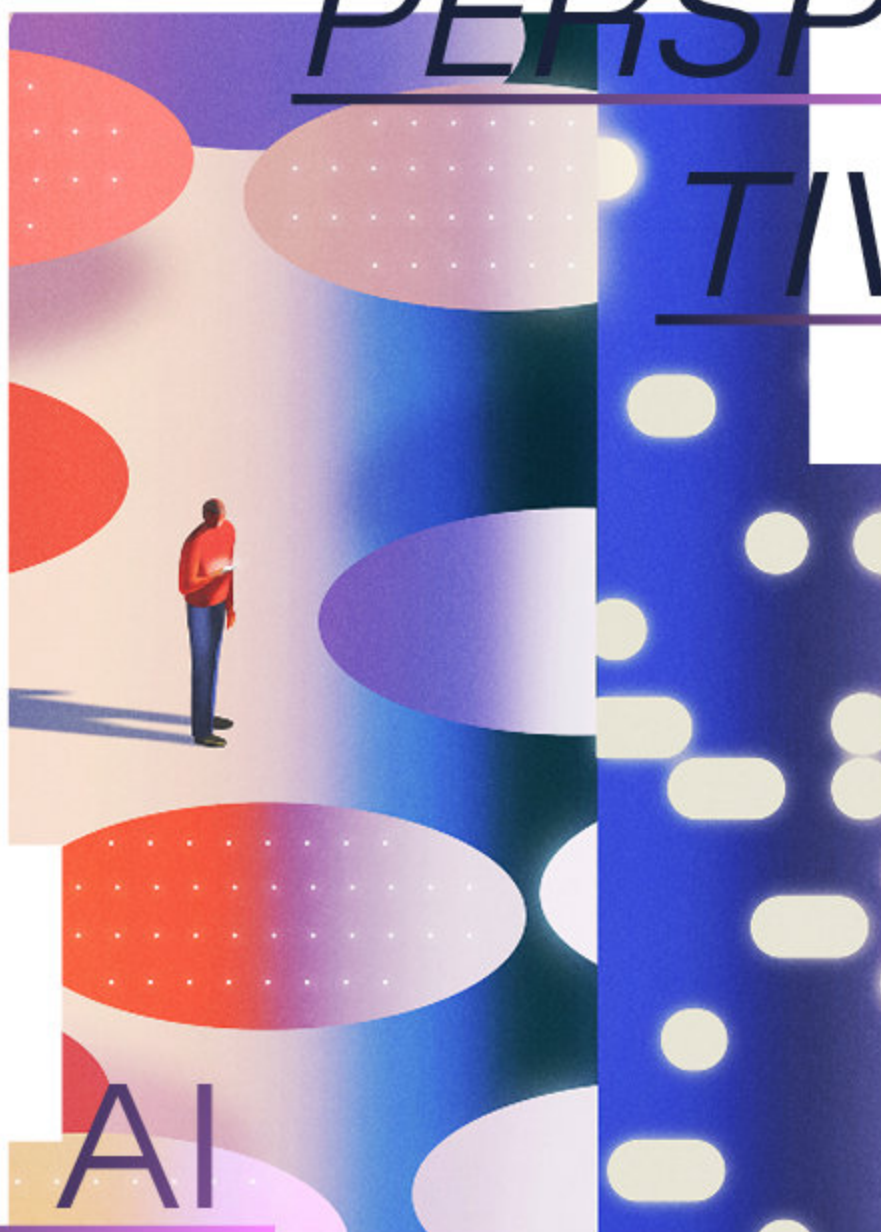


GEN  AI.

FORUM REPORT

YOUTH

PERSPEC-
TIVES



ON AI

CHATBOTS

TORONTO, ON 11.07.25 — 11.09.25

Youth voices,
AI futures

GEN Z AI.



Madeleine Case

Report Author and Lead Youth Fellow, Gen(Z)AI Forum on AI Chatbots

"Young Canadians really care about the future of AI, and they desperately want change. This was made clear during our first Youth Forum on AI Chatbots.

This generation is uniquely positioned to provide perspectives informed by their lived experiences, and they must be centred in the policymaking process.

This Youth Forum was just the beginning, and I am excited to see this important work continue!"



