

A person with long red hair, wearing a white jacket and white pants, is running away from the camera on a grassy hill. The background features a large field of white wind turbines under a clear blue sky. The terrain is hilly and green, with some rocky patches. A small white building is visible in the distance to the right.

***Next Steps, Now:
Insights for Cultural and Creative Leaders***



TrendWatch 2025

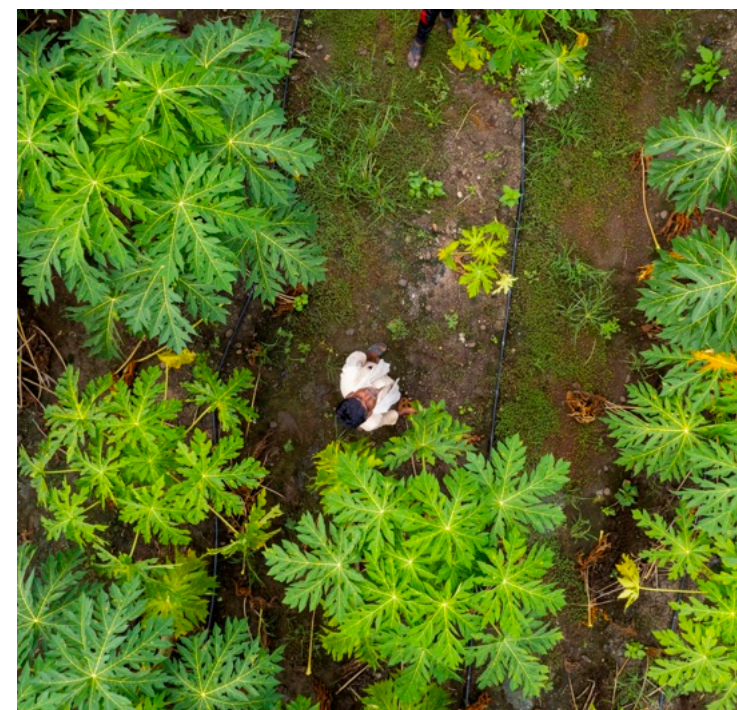
Introduction: Why These Trends Matter

As we move into 2025, cultural institutions, nonprofits, and creative businesses face rapidly shifting landscapes driven by **evolving consumer expectations, economic uncertainties, and technological innovations.**

Whether you're a museum striving to maintain relevance, a nonprofit seeking to engage new donors, or a creative enterprise redefining customer experiences, it's vital to **align your communications and public engagement strategies with the trends shaping our world.**

No matter if you're engaging audiences, designing programs, or communicating your mission, these insights and examples offer a lens to **innovate, inspire, and connect with communities**—reinforcing who you are, what you stand for, and how you express these values through your programming, partnerships, and every point of engagement.

Most importantly, we hope to help you **tie these trends together into a cohesive strategy** that effectively supports your organizational goals, ensuring that you stay aligned with what your community values most.



