

DATA **T**RANSFER INITIATIVE

2024 ANNUAL REPORT

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From the Executive Director

2024 marks our second year of operation at DTI. In our first year, we were building. All three of our staff joined in 2023, and we were working both to find our footing and to deliver immediate impact. The year was a success, and our second year, 2024, has built on that, showing more of what we can accomplish as an organization, while learning more and more about the evolving context of our work and how we can be most strategic and impactful in future years.

We began the year with some clear priorities in place, and we delivered on them:

- *Ship new DTP tools* - with our founding members Apple and Google, we announced new DTP-powered direct transfer tools for photos and for music playlists.
- *Diversify our technology-related outputs* - we shipped both a new Trust Model and a Portability Map early in the year, completing projects begun in late 2023.
- *Work with standards bodies and the fediverse* - we organized our own convening and joined multiple other efforts, including as a leader within the W3C's ActivityPub efforts.
- *Engage with the Digital Markets Act as it takes effect* - through two Brussels trips and extensive remote engagement, our work on trust and tooling contributed to many discussions of data portability under the DMA.
- *Lead data portability policy* - in hosting a day-long Data Portability Day event in DC and releasing a compendium of original portability policy papers together with three regional vision papers, DTI reinforced its identity as a leader on data portability.
- *Invest in new policy regions* - while continuing our work in the European Union, we expanded our focus globally, with initial explorations of organizational partnerships in Africa and Asia, and making significant investments in the United Kingdom.

Where we saw opportunities and high return-on-investment to go beyond our initial plans, we were fortunate enough through the contributions of our members to have the capacity to lean in. We co-hosted not one event in London, but two – the day-long Smart Data Forum, and a dinner event at Chatham House. We released not one policy vision paper, but three, targeted to the separate contexts of the EU, UK, and US. We shipped

not one trust model, but two, and carried this particularly impactful new dimension of our work further into a pilot trust registry specifically for data portability. We broke into new areas, notably AI – we worked with Inflection to carry our vision and frameworks forward into the generative AI ecosystem, partnering on an initial schema as a step towards facilitating future transfers of AI conversation history, including through DTP.

Throughout, we also shipped biweekly newsletters and blog posts, enlisted outside consultants to expand our capacity, and networked extensively with policy, technology, and government stakeholders. And we added two new partners, ErnieApp and Amazon.

By almost any reckoning, 2024 was full of surprises. Yet these twists and turns have reinforced my conviction that at DTI, we are on the right path, at the right time, to fulfill our mission: to empower people by building a vibrant ecosystem for simple and secure data transfers.

Cheers,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Riley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Chris" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Riley".

Chris Riley
Executive Director
Data Transfer Initiative

1. The data portability journey

Like life, portability is a journey, not a destination. Our work at DTI is not merely to ship new tools, and be done – it’s to empower people, through a vibrant ecosystem. We are now two years into full operation as an organization. The team at DTI is proud of what we have accomplished this year. But in so many ways, we are just getting started.

In this annual report, following our first report last year, we will identify our core initiatives and summarize where we began and ended the year. Next, we will look at how our work has helped build the core capacities of the organization, which help translate our work into the overall impact we seek to have. Finally, we will look briefly at what the future holds.

2. Progress on core initiatives

As our work grows, the category of “core initiatives” morphs and blurs; this report will imperfectly bucket DTI’s activities under the three categories we use internally for our day-to-day tracking: technology, policy, and organization.

Technology

Our strategic plan for 2024 identified six goals for the year, towards which we made significant progress. Through this work, we advanced our mission in at least three dimensions: first, to **deepen** our existing investments in concrete data portability tools available to billions of people; second, to **broaden** the scope of our work in new technologies and new approaches to facilitating data transfers; and finally, to **grow** awareness of and engagement with data portability to more people and organizational **stakeholders**.

Goal	Impact
1. Portability Map: Ship first version by Mar 7, then iterate	Success – We released v1 of Portability Map on March 6. Throughout the year, we improved code and added content.
2. Trust Model: Publish report and initial appendix by Mar 7	Above and Beyond – We published the report on March 6 and a second, granular model in November. We also produced a threat model specific to portability, and began work on a trust registry.
3. Verticals: fediverse, short video, music; expand to other areas	In Progress – We shipped music DTP tools to transfer playlists; we brought stakeholders together on fediverse and short video. We are in the process of exploring new verticals.
4. Experiments: Advance long term vision of effective portability	Success – We made progress on our long-term vision through new collaborations on schema (in AI) and consent.

5. Community: Build tools, processes in response to increasing engagement	Success – We held mini-conferences with fediverse community leaders early in the year, and then shifted our support towards separate structures (such as standards bodies and the new Social Web Foundation) as they increased their effective activity.
6. Standards: Engage more with W3C and other standards bodies	Success – We advanced efforts within W3C and IETF in relevant topical areas and joined a new standards organization in Canada.