Centre for MEDIA,
TECHNOLOGY
and DEMOCRACY

DoT

Dialogue on Technology Project
SFU Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue



Mila

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The Centre for Media, Technology and Democracy is an interdisciplinary research organization housed at the Max Bell School of Public Policy at McGill University. Its work is dedicated to understanding and responding to the social, political, and policy challenges posed by the evolving information ecosystem and digital technologies.

DoT

Dialogue on Technology Project

SFU Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue

The Dialogue on Technology Project (DoT) is the SFU Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue's flagship initiative on technology and artificial intelligence. Drawing on the Centre's deep expertise in design, facilitation, consensus building, and conflict engagement, DoT brings together diverse stakeholders—community members, researchers, policymakers, industry, and civil society—to better understand and shape how AI and related technologies are transforming our lives and societies.

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FORWARD



Fergus Linley-Mota and Helen Hayes, Gen(Z)AI Co-Leads

Gen(Z)AI began with a simple but urgent premise that young people deserve a real voice in shaping the future of AI in Canada. As AI systems become increasingly embedded in our daily lives, the generation most directly impacted has too often been left out of the policy conversation. Gen(Z)AI was created to change that.

This report summarizes the first chapter of Gen(Z)AI's national process, which began in Toronto, Ontario, Canada on November 7-9, 2025. At this Forum, which focused on AI Chatbots, a clear message emerged: young people are feeling the impacts of AI systems that can enable emotional dependence, undermine critical thinking, and expose them to harmful or inappropriate content. They understand these risks intimately because they encounter them daily.

The conversation at the Toronto forum, and the findings presented in this report, also reflect optimism. Participants approached issues about AI chatbots with a determination to help shape them into better, more functional systems. Their recommendations emphasize design reforms, stronger safeguards, and participatory approaches that empower users and increase accountability.

Alongside the enter Gen(Z)AI process – including three more forums to be hosted in 2026 – thousands more youth will engage with the drafted policy recommendations from each forum using Make.org's civic dialogue platform. We're hopeful that extending this participation will help to refine and build consensus about the future of AI governance in Canada. Following this iterative, participatory process, our Gen(Z)AI participants will present their finalized recommendations to policymakers, public servants, and politicians in Ottawa.

Gen(Z)AI is a reminder that democratic innovation happens when people are trusted as partners in the development of governance mechanisms for technologies that will define their futures. Their insights, values, and lived experiences are not just relevant to AI policy, they are indispensable to it.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gen(Z)AI is a first of its kind Youth Assembly on AI, bringing 100 young Canadians aged 17-23 together to help shape the future of AI in Canada. This project is jointly led by the [Centre for Media, Technology and Democracy](#) and the [Dialogue on Technology Project](#), in partnership with [Mila](#), Quebec's AI Institute.

This report provides an introduction to the Gen(Z)AI project, its purpose, the methodologies used, and the key issues, findings, and recommendations from the first forum on AI chatbots. A full report will be released in May 2026 following the completion of all four forums.

Gen(Z)AI Forum #1: AI Chatbots

The first of four forums was held on AI chatbots, the [most widely used](#), particularly among young Canadians, and fastest evolving AI technology. This year, [73%](#) of young adults report having used AI for school or work, up from 59% in 2024. This increase in use goes beyond academia and the workplace – [72%](#) of teens have reported using AI for personal companionship, with over half being regular users.

Young people [tend to be more trusting](#) of AI technologies, but remain skeptical, specifically of its [impacts on critical thinking](#). Why does this matter? AI chatbots have the potential to expose users to harm, particularly vulnerable

populations including children and youth. Risks can include exposure to harmful content and mis- and dis-information, amplification of dangerous biases, the undermining of mental and physical well-being, and erosion of critical thinking skills, with additional compounding concerns about data privacy and transparency.

Canada is at an inflection point: choices about its AI policy made now can position Canada as either a laggard or global leader in responsible AI governance. As the generation that will inherit a future influenced by AI, young people's voices, insights, lived experiences, and values must be included in shaping it.

Gen(Z)AI's first forum brought together participants through expert briefings, interactive workshops and deliberative policymaking sessions. The result was a strong consensus: young Canadians are dissatisfied with the status quo and believe that AI chatbots need to be regulated.

Specifically, participants identified three main issues of concern:

1. Emotional dependence that exacerbates social isolation / atomization and contributes to mental health issues.
2. Cognitive offloading and loss of critical thinking skills among users, which can jeopardize their ability to learn, work, and engage in civic discourse.

