

Should **NGOs** Survive Without Radically **Rethinking** Everything?

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Meet the Panelists



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Why the traditional NGO model no longer matches today's reality

NGOs are operating in a changing environment that is defined by three main structural shifts:

> **Geopolitical fragmentation**

After 80+ years of stability, the current world order is significantly fragmented, creating an uncertain environment for “the business of doing good”.

> **Financial instability from the start**

The international development framework, heavily reliant on Global North funding, is now considerably disrupted, with serious implications for the future of the sector.

> **Technological acceleration.**

AI is reshaping knowledge work, investors use advanced analytics to allocate capital, and corporations run on integrated digital systems—while many NGOs still rely on fragmented spreadsheets and manual reporting.

How can NGO fix this?

This leads directly to the next question. If the traditional funding base is unstable, what does a resilient funding architecture look like?



Adapt or Die: Why NGOs Must Radically Rethink

The Funding Cliff

Traditional grant funding from global donors is rapidly drying up. NGOs must pivot from outdated charity models to sustainable co-investment strategies.

The Legitimacy Crisis

Institutions and communities are rejecting international NGOs that attempt to speak on behalf of affected populations. NGOs must step back and transition into logistical facilitators that amplify direct, local leadership.

Decolonizing Aid

Western-centric, top-down models can reinforce colonial dynamics and distance communities; organisations should reduce western-centric control and shift resources directly to local actors.