2025 Trends Overview



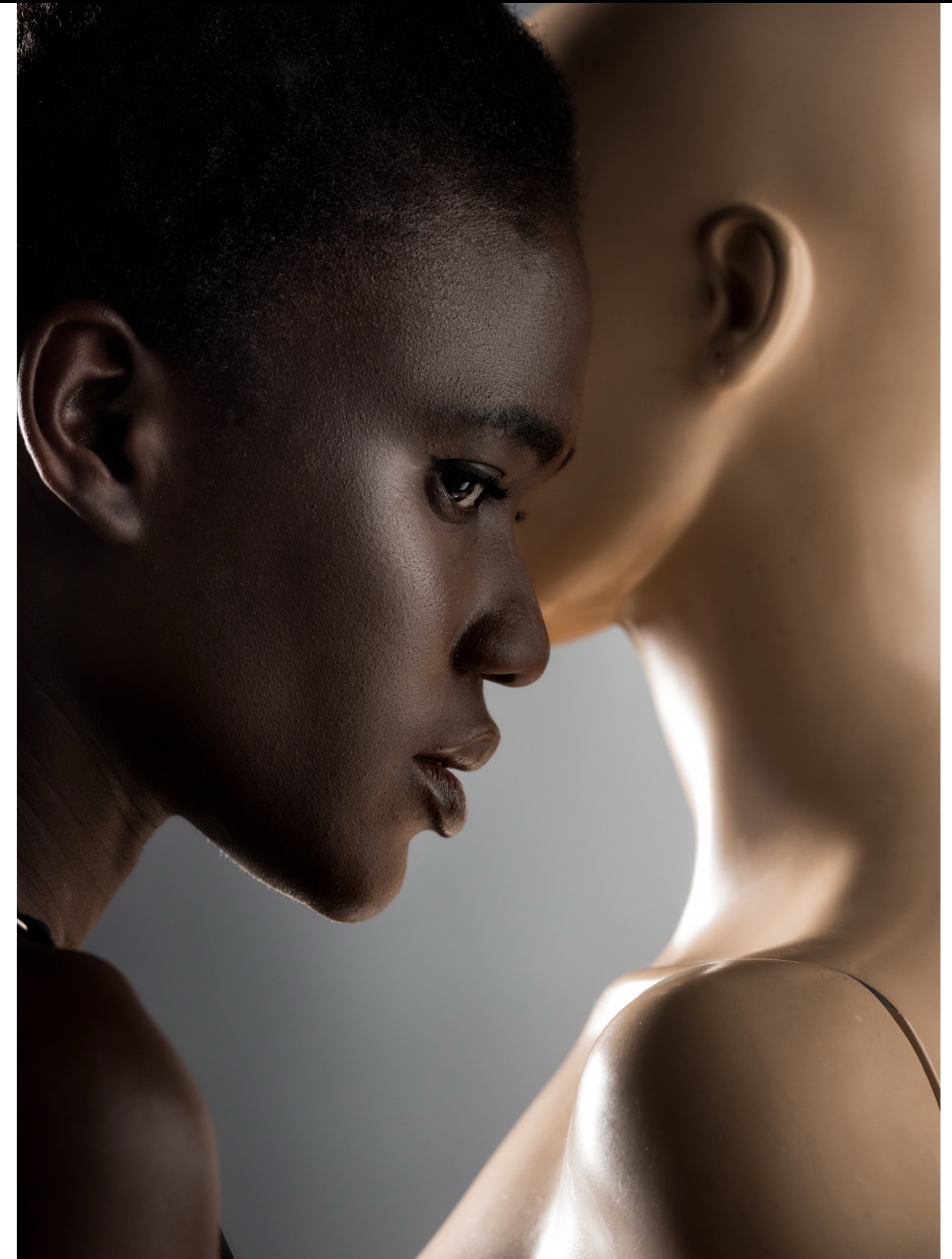
- **AI and Automation** sharing how you can personalize outreach and streamline operations, ensuring that both staff and audiences can focus on what truly matters: meaningful content and mission-driven programs.
- **Narrowcasting** focusing on the growing need for hyper-targeted, authentic engagement by honing in on specific communities or interest groups instead of broadcasting to everyone at once.
- **Digital Wallets** highlighting the value of convenience and digital accessibility—particularly for younger, tech-savvy donors and consumers who prefer frictionless transactions.
- **Experiential Experiences** demonstrating the power of immersive, story-driven offerings that resonate with audiences craving deeper connections in a digital-first world. Cultural institutions, in particular, can leverage their physical spaces to deliver moments of wonder and learning.
- **Small Treats Culture (Let Them Eat Cake!)** serves as a reminder that even in an era of economic fluctuation, people still seek small comforts and minor luxuries. Offering accessible, uplifting touchpoints—like affordable workshops, pay-what-you-wish admissions, or exclusive yet modestly priced items—can keep your organization relevant and inviting.

Empathetic AI

Empathetic Artificial Intelligence (AI)

AI (Artificial Intelligence) refers to machines and systems capable of mimicking cognitive functions like learning, problem-solving, and decision-making. Automation uses technology to streamline repetitive tasks, saving time and resources.

When combined, AI and automation reshape the work environment by accelerating routine processes and opening up new creative and human-centric possibilities—everything from data entry to immersive storytelling can be done faster, more efficiently, and with a personal touch.



