like."

Buzzword Graveyard

Which phrases haunt your inbox, your meeting notes, or even your dreams?

Below are the most overused, over-polished, or over-promised words of 2025—many of which we at Siegel have probably said one too many times in check-ins, strategy sessions, or even on LinkedIn. Help us gently retire them before they sneak into our next email.

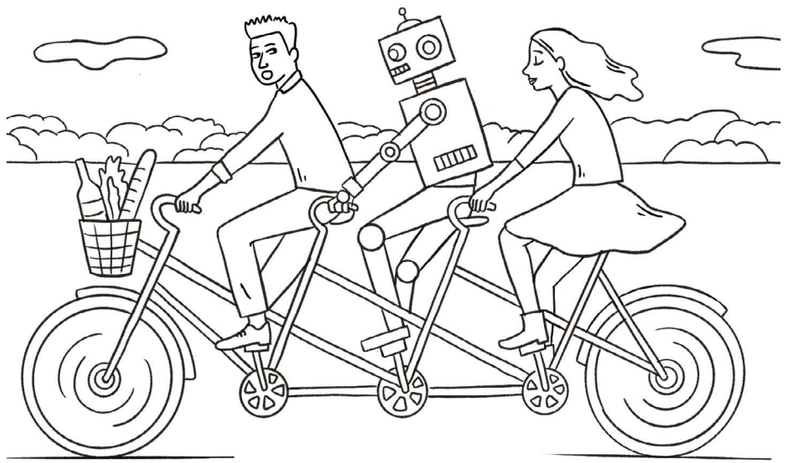
V	C	A	O	J	G	K	R	O	N	A	I	L	I	T	E	R	A	C	Y
N	N	K	P	G	H	M	T	H	I	S	E	J	V	B	G	E	D	H	E
F	O	L	I	Q	S	X	R	M	U	P	D	U	X	C	S	E	Q	F	V
X	E	W	U	Z	N	F	R	L	M	W	Y	K	L	J	N	X	X	O	I
I	C	Q	Z	C	P	O	M	A	J	P	H	E	F	F	E	K	W	T	T
U	O	E	E	D	C	E	H	M	C	F	X	R	G	V	P	J	V	E	A
I	S	N	D	P	E	R	A	M	K	N	X	Z	Y	S	J	S	L	C	R
N	Y	Z	L	X	W	U	C	W	V	U	Z	O	Z	J	X	L	O	H	O
F	S	I	Q	W	Q	T	N	F	V	R	J	G	R	E	M	P	C	N	B
R	T	L	Z	Q	T	U	H	G	R	C	H	A	T	B	O	T	N	O	A
A	E	U	A	T	H	F	E	U	L	O	P	A	K	D	K	H	Z	O	L
S	M	H	G	I	G	E	V	J	M	P	X	A	Q	O	X	P	K	P	L
T	V	Z	E	H	T	H	N	D	N	W	A	N	F	K	D	M	J	T	O
R	P	R	O	M	P	T	E	N	G	I	N	E	E	R	I	N	G	I	C
U	T	G	F	U	N	P	R	E	C	E	D	E	N	T	E	D	J	M	E
C	O	U	A	I	N	T	H	E	S	E	T	I	M	E	S	V	A	I	S
T	U	A	I	A	G	E	N	T	S	Y	W	J	A	L	P	T	T	S	N
U	Z	A	I	D	R	I	V	E	N	G	K	T	I	H	L	T	N	M	V
R	G	N	Y	Y	T	I	B	L	T	F	T	W	F	F	T	Y	U	U	Y
E	F	V	S	V	P	L	A	Y	B	O	O	K	S	J	F	Q	W	O	K

Circle the words that you've heard us say way too many times!

AGE OF AI
AGENTS
AI DRIVEN
AI LITERACY
CHATBOT
COLLABORATIVE
ECOSYSTEM
IN THESE TIMES
INFRASTRUCTURE
PLAYBOOK
PROMPT ENGINEERING
TECHNOOPTIMISM
THE FUTURE OF X
UNPRECEDENTED

Attendees at Tech Together take part in a discussion during the Human Connection + AI working group, hosted by the Omidyar Network.

CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST



CONTEST WINNERS

FIRST PLACE

"I miss the days when only humans could ruin a tandem ride."
— Ellery Wong

SECOND PLACE

"According to the app, our Holiday Enjoyment Efficiency is up 18% since he joined!"
— Evan Trout

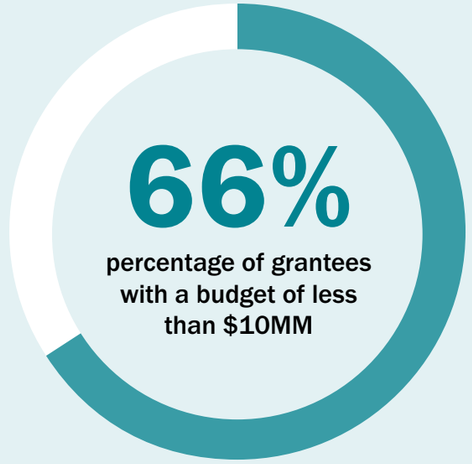
Siegel's 2025 Impact Index

Investments in Possibility

44M DOLLARS COMMITTED

Seventy-seven

GRANTS AWARDED, INCLUDING 10 TO FIRST-TIME GRANTEES



Networks in Motion

14

Siegel Research Fellows from leading institutions

100+ convenings attended and hosted

ENGAGED IN 5 FUNDER COLLABORATIVES

INCLUDING: PIT Infrastructure Fund; PIT-UN; Feedback Incentives Learning Group; Humanity AI; Opportunity AI.