3. Potential exposure to harmful content, including sexually explicit, extremist, and/or self-harm content.

In response to these issues, participants surfaced a number of potential policy mechanisms:

1. Reactive policy mechanisms: This includes implementing policy tools that can provide resources and recourse when issues or harms occur.
2. Design and system change mechanisms: These policy tools seek to address issues identified within the design of AI systems. They would address problematic design features before harms occur.
3. Participatory and literacy building mechanisms: These recommendations would support agency-building and empowerment for users, as well as increased transparency.

Subsequent youth forums in Montreal, Vancouver, and Halifax will address other key issues in AI: information integrity, data privacy, and age assurance. Following each forum, policy recommendations drafted by participants will be shared with thousands of other young Canadians through Make.org's civic dialogue platform, ensuring broader consensus.

INTRODUCTION

Gen(Z)AI is a first of its kind Youth Assembly on AI, bringing 100 young Canadians aged 17-23 together to help shape the future of AI in Canada. This project is jointly organized by the [Centre for Media, Technology and Democracy](#) and the [Dialogue on Technology Project](#), in partnership with [Mila](#), Quebec's AI Institute.

The prevalence and reach of AI chatbots in Canada and around the world necessitated its inclusion as one of the topics of Gen(Z)AI. Chatbots and virtual assistants are the [most widely used](#) AI tool at 73%, followed by search engines (53%), and social media integrations (29%). The sheer range of use-cases of AI chatbots indicate its potential to be one of the most disruptive technologies of our generation. Their application in daily life, from asking for personal advice to writing essays, is wide and growing.

AI chatbots are widely used – 83% of Gen Z Canadians are [self-reporting](#) familiarity with AI tools, compared to their Millennial (71%) or Gen X parents (61%). In a study conducted earlier this year, [Common Sense Media](#) (2025) found that 72% of teens have used AI companions, with over half being regular users.



Coupled with increased use and familiarity, younger Canadians show [greater trust in AI than their older counterparts](#). Why does this matter? AI chatbots have the potential to expose users to harm, particularly vulnerable populations including children and youth. Risks can include exposure to harmful content and mis- and dis-information, amplification of dangerous biases, the undermining of mental and physical well-being, and erosion of critical thinking skills, with additional compounding concerns about data privacy and transparency. Countries around the world have made efforts of varying success to address some of these harms, but Canada lags behind in its efforts.

FORUM OBJECTIVES

The first Gen(Z)AI forum on AI chatbots aimed to:

- Identify issues and concerns held by young Canadians surrounding AI chatbots;
- Elevate lived experiences and involve youth directly in policymaking;
- Create youth-driven recommendations about AI chatbots.

METHODOLOGY

To ensure that participants entered into the process with the basic knowledge they needed to effectively engage, they

were provided a preliminary package for review. This included a logistics and welcome guide with information about how a citizen's assembly works, and what to expect over the three-day forum, including how their participation will impact final results of the Gen(Z)AI project. They were also provided with a resource pack, which included a technical overview of AI chatbots, literature review, scan of the Canadian policy landscape and other relevant jurisdictions, as well as the basics of policymaking and policy tools. These resources were easy to understand, digestible, and intended to lay the groundwork for their learning.

As with all four forums, the first on AI chatbots followed a hybrid participation model. On day one of the forum, all 100 participants gathered virtually to hear from three expert speakers:¹

- Kris Perry, Executive Director, [Children and Screens](#)
- Meetali Jain, Founding Executive Director, [Tech Justice Law Project](#)
- Taylor Lynn Curtis, Software Developer, [Mila](#)

The three speakers provided a well-rounded overview of the AI chatbot policy environment. This expert speaker day, coupled with the accompanying resource package, provided the participants with relevant background information.

¹ See appendix for full bios.

Taylor Lynn Curtis laid a foundation of understanding how AI chatbots actually work. Key takeaways included:

- The capabilities of Large Language Models (LLMs) is groundbreaking, and a shift from the way we understand traditional computer science.
- Understanding the way that AI chatbots operate can help us to identify and situate both the strengths and risks associated with their use. Risks can include hallucinations, misinformation, biases, manipulation, accountability gaps, and overreliance. We can point to the ability to summarize large datasets, reasoning (to a certain degree), and supporting the reorganizing of human ideas as some of the strengths of AI chatbots.
- There are technical solutions that can address these risks. Solutions can include content filtering, reinforcement learning from human feedback, prompted guardrails, and external validation.