Empathetic AI

Why it Matters

Democratized Access

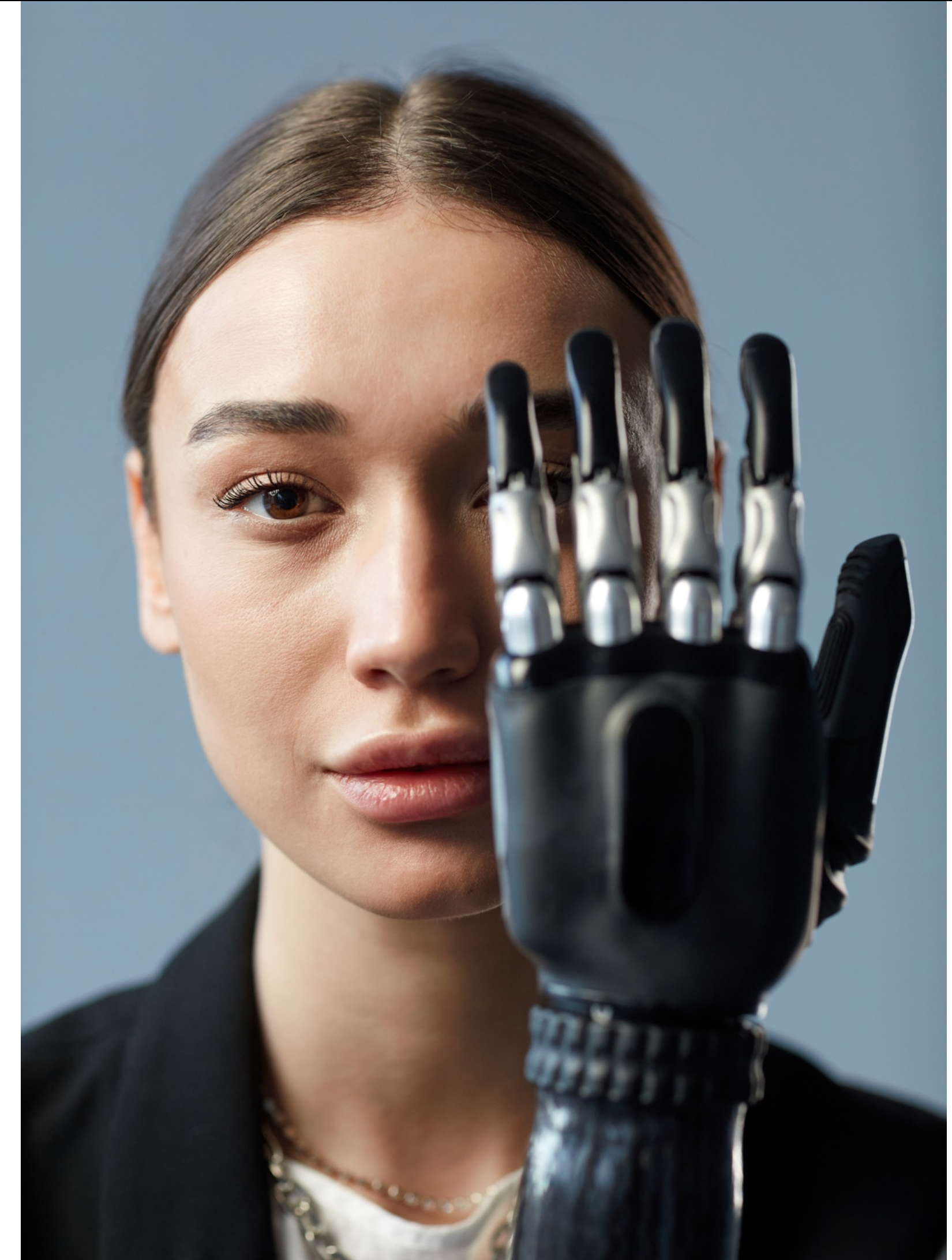
AI can level the playing field by offering powerful capabilities even to organizations with modest budgets. Automated workflows, AI-driven research, and analytics can reduce barriers to growth, freeing time and resources for the core mission.