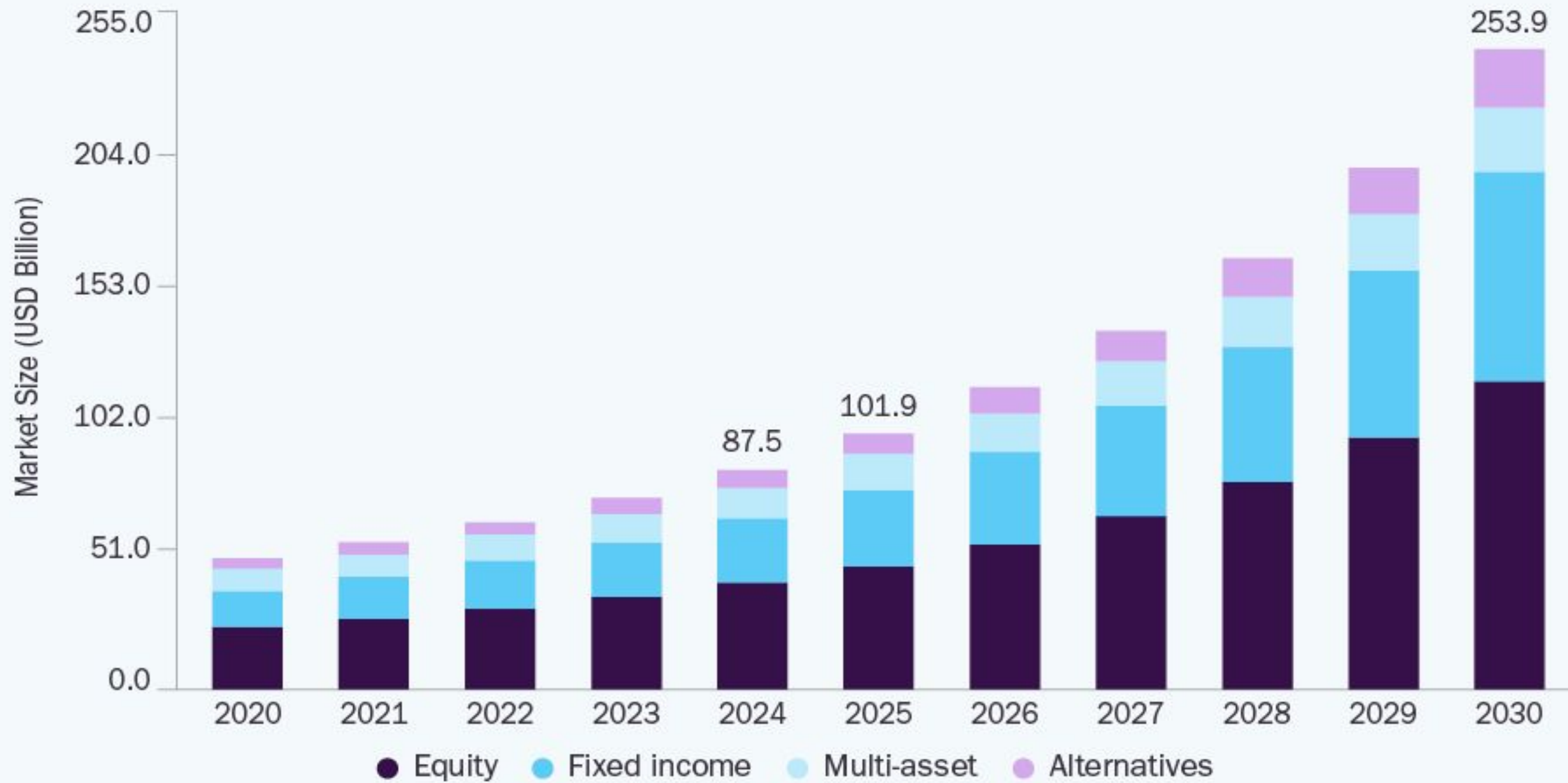
The Digital Trust Premium

Clinging to outdated, manual reporting systems destroys donor trust and drains financial resources. Nonprofits must implement AI and real-time data analytics to guarantee radical transparency and operational efficiency.

Impact investing- the new normal

Impact Investing Market

Size, by Asset Class, 2020 - 2030 (USD Billion)





Building a Funding architecture Beyond Grants

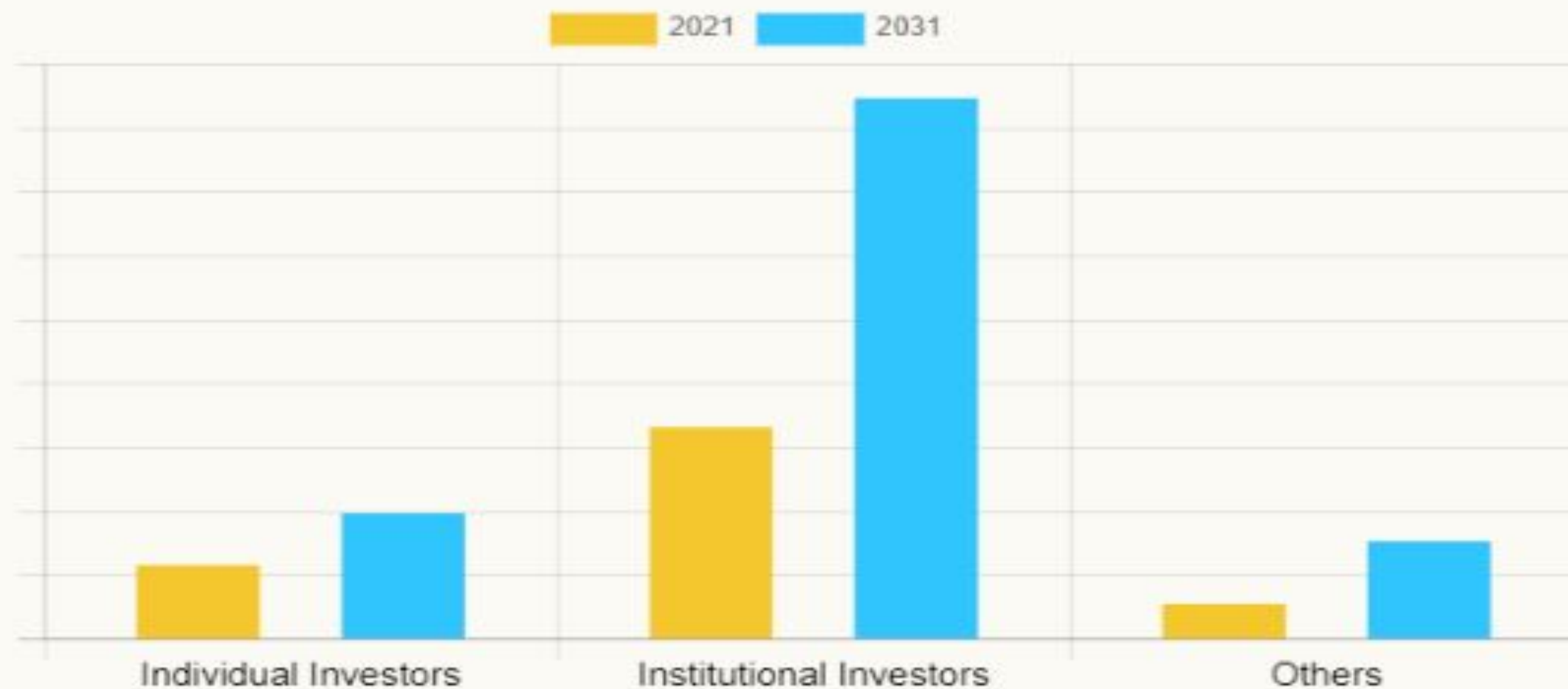
A robust funding plan goes beyond grants, using data and AI to strengthen fundraising. It focuses on funding analysis, catalytic grants, readiness to blend grants with investment, and AI-supported fundraising to diversify income, reduce risk, and maximise impact.

