

creating  
an  
internet  
for the  
people

resist tech monopolies - seattle

# introduction

The internet was stolen from us. From the start, the history of the internet is characterized by corporate privatization of public technology. We believe that communities should take back what was stolen from us and create a newer, more equitable internet for the people.

In the US, the internet began as a publicly-funded project to serve the needs of the the military. It became more than that when academics realized they could link together their labs and the everyday people could connect with each other on message boards. It was certainly not perfect, but it was a public good.

Then, neoliberalism attacked. Once the backbone of the internet, NSFNET, began to reach capacity, the government auctioned off the pieces to private corporations so they could make money off the very public that funded the project in the first place. **Privatization wasn't inevitable, and we can imagine so much better.**

# a community-owned internet

While ISPs line their pockets with subscription fees, Americans pay some of the most expensive rates in the world, in exchange for the 12th-worst connectivity rates globally.

Meanwhile in rural North Dakota, 100% of residents can access gigabit speeds through community-owned fiber-to-the-home networks, better access and speed than most Americans.

In Detroit, up to 60% of low-income households have no access to broadband. The Equitable Internet Initiative has set up a system of wireless transmitters across the city to provide free internet.

Community-owned data networks can not only provide better connectivity by valuing universal connectivity over profit maximizing. They encourage active participation in human networks of trust and support, through caring both for collective infrastructure and for each other. **What would your neighborhood look like if you owned the infrastructure together?**

# big tech

Meta, Google, Netflix, Amazon, Apple, X: many of us use these big tech products everyday, but who makes the decisions about how they are run?

**Users, artists, and engineers are the ones who make these online spaces worth visiting, and yet, we have little say in their governance.**

As big tech companies harvest our data in order to feed us customized ads that make us *want* things we don't *need*, they simultaneously distract us from the unmet *needs* that they don't *want* us to think about. They surveil those who try to speak up against injustice, often censoring radical voices and eagerly handing over data upon police request.

# the cloud

A famous saying goes "The cloud is someone else's computer." This is technically true, but in reality, cloud providers own a large amount of data centers that make them the default place to have content hosted.

While it creates convenience, it gives those companies unprecedented power over a crucial piece of infrastructure and makes the possibility of that infrastructure being owned and governed by the people practically impossible.

It doesn't matter how you vote or who you vote for, there is no democracy if you can't participate in the decisions that affect important parts of your life. As is, a handful of disproportionately wealthy people are in charge of making decisions that affect internet users all around the world.

The discourse around this needs more attention and **we need to explore solutions and experiment with them quickly and cooperatively** if we intend to avoid the imminent threat to our freedom and what makes humans unique, our ability to make decisions collectively.

# Decentralization and Federation

We don't need to copy the current function of profit-driven internet. We need to imagine alternatives that serve our needs and make us thrive as communities, not consumers. **"Failure of imagination produces practical failures"** and our ability to imagine an alternative is what sets us up for success. <sup>1</sup>

Some are experimenting with decentralization and federation as a way to break the monopolies of social media tycoons and their surveillance capitalism.

Decentralization allows communities to host online content across nearby physical locations (e.g. home servers, libraries, small data-centers) without a central authority to manage or own all the content.

Federation allows these decentralized system to **communicate and connect users without relinquishing decision-making power to a small group of decision makers** (e.g. shareholders, executives, etc.).

## Decentralization and Federation (continued)

We already have examples that have proven their viability. Federated social media alternatives like Mastodon and Peertube allow millions of users to socialize virtually while owning their online spaces.

Along with social media, **federation could be an alternative computational resource to the corporate cloud**, where we could pool compute for more useful ends than, say, crypto mining.

Imagine if places in Seattle, such as public libraries, acquired the physical servers needed to host one of these alternatives. If X went down because  $\backslash\_(\text{ツ})\_/\_$ , or if we lost connection to the rest of the internet due to a natural disaster, Seattle neighborhoods would still be able to talk to each other on our own social media instances, or pool our own compute power, because we would own and operate the means of communication.

**"Creativity is a social act".** <sup>1</sup> In what ways can you imagine community-owned social media, or even compute, might serve your needs?

# conclusion

By now, you've hopefully come to see the ways in which privatization makes for an internet that does not meet the needs of the people, but instead steals from us in the interest of profit maximization!

Taking it one step further, companies here in Seattle like Amazon, Boeing, Google, and Microsoft are complicit in providing the technology for genocide with initiatives like Project Nimbus. In response, groups like ours are organizing against this war profiteering. **If you'd like to get involved, check out the information below and help us create an internet for the people!**

<https://actionnetwork.org/forms/rtm-intake>



<sup>1</sup> Tarnoff, Ben. *Internet for the People: The Fight for Our Digital Future*. Verso, 2022.