Enhanced Creativity and Empathy

Contrary to fears that AI might stifle creativity, it often unleashes it. Projects like [My First AI](#) by Amsterdam agency Modem and Danish art and design duo Wang & Söderström show how empathetic, AI-powered tools can engage children in personalized learning experiences. Meanwhile, [Nvidia and Hippocratic AI have launched AI “nurses”](#) that excel in empathy and rapport, offering real-time support for pre- and post-operative patients. These breakthroughs illustrate the expanding potential for AI not only to speed up tasks but also to foster emotional connections.

Strategic (and Empathetic) Integration

The key is weaving AI into broader organizational strategies and values. You are the master, let it be a good servant. Museums, cultural institutions, and nonprofits can harness “Empath-AI” to enhance community experiences—think AI-guided tours that deepen engagement, or companion chatbots that reduce isolation for solo-visitors. By adopting an empathic approach, AI can be a tool for greater inclusivity, user well-being, and community building.



Empathetic AI

Creative Inspiration

Artsteps or Virtual Art Gallery: Institutions use these tools for immersive virtual exhibits and AI-driven chatbots like **Zendesk** and **Meta's Inbox Automation** to add interactive and personalized elements to the online experience.

Nonprofits like **The Trevor Project** employ predictive analytics to understand donor behaviors, community needs, and even mental health support—shifting focus from admin tasks to higher-impact initiatives. Empathetic chatbots—such as **Bloom's** interactive role-play features—demonstrate AI's capacity to provide companionship, creative thinking, and support, albeit in ethically nuanced ways.

GoDaddy's Airo: This AI tool supports small businesses by generating logos, websites, and marketing campaigns from simple prompts.

Jasper: Generates high-quality marketing copy, blog posts, and social media content tailored to your organization's voice.

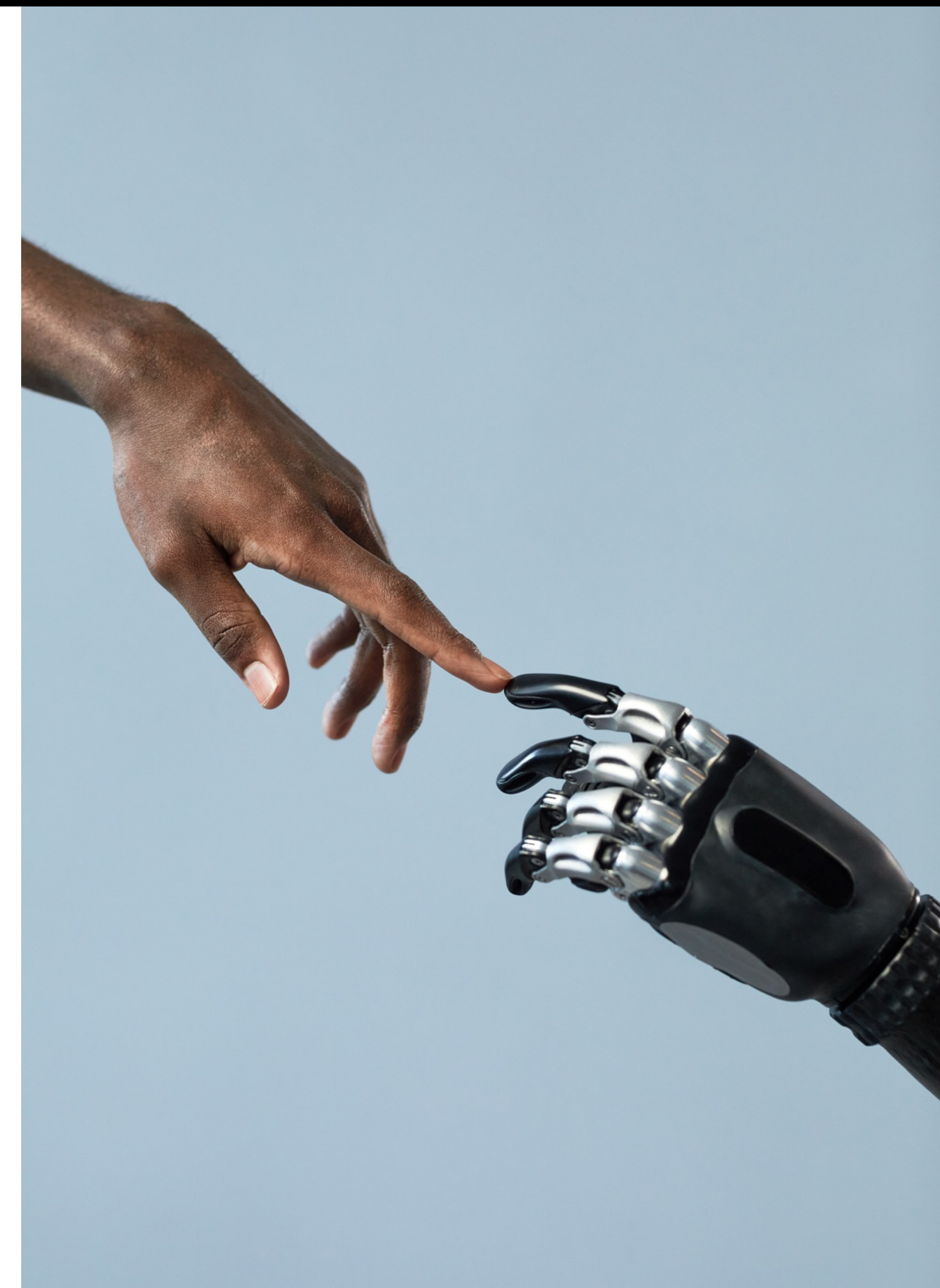
Instrumentl: Uses AI to identify relevant grant opportunities and automate parts of the application process.