Let's discuss the structural steps in detail.



IMPACT INVESTING MARKET

BY INVESTOR



The institutional investors segment attained the highest growth in 2021

Report Code : A53663 | Source : <https://www.alliedmarketresearch.com/impact-investing-market-A53663>

Next up **Toni-Ann Robinson**



Consultant

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Key Considerations for a Modern NGO

A modern NGO is financially diversified, digitally integrated, outcome-driven and designed to operate in volatility rather than depend on stability. It reduces reliance on a narrow donor base, connects finance and programme data through integrated systems, and manages impact as a strategic portfolio rather than isolated projects.

Here are the top three implementation priorities that can help NGOs move to a modern, future-ready capability by 2030.

01 Redesign your Funding Plan(s)

- Start with a **funding dependency review**: calculate what share of your income comes from your top three funders, and look back over the last five years to see how much your funding has fluctuated.
- Then create a three-year funding mix plan that combines catalytic grants with modern options like results-based or performance-linked financing.

02 Integrate Digital Infrastructure Across the Organisation

- Conduct a digital maturity assessment covering finance systems, donor management platforms, monitoring frameworks, and cybersecurity standards
- Invest in integrating systems so that finance, programmes, and fundraising data flow through a single source of truth.

03 Shift from Project Delivery to Portfolio Stewardship

- Define a clear long-term outcome thesis that guides all programme design and capital allocation decisions.
- Map all current projects against this thesis and identify overlap, gaps, and funding cliffs.

By 2030, the organisations that remain credible will be those that demonstrate strategic coherence, diversified capital, and disciplined performance management. [Find out how to here.](#)



From Project Thinking to Portfolio Management

Project-level thinking creates siloed interventions, teams & impact. Portfolio-level thinking looks at the organisation's work as a connected set of projects, making sure they align with the strategy and deliver greater combined impact—not just results in isolated activities.

Radical rethinking begins with immediate, actionable steps. Here are step-by-step process we highly recommend.

✔ **Define a Strategic Outcome Thesis**

Clarify long-term organisational goals over three to five years. Use this thesis to determine which initiatives advance the mission and which do not.

✔ **Map Current Projects Against Strategic Outcomes**

Reformat, where possible, current projects to complement strategic focus. Shift from project-level reporting to portfolio dashboards that show cumulative outcomes, cost efficiency, and funding exposure.