The core of our technology efforts remains the [Data Transfer Project](#) codebase, which DTI as an organization was founded to shepherd. Two new DTP tools were underway at the beginning of the year, [a new Photos tool](#) allowing Google Photos users to transfer data directly to Apple’s iCloud Photos, and [a new Music tool](#) allowing users of Apple Music and Google’s YouTube Music to transfer their music playlists between the services. We shipped both of these tools in 2024, with significant positive feedback.

All long-standing software projects accumulate some amount of technical debt, and DTP is no exception. We invested resources to shore this up. With Google’s support, we transferred the canonical DTP codebase to a repository operated by DTI. We worked to resolve open issues in the repository. And, recognizing that the most effective means of implementing DTP is not necessarily the easiest to adopt for new organizations, we are working with our partners to supplement the DTP framework through generic adapters, a model which requires more customization and engineering around DTP but may reduce some upfront complexities.

A major focus of our work this year was [trust](#). In March we released our [Trust Model Report](#), and continued to develop our thinking and strategies throughout the year. In early December, we launched [Trust Model v2](#), and throughout the year made progress on a pilot trust registry specifically for the context of data portability. This issue is of significant importance to our current and prospective future partners, and it has been and will continue to be a priority.

2024 was, in many ways, the year of Artificial Intelligence. Data portability offers some opportunity for contributions to AI conversations in both technology and policy. Following our core spirit of leading with products, we established a [collaboration](#) with Inflection, makers of the Pi generative AI chatbot, to agree on a shared data model for conversation history exports. As conversations around the portability of AI tools develop, we hope to keep them centered on our principles such as user centricity and reciprocity.

Over the course of the year, our investments in supporting the fediverse shifted away from conducting our own convenings, to participating in W3C sponsored technical activities and other venues. In that vein, we have increased our investments in standards efforts and in groups related to the ActivityPub protocol. We’ve seen both Threads and Bluesky grow rapidly, and less

heralded (and for that matter, less measurable) but still notable gains in the diverse set of Mastodon hosts.

Policy

Our strategic plan for 2024 identified four goals for the year, one targeted to a specific timely development for policy work and the other three descriptive of policy activities. The impact of our policy work can be seen on three levels: **reach**, reflecting DTI’s expanding visibility, trust, networks, and reputation as an organization; **shift**, related to our ability to influence the views and actions of others to align them with our principles and mission; and **transform**, concerning the broader ecosystem’s systemic activation and engagement on our issues.

Goal	Impact
1. DMA: Working to build a positive path for portability alongside the DMA	Success – As the Digital Markets Act took effect in March 2024, our relationships and conversations around data portability remained positive with EU officials and we connected with additional EU influential stakeholders.
2. Events: Showcasing convening ability in Washington DC and London	Above and Beyond – We held a successful full-day event in DC and co-organized two events in London. Across the board, we had high-level support and engagement from influential stakeholders, including welcome remarks from a U.S. Senator, and universally positive acclaim.
3. Writing: Newsletters, policy briefs; tackling unanswered deep questions	Success – We introduced and sustained a consistent newsletter of timely original compositions, and our compendium of original scholarship broke new ground in portability policy.
4. Public speaking: Speaking at CPDP and other events throughout 2024	Success – Throughout the year, DTI staff spoke at high-profile events including at CPDP, the FCBA Women’s Summit, Harvard Law, Stanford, and with CERRE and CIPL.

This year witnessed the initial effective date of the Digital Markets Act in the European Union. We engaged early and often with the European Commission, including on a January trip to Brussels where we updated Commission staff on our efforts and spoke at an event organized by CERRE. In May, Delara hosted a workshop on data portability at CPDP in Brussels, and Deputy Head of Unit Antoine Babinet accepted our invitation to join the workshop alongside DTI. This fall, through an initiative led by Information Labs, we were invited to create a short video

highlighting the “Brussels Effect” and Europe’s pivotal role in advancing data portability. The [video series](#) and accompanying [report](#) were shared with members of the European Parliament.



Antoine Babinet of the European Commission joins DTI's panel at CPDP in Brussels

On February 29th, we organized a full-day data portability [summit](#) in Washington, D.C., featuring presentations of original scholarship and discussion panels with influential [stakeholders](#) from government, civil society, and the technology industry. We were extremely pleased to welcome Senator Markey to open the day, and to have representatives of our member companies Google and Meta to speak to their investments in this space.

Attendees, online and in person, praised the event for its originality and substantive depth. Tech Policy Press [published our event report](#) on their site.

In May, we released our [Compendium](#), containing the final edited versions of the papers presented at the summit, incorporating feedback received at and after the event. Above and beyond our own policy outputs, these papers by independent scholars help articulate the complexities of portability in practice while also looking to its future, notably with papers on portability’s relationship to virtual reality technologies and to artificial intelligence.