CauseVox: Automates fundraising campaigns and integrates AI insights to optimize donor engagement.

Otter.ai: Transcribes meetings and events with AI, making content easily accessible for communications and documentation.

Golden: Streamlines volunteer onboarding, scheduling, and management with AI insights.

Whova: Uses AI to streamline event planning, attendee networking, and post-event reporting.



Empathetic AI

Applying it to Your Work

By embracing AI and automation thoughtfully, organizations can amplify both efficiency and impact. Beyond accelerating tasks, AI can foster empathy, deepen engagement, and build connection in ways once relegated to science fiction.

Rather than fearing these technologies, cultural nonprofits, social change organizations, and creative businesses should explore how AI can meaningfully enhance their work—whether by streamlining administrative burdens, offering personalized learning or care, or forging new emotional bonds with audiences.

The future of AI holds enormous promise for expanding cultural reach and social good—so long as it's guided by ethical frameworks and human-centered values.

Content Creation & Storytelling

Use text-generation tools like ChatGPT or Jasper for newsletters, program descriptions, or grant proposals. Experiment with AI-generated images or immersive storylines to deepen audience engagement—especially in cultural or community-based projects.

Workflow Optimization

Automate administrative tasks (scheduling, data management, simple communications), so teams can focus on mission-critical work and community relationships.

Empathy-Driven Experiences

Consider AI companions for deeper user engagement—like personal guides for digital exhibitions or empathic chatbots offering real-time support. These not only speed up processes but also nurture more meaningful community interactions.

Ethical Considerations

Integrate AI responsibly. Respect privacy, ensure data security, and uphold human dignity. The goal is to enhance human connection, not replace it.

Narrowcasting

Narrowcasting

Narrowcasting is the practice of targeting specific, niche audiences rather than trying to reach everyone at once. Instead of broadcasting to a mass audience, narrowcasting focuses on delivering highly relevant content and experiences to smaller communities united by shared values, interests, or identities.

While it's not an entirely new concept—marketers and communicators have long recognized the power of niche marketing—it has taken on new significance in an age where consistent attention and engagement are the most valuable commodities.



Narrowcasting

Why it Matters

Attention Over Saturation

In a world flooded with information, audiences are fatigued by one-size-fits-all messaging. Narrowcasting cuts through the noise with specificity.

Deep Relationships

Deep engagement with a smaller number of dedicated supporters often outweighs superficial connections with a larger but passive audience.

Luxury Market Adopts It

Luxury marketers have been narrowing their focus to “high-touch” client experiences, offering personalized events, invites, and even micro-communities for their most important clients. Cultural nonprofits and creative businesses can use similar tactics to cultivate close-knit donor circles, membership groups, or brand loyalists who become champions of your mission.