Kris Perry outlined the effects of AI chatbots use on the developing minds of young people. Key takeaways included:

- Earlier and greater exposure to digital tools can increase the risk of mental health issues.
- A variety of factors can converge to make AI chatbot use problematic, including overuse, sycophancy, anthropomorphization, and the replacement of human interaction.
- Use in the classroom is complicated. On one hand, it can provide

adaptive tutoring capabilities, but on the other it raises questions of cognitive offloading and what counts as cheating.

- The next two years are critical – there have been small policy wins around the world, including industry adaptation.
- Youth leadership and resilience give us hope.

Meetali Jain engaged with participants on how AI chatbots have been the subject of multiple court cases across the United States. Key takeaways included:

- AI technologies, including chatbots, have been raising questions about legal responsibility and accountability, especially when harms occur.
- There are currently a number of cases working their way through the U.S. courts alleging harms by engagement with AI chatbots, including devastating cases of young people turning to suicide. These groundbreaking cases have the potential to set precedence for how AI interacts with the legal system.
- The responsibility and accountability of technology companies is in question. AI chatbots are products, and must be held to the same standards as we hold other companies.

During days two and three of the forum, 25 participants from Toronto gathered at the University of Toronto for in-person

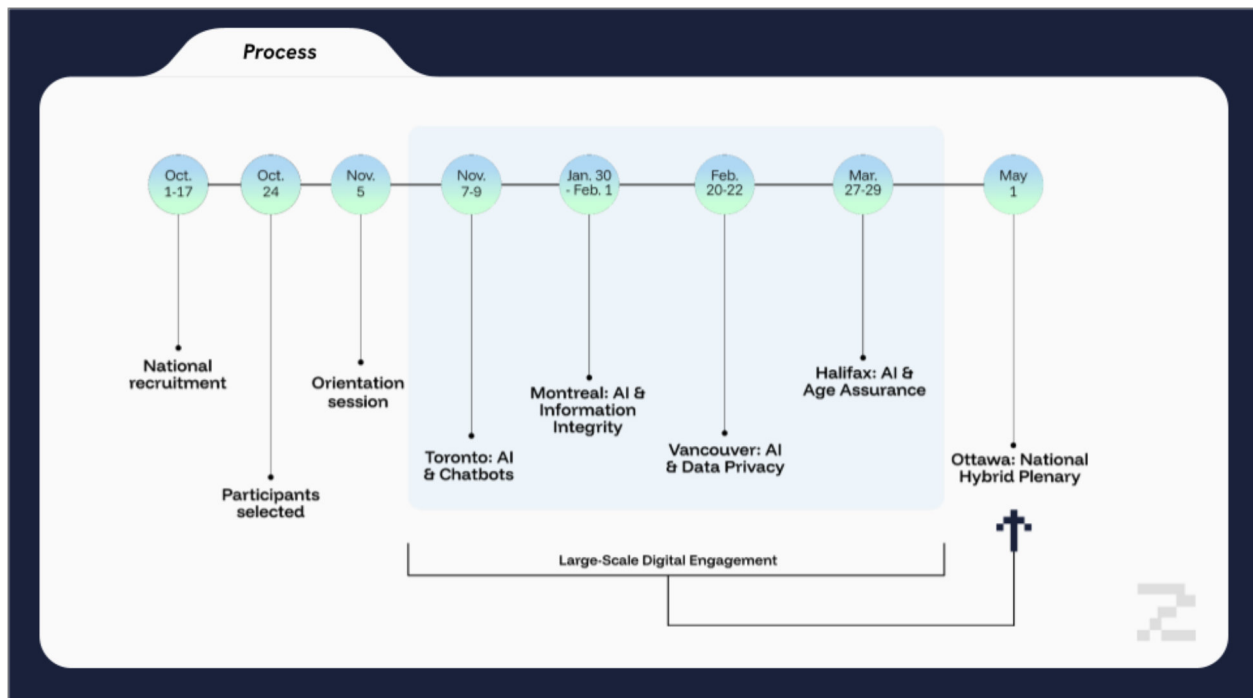


Image 1: An outline of the Gen(Z)AI process

The Structure of a Regional Forum		
Day 1 (Remote)	Day 2 (In-person)	Day 3 (Hybrid)
Online Foundation Participants learn from subject-matter experts, practitioners, and advocates who introduce the Forum theme. - Build shared starting point - Level the playing field - Prime participants for deeper dialogue	In-person deliberation Participants engage in a full day of deliberative dialogue, drawing from Citizens' Assembly principles. - Orientation and framing - Facilitated small groups - Issue-mapping	Hybrid Recommendations Writing/Consensus Building Participants refine and formalize recommendations. - Recommendation drafting - Collective review and consensus building - Reflection and closing ceremony
Who? All 100 participants join remotely.	Who? 25 regional participants gather in-person. Everyone else gets this day off.	Who? All 100 participants join for a hybrid session.

Image 2: An outline of the structure that each of the four forums will follow

deliberations. This included a wide range of engagement activities, from values mapping² and Q&As,³ to workshops,⁴ breakout groups, and deliberative policymaking exercises.⁵ These activities were facilitated by the Centre for Media, Technology, and Democracy's Youth Fellows, and led by Gen(Z)AI's co-leads, Helen Hayes and Fergus Linley-Mota.

On day three of the forum, an additional 75 participants from outside the Toronto region gathered for hybrid moments of engagement. Full group sessions with all 100 youth ensured that those participating remotely were included in all major touchpoints, allowing meaningful connection with their peers and active contribution to the dialogue.