Knowledge & Connection

25

INSIGHT POSTS

THREE Case Studies

and FOUR Q&As

Forty-six

earned media mentions across stories, interviews, op-eds, quotes, podcasts, and other original reporting featuring Siegel Family Endowment and its leaders.

Trust Index

Forty-three

grantee office-hour meetings held with 32 unique organizations

GRANTEE SCORING FEEDBACK*

Overall experience partnering with Siegel
4.94/5

Experience with our post-grant engagement process
4.94/5

Experience with our grant writing process
4.92/5

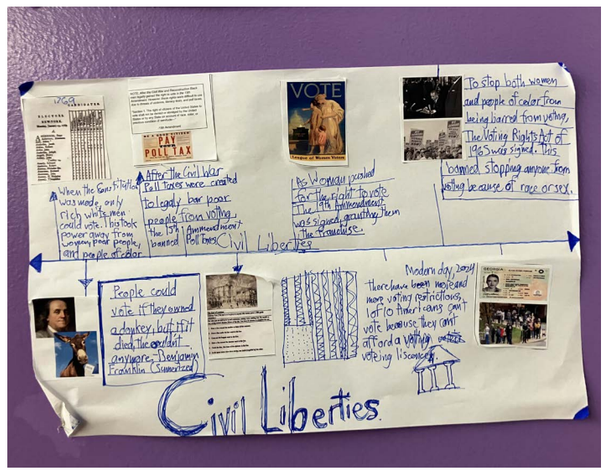
Each field received roughly **20% more 5-star ratings**—equivalent to about **10 additional organizations** giving us top marks, with response rates and total counts nearly identical.

*Based on end of year survey

Our Grantee Partners

[2025]

#BlackTechFutures Research Institute
1Up Career Coaching
Alder GSE
all tech is human
aiu
ASU Mary Lou Fulton College for Teaching and Learning Innovation
BetaNYC
Big Thought
bdc
The Birmingham Promise
DEVTECH Research Group
Braven
Break Through Tech
Brown University
building21
Candid.
Capital B
Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching
CHF
CAP
Center for an Urban Future
CDT Center for Democracy & Technology
CITAP Center for Information, Technology, and Public Life
CORI Center on Rural Innovation
Citizens Committee for New York City
Chalkbeat
Coalition for Independent Technology Research
Code the Dream
CODE
common sense
Communitas America
Community Solved
CSTA Computer Science Teachers Association
Connect Humanity
Convocation Research + Design
Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum
Cornell Tech
PiTech Public Interest Technology
creative commons
CITE
CUNY The City University of New York
Data & Society
DataScience4everyone
Digital Promise
Economic Policy Institute
Learning Landscapes Challenge
education reimagined
EducationWeek
eLAB
NSF ECEP Expanding Computing Education Pathways
Feed Back Labs
FIRST
Foundation for Civic AI
FullScale
Govern for America
Grove
CLJE Center for Labor & a Just Economy at Harvard Law School
d
Hoff-Barthelson Music School
Humanity AI
ICA
Innovation for Equity
ACE Institute for Advancing Computing Education
JFF
Just Capital
Just Fund.
Khan Academy
KIPP NYC Public Schools
Last Mile
LEANLAB Education
MakerUSA
LearnerStudio
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
MIT Siegel Family Quest for Intelligence
Media Economies Design Lab University of Colorado Boulder
MIT work of the future
Modern Classrooms Project
National Council of Nonprofits
New America
New Growth Innovation Network Powering Inclusive Economies
Public Interest Technology University Network
public interest tech.fund
new york cares.
nysci New York Hall of Science
New_ Public
NYC First
CSMaP Center for Social Media and Politics
Open Athena
Opportunity AI
Princeton University
Project Evident
Project Invent
project tomorrow
Pursuit
Quill
READ Alliance
REALIGN Education
Rebuild by Design
RedefinED Atlanta
RPA Regional Plan Association
reimagine America's Schools
ril responsible innovation labs
Roadtrip Nation
Robin Hood Learning Technology Fund
Santa Fe Institute
Scratch Foundation
Stanford PACS Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society
SETDA
STEM teachers NYC
STEM from Dance
NYC Public Schools Office of Student Pathways
StudyGroup
Marshall Street
Teaching Lab
TechCongress
The Acceleration Project
AFL-CIO America's Unions
Aspen Digital aspen institute
Obama Foundation
the Bell
Black River Innovation Campus
DATA4Philanthropy
The Hechinger Report
The Knowledge House
Tools Competition
Maintainers
NYCT The New York City Workforce Development Fund in the New York Community Trust
Tech Institute
Transcend
Tech Policy Lab University of Washington
Upwardly Global
urban arts
Washington Center for Equitable Growth
WeTeach_CS
Work It Out Wombats!



Top Left: SXSW EDU; Top Right: The Light House at SXSW Interactive; Middle Left: PIT-UN; Middle Right: RedefinED Atlanta; Bottom Left: KIPP NYC; Bottom Right: Tech Together