Your Most Engaged Champions

For cultural organizations and social impact groups, focusing on supporters who already pay attention and engage regularly can lead to stronger community buy-in, higher retention, and more organic word-of-mouth.



Narrowcasting

Applying it to Your Work

While narrowcasting isn't a new concept, its importance in an era of fragmented attention and the relentless quest for authentic engagement has skyrocketed. Luxury marketers are increasingly turning to narrowcasting as a high-touch strategy for cultivating deep relationships with their most valued customers.

Cultural nonprofits, social impact organizations, and creative businesses can use similar tactics—emphasizing exclusive experiences, personalized interactions, and community-building approaches—to connect with their supporters in more meaningful ways.

Email Strategy & Automation

Use tools like Mailchimp or WhatsApp to segment audiences, automate personalized follow-ups, and create tailored broadcast groups, ensuring targeted and relevant communications for different audience subsets.

Audience Engagement

Leverage user-generated content, polls, and interactive tools on platforms like Instagram and TikTok to foster participation, spark shared ownership, and deepen connections with your audience.

Customer Service & Direct Connections

Utilize chatbots, private messaging, or real-time Q&A sessions on platforms like WhatsApp or Messenger to provide personalized service, exclusive previews, and meaningful interactions that build trust and loyalty.

Subscription Services

Offer curated, subscription-based experiences like membership tiers, newsletters, or exclusive content to transform passive audiences into loyal communities while generating consistent revenue and valuable data insights.

Digital Wallets

Digital Wallets

Today's cashless society replaces physical currency with digital transactions facilitated by mobile money, such as mobile wallets, QR codes, and payment apps.

While the concept isn't new, the rise of mobile money platforms—like Apple Pay, Google Pay, Venmo, and M-Pesa—has made cashless transactions more accessible and seamless.

From pop-ups to performing arts venues, cultural organizations and nonprofits are embracing these tools to streamline operations, meet consumer demand for convenience, and adapt to the mobile-first economy.



Digital Wallets

Why it Matters

Convenience & Speed

Shifting to digital wallets (e.g., Apple Pay, Google Pay) cuts down on wait times for ticketing, membership sign-ups, and onsite purchases. This streamlined approach makes transactions more efficient, allowing audiences to spend less time in line and more time engaging with your organization.

Transparency & Security

Digital transactions leave a clear audit trail, offering added reassurance to donors, boards, and stakeholders. Unlike cash, digital wallets and payment platforms keep better records and enhance accountability around how funds are collected and allocated.

Appeal to Younger Audiences

Many Gen Z and millennial consumers rely on their smartphones for everyday transactions, rarely carrying physical currency or even cards. By accepting digital wallets, you align with their mobile-first habits, which can lead to higher participation, donations, and sales.

Frictionless Experiences

Digitizing ticket sales, donations, and other transactions through contactless, automated payments removes entry barriers for potential supporters. Adopting digital wallets offers a quick, intuitive experience that keeps visitors focused on your mission rather than payment logistics.



Digital Wallets

Creative Inspiration

Hot:Second Pop-up Store: Fashion futurist Karinna Nobbs launched Hot:Second, a pop-up store that trades unwanted physical fashion items for digital garments. This innovative approach uses the concept of a cashless economy to merge sustainability with digital retail experiences. Nobbs leverages consumers' perception of value through experiential engagement with digital fashion.

Curve's AR Payment Technology: The London-based start-up Curve has developed augmented reality (AR) payment technology that allows consumers to complete transactions without physically being present at the payment terminal. This offering exemplifies the cutting-edge integration of cashless payments, making it possible to pay from the comfort of one's home.

Cash App and Chillhouse's 'Cash in Hand' Manicure: Illustrates how cashless payments can fuse seamlessly with style and everyday experiences. By embedding RFID chips in press-on nails, users can initiate peer-to-peer payments simply by holding their phone near their thumbnail. This creative collaboration shows the growing potential of female-forward finance solutions, blending beauty, convenience, and innovation in an accessible format.



Digital Wallets

Applying it to Your Work

As more cultural institutions, social impact organizations, and creative businesses adopt cashless models, the question isn't whether to go digital—it's how to do it effectively and inclusively. Beyond the convenience and security benefits, cashless transactions open doors to richer data, better audience insights, and more nuanced engagement strategies.

