



COOPERATIVE FUTURES
INSTITUTE

THE COOPERATIVE FUTURES INSTITUTE

Building a Cooperative Future for America

The Cooperative Futures Institute (CFI) is a hybrid ecosystem builder that brings together the strengths of a think tank, a startup incubator, and a cultural engine. Its purpose is to design, prototype, and scale a new generation of technologies (both digital tools and human-facing systems) that treat cooperation as the fundamental design principle. In a landscape where most technologies optimize for engagement, competition for attention, and extractive data practices, CFI instead builds systems that optimize for mutual benefit, trust, shared fate, and human flourishing. Its work is about creating the intellectual, cultural, relational, and technical conditions under which a different digital future becomes possible.

At the heart of CFI is a simple thesis backed by decades of evolutionary and social science: humans are intrinsically cooperative when we feel safe, connected, and in control of our environments. Technology should amplify those instincts rather than hijack them. Everything CFI does is directed toward translating cooperation science into actual systems, products, and institutions that help people cooperate with each other, with their future selves, and with the emerging world of AI.

Why this is needed in the current moment: We are living through a profound breakdown in trust, coordination, and shared meaning. Modern technologies have intensified loneliness, fragmentation, and distraction - problems rooted not in individual shortcomings but in an ecosystem that rewards the hijacking of attention rather than supporting human goals. At the same time, the global race toward AGI is unfolding within a paradigm that treats AI systems as isolated agents that must be controlled or “aligned,” instead of recognizing them as components of broader cooperative ecosystems.

CFI was created to build an alternative path. Its purpose is to help create a world where digital systems support human relationships, strengthen communities, and make cooperation easier, rather than harder. The Institute’s work is oriented toward societal challenges whose root cause is failed cooperation and coordination - and toward building the technological and cultural infrastructures that can repair it.

What we create: The systems CFI develops share a common set of characteristics: they treat cooperation as their optimization target, measuring success not through engagement metrics but through their ability to increase trust, coordination, and mutual benefit. They rely on user-centric data architectures that empower individuals to control and meaningfully use their own data. And they place human–human and human–AI cooperation at the core of their functionality, scaffolding people into becoming more capable and connected cooperators in the real world.

CFI’s early prototypes demonstrate this translational approach: The AmericaAI chatbot supports people in resolving conflict, navigating relational dilemmas, and learning cooperation through a warm, ancestor-like voice; MyRiskDashboard applies cooperation principles to risk management by enabling

*This document was prepared by Athena Aktipis, Executive Director of the Cooperative Future Institute
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hybrid insurance, risk pooling, prediction markets, and mutual-aid networks; and the Cooperative OS reimagines digital life around cooperation with one's future self and community, beginning as an Android layer that interrupts hijacking loops and offers goal-aligned alternatives. Together, these systems function not as standalone apps but as mutually reinforcing elements of an emerging cooperative ecosystem.

How we work: CFI functions by creating the conditions under which cooperative technologies can emerge and thrive. It translates cooperation science into design principles through think tank activities, and simultaneously builds and tests prototypes through its startup incubation efforts, spinning out companies where appropriate. The cultural arm of CFI produces festivals, comedy and music events, storytelling projects, and other forms of public engagement that help shift narratives and create shared meaning around cooperation.

The Institute also cultivates collaborative environments through convenings and design sprints where artists, scientists, developers, and communities work together to invent new cooperative technologies. Partnerships with laboratories, companies, municipalities, and organizations aligned with cooperative principles provide the real-world contexts where prototypes can be tested and refined. CFI is neither a traditional research institute nor a conventional tech incubator; its unique power comes from the way it allows scientific insight, technological experimentation, and cultural meaning-making to reinforce one another.

What makes CFI viable: CFI's strategy is grounded in realities that make its success plausible. Cooperation is intrinsic to human nature; people want to support one another and contribute to something meaningful, and technologies that align with these instincts are naturally adopted and sustained. Also, the underlying science of cooperation is mature - areas of research such as multicellularity, social evolution, risk pooling, coordination games, and interdependence already provide a strong theoretical foundation. The cultural layer accelerates adoption, as CFI's festivals, events, and narrative projects build a shared vocabulary and emotional resonance around cooperative futures. The technology prototypes themselves interoperate, with America AI, MyRiskDashboard, and the Cooperative OS reinforcing one another's value. And importantly, there is growing demand for an alternative to the AGI race: people want technology they can trust, technology that reduces fragmentation rather than intensifying it.

How we define success: In the near future, success for CFI means catalyzing a portfolio of cooperative AIs across different domains of life, establishing mutual-aid based risk infrastructure accessible to ordinary people, and building a data architecture that empowers users rather than exploiting them. It means enabling families, friends, neighbors, and communities to cooperate more effectively, and establishing cultural narratives that make cooperation exciting, aspirational, and normal. Over time, it includes developing an operating system, and eventually a smartphone, built from the ground up to help people become their best selves.

In the long arc, CFI's success is measured by its role in shifting the broader digital ecosystem from one that maximizes engagement to one that maximizes cooperation, and by its contribution to a new information layer that supports an evolutionary transition toward greater cooperation on this planet.

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