Complementing our extensive engagements in the United States and the European Union, in September we traveled as a full team to London. Following extensive planning over many months, Chatham House and DTI [co-hosted](#) a high-level dinner. DTI also served as the principal sponsor of the [Smart Data Forum](#), which we helped plan and host. Both events were well received, and as a result we have received additional inquiry and invitations to contribute to the UK government’s developing digital strategy plans, reflecting substantial alignment in our visions.



Senator Edward J. Markey (D-MA) gives opening remarks at DTI summit in Washington, D.C.

Organization

Throughout the year, DTI demonstrated our institutional leadership with extensive public-facing activities. We published email newsletters and blog posts every two weeks, with special editions at key points along the way. We spoke extensively at virtual and in-person events. Our objective was building and growing awareness of DTI as the leading organization working on user-directed portability, and we feel we delivered on that, though there is ample room for more.

One concrete example of our outward-facing work is the release of [Portability Map](#), a public-facing resource containing short and user-directed articles on how to transfer data of different types. We hope to gain valuable user signals from Portability Map to direct our investments to the most valuable improvements and new tools we can support.

We did not add full-time headcount roles in 2024, but instead rounded out our engineering team with consultants, including front-end development, back-end engineering, and design capabilities. Through these resources, we have improved our web resources in several respects, and we are building our trust registry.

Our goal for this year was to add 3-5 new organizational partners. We ended up adding two, ErnieApp and Amazon. In addition, we work with many organizations in other capacities, as evidenced for example by our collaboration with Inflection. Overall, the network surrounding our work is large and diverse, and an open action item for 2025 is to identify the right way to illustrate these connections.



Focus on: Trust

Without question, trust became a significant focus for DTI in 2024. We expected this at the beginning of the year as our first trust model report was underway, and we were happy to release that report and initial high-level trust model in March of this year.

We then split our strategy going forward in three directions and pursued them in parallel. The first was to articulate with greater specificity our underlying threat model for data portability - a clear statement and analysis of privacy and security risks, specific to data portability transactions. The second, intersecting with the first, was to develop a more granular trust model, taking the spirit of the initial exercise and building on it with reference to the threat model and other sources.

Finally, we looked to the long-term future, and determined that DTI would be well-placed to build a trust registry for data portability, and we began scoping that exercise, identifying partners, and building the underlying infrastructure - work that will continue well into 2025, which we are excited to pursue.

3. Measuring impact

Showing impact for nuanced work like ours requires more than quantitative metrics. Last year, we identified five core capacities that help reflect how our tactical activities contribute to our ability to influence the ecosystem-level changes described in our mission: 1) improved public knowledge of data portability; 2) active and engaged allies and partners; 3) positive DTI brand and reputation; 4) new explorations for data transfer products and infrastructure; and 5) a healthy community of contributors and collaborators.

For this annual report, seeking to preserve some continuity while evolving metrics alongside our strategies, we will combine the fifth of these into the second, and relabel the second and fourth:

1. *Improved public knowledge of data portability* – Through our written outputs and event speaking, and the launch of portability map, we believe we have made some contributions towards this goal. However, we recognize that our primary audience at this point in time consists primarily of experts in technology and/or policy, and reaching a broader “public” audience remains a difficult objective that will require some adaptation.
2. *Active and engaged network* – Our extensive networking and collaborations have grown the number of individuals and organizations who “think portability, think DTI” in Washington DC, Brussels, and London. Visibility for data portability in general rose

significantly throughout the year, and there is thus ample room for continued investment in growing our network of allies and ensuring that they have information and resources from us to advance the shared elements of our vision.

3. *Positive DTI brand and reputation* – Several dimensions of our work contribute to our brand and reputation, including our public speaking and written work, but also the many individual connections each of our three staff undertake on a regular basis. Our substantive work adds to this as well, by choosing to focus on topics like trust that reflect and reinforce our constructive role.
4. *Robust data transfer products and infrastructure* – By releasing new DTP tools and making significant progress towards a novel data portability trust registry, we have contributed substantially to this goal. At the same time, we have also recognized the opportunity to do more, including in particular adapting DTP in practice to allow for lighter-weight connections to generic adapters. We will be continuing our longstanding product efforts while also developing these extensions in the coming months.

Overall, we believe that our efforts are contributing substantially to our mission, and that continuing and expanding them will deliver significant impact in the coming years.

4. Looking ahead

Entering our third year of operation, we hope to continue most of our current efforts, as they are proving practical; expand in new ways, including public storytelling and research on the portability ecosystem; and develop external independent fundraising to ensure that we have the resources we need to deliver the impact that we know we can have.

The road ahead is long, but the pace is quick. We hope you will join us on our journey. You can [sign up for our emails here](#).