By reducing friction at every step—tickets, donations, product sales—you offer a streamlined experience that resonates with modern audiences.

Remember, transitioning to a cashless society isn't an all-or-nothing leap. Start incrementally, balance innovation with accessibility, and keep your community's needs at the center. This thoughtful approach will help you evolve in step with the changing economic landscape while staying true to your organization's mission.

Micro-Donations

Leverage QR codes and mobile apps to encourage quick, bite-sized contributions during events or exhibitions, boosting real-time donor engagement.

Subscriptions & Membership Models

Establish monthly or annual digital memberships via mobile money apps for steady revenue while offering exclusive benefits to donors.

Community Partnerships

Collaborate with local businesses or online stores that align with your values so that a percentage of each sale (processed digitally) goes to your nonprofit or initiative.

Pay As You Go or Flexible Pricing

Offer tiered or pay-what-you-wish pricing for events and programs, enabling broader accessibility while leveraging digital payment systems for easy transaction tracking.

Experiential Experiences

Experiential Experiences

Experiential experiences are immersive, engaging activities that enable participants to connect more deeply with an organization's story, mission, or brand. They often evoke strong emotional responses, leaving lasting impressions and encouraging repeat visits.

For cultural institutions, museums, and other place-based organizations, experiential programming taps into the inherent advantage of having a physical space dedicated to sharing, learning, and community-building.



Experiential Experiences

Why it Matters

Growing Demand for Personalization

With 71% of U.S. consumers expecting customized interactions, personalization has shifted from 'nice-to-have' to 'must-have'. Recognizing individuals intensifies emotional bonds, driving loyalty, word-of-mouth, and donor support.

Experience-First Mindset

87% of younger consumers would rather spend on meaningful experiences than material goods. Museums and galleries can meet this need through transformative, story-driven programming.

Leveraging Physical Spaces

Institutions can reimagine galleries, outdoorspaces, and performance areas to create interactive and engaging experiences. Adding immersive elements to existing collections deepens emotional resonance with exhibits and missions.

Long-Term Relationship Building

Personalized follow-ups and behind-the-scenes content encourage repeat visits and stronger advocacy. Personalization drives 40% more revenue for fast-growing organizations, making it vital for sustaining memberships and donations.



Experiential Experiences

Applying it to Your Work

Every interaction—before, during, and after a visit—shapes how visitors perceive your organization. Keep personal touches alive to turn one-time visitors into lifelong supporters.

By applying these insights, your organization can tap into the power of experiential programming in a way that highlights the value and uniqueness of your physical space.

Each corner of your organization or institution can be leveraged to provide guests with emotive, thought-provoking engagements that deepen community bonds—and ultimately advance your core mission.

Invite Co-Creation

Offer interactive experiences that allow visitors to help shape the event or exhibit, then follow up with personalized messages to turn one-time visits into long-term relationships.

Explore Digital & Hybrid Enhancements

Use VR, AR, and data-driven personalization to immerse visitors in your collections, tailoring each experience to individual interests and enhancing overall engagement.

Host Intimate, Interactive Gatherings

Leverage existing courtyards, archives, or membership groups for exclusive tours, performances, or screenings, creating deeper bonds and a sense of ownership among participants.

Keep Up with Evolving Consumer Values

Prioritize experiential, resonant programming over mere products, and incorporate sustainability or social initiatives to align with modern, socially conscious audiences.

Small Treats

Small Treats Culture (Let Them Eat Cake!)

Small treats culture describes the rise of affordable luxuries that bring moments of joy and uplift during uncertain times. From limited-edition museum shop items to special-edition gourmet treats, these relatively low-cost “indulgences” help consumers feel rewarded and emotionally supported—without requiring the hefty financial outlay typical of high-end goods.

As broader economic factors continue to unsettle both household budgets and corporate investments, small treats have become a widespread coping mechanism for those seeking pockets of delight in everyday life.



Small Treats

Why it Matters

Luxury Isn't Always Essential

In times of financial insecurity, big-ticket luxury items can seem both out of reach and out of step with consumer priorities. Even for institutions that traffic in cultural “luxury” experiences—museums, performing arts centers, design boutiques—the general public doesn’t necessarily see them as essential. A focus on “small treats” can help maintain engagement and inclusivity.