The issue statements and policy mechanisms generated by the in-person participants were presented by the youth representatives themselves, directly to their virtual peers. Virtual breakout groups led by the Youth Fellows ensured that virtual participants were able to fully understand the prioritized issue statements and recommendations, ask clarifying questions, and provide input and feedback, ensuring that perspectives and insights from those outside Toronto were genuinely incorporated.

Virtual participants were also given time to study and reflect on the recommendations and provide input in written form. The combination of full group discussions and more intimate breakout sessions created multiple avenues for effective and meaningful hybrid contributions.

At the end of the first forum, the issue statements and policy recommendations written by the participants were presented to thousands of other young people for deliberation via [Make.org](https://make.org)'s civic dialogue platform. This process of national engagement is ongoing, and will be publicly accessible until April 2026.

KEY ISSUES AND FINDINGS

Participants had a strong grasp of how: 1) AI chatbots worked; 2) are deployed and governed; and, 3) impact different sectors as well as their own and their peers' daily lives. While they identified helpful use cases of AI chatbots, they largely found these technological tools addictive, intrusive, and harmful. Participants mapped the effects of AI chatbots in areas including labour, education, and politics, but were able to narrow their concerns to three major issue areas.

² Youth participated in Brené Brown's [Dare to Lead List of Values Exercise](#). This allowed them to identify what mattered most to them and provide a starting point for their issue statements.

³ Q&A sessions allowed the group a chance to ask any questions that may have come up during workshops and table discussions. The sessions were led by Helen Hayes of the Centre for Media, Technology and Democracy, Fergus Linley-Mota of the Dialogue on Technology Project, and Maddie Freeman of NoSo November.

⁴ Workshops included a Digital Wellness session, issue mapping, and a participatory AI chatbot policy presentation.

⁵ In-person participants drafted a suite of policy recommendations in breakout groups before undertaking a gallery walk exercise to identify the top priorities of the larger group. Recommendations were presented to the hybrid participants and refined as a collective.



Youth Fellow, Julian Lam, leading values mapping exercise



Breakout group deliberations

The key issues identified by participants were:

1. Over reliance on AI chatbots can lead to emotional dependence that exacerbates social isolation / atomization and contributes to mental health issues.
2. Widespread use of AI chatbots risks cognitive offloading and loss of critical thinking skills among users, jeopardizing the ability to learn, work, and engage in civic discourse.
3. AI chatbots increase users' potential exposure to harmful content, including sexually explicit, extremist, and/or self-harm content.

PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS

By identifying the issues that they felt were most pressing, participants were then able to develop a suite of policy recommendations to help address them. These recommendations were created and deliberated on by all 100 participants and will be further considered and weighed by thousands of other young Canadians via [Make.org](#)'s civic dialogue platform.

There was a strong consensus among participants that the status quo of AI chatbots was not acceptable and did not meet their needs. The participants' recommendations call for mandated design policies, backstops and safeguards for when harms occur, and greater user agency, choice, and information to aid in decision-making.