✔ **Rebalance Funding and Risk**

Diversify capital across projects. Blend grants, earned income, and performance-linked financing to reduce dependency on single sources.

✔ **Align Leadership and Governance**

Adjust staff performance metrics and board oversight to focus on portfolio performance. Decisions are based on overall mission impact and strategic priorities, not isolated outputs.

Organisations that take these steps can strengthen strategic alignment, diversify funding, and better demonstrate measurable impact over time. [Find out how to here.](#)



Re-designing your Funding Plan(s)

Now is the best time to shift from traditional grants to building a deliberate funding mix that keeps your organisation stable and impact-focused.



Define a mission-aligned financing thesis

Clarify the long-term outcomes your organisation seeks to achieve over a five to ten-year horizon.



Map funding streams

Map all current funding streams against this thesis. Identify overlap, gaps, and concentration risks.



Rebalance risk

A healthy portfolio contains a mix of stable grants, catalytic funding, earned income, and performance-linked mechanisms. This diversification reduces volatility.

Organisations that take these steps can strengthen strategic alignment, diversify funding, and better demonstrate measurable impact over time. [Find out how to here.](#)

Next up Shila Nhem



Technical Director
Humentum



The Government Gap

The governance models many NGOs have inherited:

Compliance-Driven

Compliance-heavy, grant-based funding.

Focused on meeting donor requirements and reporting obligations.

Financial oversight centred on grant compliance, not institutional resilience/sustainability.

Stable Grant Funding Cycles

Funding models reinforcing donor dependency and reinforcing short-to medium-term project thinking rather than diversified financial strategy and long-term financial sustainability.

Technology-Blind

Slower technological cycles and human-driven decision-making.

With no formal mandate or capability to oversee digital systems, AI use, data governance risks, or automated decision-making tools.

Governance Capabilities NGOs Need to Build

01



Data Literacy

Boards that read, interrogate, and act on data — not just approve reports.

02



Financial Engineering

Moving beyond spend compliance to diversified funding models, revenue volatility, long term financial sustainability.

03



Technology Oversight

Governance with the mandate to oversee AI, digital systems, and cyber risk.

04



Outcome-Focused Leadership

Evidence-based decisions that connect governance to mission impact.

Pillar 1: Data Literacy

The Reality

- Reports are approved, not interrogated
- Dashboards track outputs and not linking to mission outcomes
- Financial oversight focuses on spend, not value
- Data quality is rarely challenged at board level

What Good Looks Like

- ✓ Leaders interrogate data: ask what data is missing and assumptions behind metrics
- ✓ Data quality reviewed as a standing governance item with identification of weak indicators
- ✓ Link financial, operational, and impact data
- ✓ Board skills audit and skills development includes data competency as a requirement

Pillar 2: Financial Engineering

Beyond Spend Compliance

- ▶ Stop asking: Did we spend within budget?
- ▶ Start asking: Is our financial model structurally sustainable?
- ▶ Financial oversight should interrogate financial sustainability

Board Financial Literacy

- ▶ Must be able to critically read and interpret finances
- ▶ Financial reports should be challenged, not just received
- ▶ Board needs a technical finance person and invest in board financial literacy

Financial Diversification & Revenue Diversification

- ▶ Boards must actively oversee the funding mix and financial resilience strategy/modelling
- ▶ Funding concentration risk, donor dependency ratio, revenue volatility exposure, liquidity buffers, cost recovery realism

Finance Linked to Outcomes

- ▶ Resource allocation decisions should be tied to impact evidence, strategic priorities
- ▶ Cost-per-outcome analysis, portfolio level impact allocation, return on mission
- ▶ Financial health and programme performance must be reviewed together