Emotional Uplift & Escapism

Research shows many consumers are adopting a “little treats” mindset to manage stress and preserve their sense of well-being. These minor indulgences—like a new coffee mug from a museum store or a discounted workshop at a gallery—offer a brief moment of joy and normalcy.

Bridging the Gap Between Exclusive & Accessible

The “Wirkin” vs. Hermès Birkin debate underscores a growing tension: consumers want the aesthetic, status, or emotional kick of luxury goods but may not be willing or able to pay sky-high prices. Likewise, cultural institutions can use small yet meaningful perks—free tours, pay-what-you-wish nights, or special-edition souvenirs—to fill that gap and remain relevant to broader audiences.

Economic Realities

The global personal luxury goods market faces headwinds—some forecasts predict a flattening or slight contraction. As incomes tighten, consumers often shift spending from expensive, high-consideration purchases to smaller, impulse-driven items. Cultural nonprofits and creative businesses can capitalize on this pivot by offering a range of low-cost, high-value experiences or products.



Small Treats

Creative Inspiration

Gift Shops: Creating curated, short-run merchandise—like art-inspired totes, postcards, or exclusive prints—gives visitors a tangible way to bring home a piece of their experience, without breaking the bank.

Pay-What-You-Wish Nights: Offering occasional donation-based admissions can encourage casual visits and attract new audiences who might otherwise feel priced out.

Workshops & Mini-Events: Hosting hands-on activities (like a short creative writing class or a drop-in craft session) can create small but powerful moments of inspiration. Such engagements often cost far less than a typical multi-week course, broadening accessibility.

Community Bundles: Bundling essential items with a small “luxury” touch—like adding gourmet snacks or specialty goods into a meal distribution program—can boost mood and show care for underserved communities.

Budget-Friendly Décor: Inspired by pricier designer products, smaller, more affordable lines of home goods or apparel let consumers invest in something special without the guilt of a major splurge.



Small Treats

Applying it to Your Work

When finances are tight, consumers may question whether they can justify museum memberships or designer furniture. You can bridge this gap by offering smaller, low-commitment options. From gourmet samples to miniature artworks, small treats create disproportionately positive emotional impact relative to their price.

As consumers become more selective, institutions must find ways to engage their audiences with affordable experiences that still feel special. By embracing small treats culture, cultural institutions, nonprofits, and creative businesses can deliver moments of delight and meaning to audiences who may be cutting back on major splurges.

In times of uncertainty, these affordable indulgences can maintain—and even strengthen—your relationship with the public, showcasing how your offerings remain relevant, comforting, and worthy of investment.

Offer Small, Meaningful Engagements

Provide take-home items (postcards, mini-reproductions) and tiered memberships so broader audiences can support and enjoy your mission.

Highlight Emotional & Communal Value

Focus on storytelling that uplifts and reassure supporters that even smaller purchases or events still meaningfully benefit your institution.

Balance Exclusivity & Accessibility

Blend scarcity (“only 100 prints available!”) with affordability, and quickly pivot to smaller, high-joy experiences if larger offerings aren’t resonating.

Monitor Shifts in Luxury Market Trends

Stay relevant by watching economic pressures, and experiment with “micro-luxury” ideas—people still crave aspirational aesthetics, just at more attainable price points.

Tying it All Together

The convergence of these trends—technological advances in **AI and Automation**, the precision of **Narrowcasting**, the rise of **Cashless Societies**, the resonance of **Experiential Experiences**, and the inclusivity of **Small Treats Culture**—offers a blueprint for strengthening your communications and public engagement efforts in 2025.

Cultural institutions and creative businesses that embrace these shifts will be better equipped to weather economic uncertainties and shifting audience priorities. More importantly, they will cultivate genuine, long-lasting relationships with communities and supporters. By weaving these insights into a comprehensive communications plan—one that balances tech-driven innovation

As you refine your strategies for the coming year, remember that each trend offers a pathway to deeper relevance, heightened impact, and sustainable growth. By acknowledging the growing desire for personalization, convenience, immersion, and approachable luxuries, you'll ensure your organization remains a vital, inspiring force in the cultural and social landscape. Now is