Pillar 3: Digital & AI Oversight

The AI Governance Mandate

- ▶ Boards must explicitly include AI and digital systems within their governance remit
- ▶ Integrated Risk Governance: Cybersecurity, data protection, and AI risk cannot sit in silos.
- ▶ Boards must ensure defined responsibility for AI-driven outputs.
- ▶ Be aware that AI systems carry reputational, legal and mission risk which need to be actively managed

AI Governance: The 4 As

ADOPT

Make AI visible and policy-governed e.g. an AI use policy on permitted tools, data handling, staff accountability

ASSIGN

Clarify accountability and human oversight: designated AI risk owner and AI governance arrangements

AUDIT

Periodic reviews of tools in use, their outputs, and their risks

ALIGN

Anchor AI use to mission and values

Pillar 4: Outcome Focused Decision Making

NOT JUST....

Approving activities and budgets

Did we spend according to plan?

Project-by-project oversight: Is this individual project performing?

Did we meet donor requirements and output targets?



BUT ALSO....

Governing for measurable mission outcomes: Are we funding what drives mission impact or what is easiest to deliver?

Evaluating impact: What changed because of this?

Are we allocating capital to the highest-impact portfolio areas?

Are we solving the root problem or reporting activity?

What Organizations Can Start Doing Now

01

Add Digital & AI Governance to the Board Agenda

- Include AI in risk reporting
- Map where AI is currently used
- Assign board-level oversight responsibility

Small action, big governance shift.

02

Conduct a Funding & Revenue Risk Review

- Analyze revenue volatility risk
- Assess donor dependence ratios
- Review sustainability of financial model

Grant tracking → resilience oversight.

03

Introduce Portfolio-Level Reporting

- Group programmes by strategic priority
- Compare impact, risk, and sustainability
- Allocate revenue strategically

Supervise the portfolio, not just projects.

04

Upgrade Board Data Literacy

- Short training on reading dashboards critically
- Redesign reports: focus on 5–7 key indicators
- Link financial metrics to impact outcomes

Volume of reporting → quality of insight.

05

Develop an AI Use Policy

- Define where AI can and cannot be used
- Set human oversight requirements
- Determine AI governance safeguards

You don't need 80 pages. You need clarity.

06

Redesign Board Questions

- Pick recurring agenda items
- Example change from: 'Did we deliver?'
- To: 'What changed, what impact/outcome did we achieve?'

Transformation starts with better questions.

Q & A

Upcoming Executive Education

Write Winning Proposals (Online)

Write Winning Proposals (Online) is an interactive e learning course designed for NGOs. It builds practical skills in writing, managing, and negotiating successful funding proposals through live sessions, real donor case studies, and collaborative learning. It focuses on opportunity selection, proposal structure, clear writing, and effective budgeting.

Write Winning Proposals

The course builds practical skills in writing, managing, and negotiating successful funding proposals through hands-on exercises, real donor case studies, and small-group learning, with a strong focus on opportunity selection, proposal structure, clear writing, convincing budgets, and understanding donor decision-making processes.

Impact Investing for NGOs

The course offers a practical and strategic introduction to impact investing, helping NGOs and mission-driven organisations understand how to engage effectively with catalytic capital providers. Through interactive sessions, case studies, and peer learning, participants gain clarity on impact investment principles, investor expectations, impact measurement, and communication strategies.

If you are uncertain about where to start, feel free to email nicole@mzninternational for any training-related inquiries.

Upcoming Webinars

LIVE WEBINAR

2026

Speakers

Blended and Innovative Finance for NGOs

Florian
Managing Partner
Human Planet

Christian
Managing Director
MzN Intl

MzN International

Follow-Up Webinar: Blended and Innovative Finance for NGOs

4 March @ 13:00 - 14:00 CET

LIVE WEBINAR

2026

Speakers

First Quarterly Funding Briefing & Donor Update

Stephen
Analyst | MzN

Betigül
Consultant | MzN

Toni-Ann
Consultant | MzN

MzN International

First Quarterly Funding Briefing & Donor Update

25 March @ 14:00 - 15:00 CET

**THANK
YOU**

Do good, better!

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