The final recommendations from this forum will be shared publicly in May 2026 following the culmination of the project and a presentation of the recommendations to government, policymakers, civil society, and other key stakeholders.

Generally, the participants identified three policy mechanisms to address the harms of AI chatbots:

1. Reactive policy mechanisms: This includes implementing policy tools that can provide resources and recourse when issues or harms occur.
2. Design and system change mechanisms: These policy tools seek to address issues identified within the design of AI systems. They would address problematic design features before issues occur.
3. Participatory and literacy building mechanisms: These recommendations would support agency-building and empowerment for users, as well as increased transparency on the part of government and technology companies.

NEXT STEPS AND CONCLUSION

This was the first of four regional forums in Gen(Z)AI. The next forum will be held in Montreal on information integrity, followed by a Vancouver forum on data privacy, and a Halifax forum on age assurance. They will follow the same model of in-person regional participation, hybrid cross-regional participation, and collaborative engagement with a broad spectrum of

young Canadians through [Make.org](https://make.org/)'s civic dialogue platform.

Following the conclusion of all four forums, recommendations and findings will be synthesized into a publicly available report. Participants will reconvene in a hybrid setting in Ottawa in May 2026 to present their final recommendations to government, policymakers, civil society, and other key stakeholders.

What is clear is that young people need a say in Canada's forthcoming AI policies. As a generation that has lived most, if not all, of their lives in the digital era, youth are uniquely positioned to contribute their insights and lived experiences to develop truly inclusive and representative AI policy.

Canada stands at a pivotal moment. Choices made now can position the country either as a laggard or global leader in responsible AI governance. Bringing youth voices to the table can ensure the right balance between innovation and safety within Canada's AI ecosystem and the online world, but this can only happen if youth are recognized as active partners in the process.

APPENDIX: EXPERT SPEAKERS



Kris Perry, Executive Director, Children and Screens

Kris is the Executive Director of Children and Screens: Institute of Digital Media and Child Development, an independent, nonprofit organization, helping children thrive in a digital world. Under her leadership, the Institute advances interdisciplinary dialogue, drives scientific research, and delivers accessible evidence-based guidance to families, educators, and policymakers.

Prior to joining Children and Screens, Perry served as Senior Advisor to Governor Gavin Newsom of California and Deputy Secretary of the California Health and Human Services Agency, where she spearheaded the development of the state's Master Plan for Early Learning and Care and the

expansion of access to high-quality early childhood programs. A longtime champion for equity in early childhood, she also held executive leadership roles at First 5 San Mateo, First 5 California, and at the First Five Years Fund, driving transformative systems change efforts at the local, state and national levels.

In 2024, Kris was inducted into the California Social Workers Hall of Distinction for her outstanding contributions to child-well being.

A nationally-recognized leader, Perry also played an instrumental role in restoring marriage equality to California following the landmark 2013 U.S. Supreme Court decision *Hollingsworth v. Perry*.



**Meetali Jain, Founding Executive Director,
Tech Justice Law Project**

Meetali Jain serves as TJLP's founding executive director. Over the course of her career, Meetali has worked as a lawyer, policy advocate, campaigner and educator. She started her career by representing detainees post-9/11 accused of terrorism, including at Guantanamo Bay, and by organizing in South Asian and Muslim communities impacted by surveillance and racial profiling. She's also litigated cases involving human rights, immigrant justice, and challenging corporate power.

Meetali worked at the Morrison & Foerster and Goldstein Demchak law firms, taught human rights and constitutional law in law clinics at American University, Seton Hall, and in law schools across South Africa.

In 2017, while working as Campaign and Legal Director at Avaaz, Meetali began working on issues of disinformation and broader tech harms globally. In 2021, she joined Reset Tech where she focused primarily on issues of tech law and policy in the US. Meetali clerked for the Honorable Virginia Phillips in the U.S. Central District of California and for Justice Yvonne Mokgoro in the Constitutional Court of South Africa.

She serves on the Boards of the Integrity Institute, Type Media Center, and is an advisor to the California Initiative for Technology and Democracy (CITED), and Design It For Us (DIFU) and ReThink Citizens Youth Squad Advisory Coalition, both youth-led movements to build better tech spaces for young people.



**Taylor Lynn Curtis, Software Developer,
Mila**

Taylor Lynn Curtis is a developer and researcher at Mila, Quebec's artificial intelligence institute, where she focuses on building AI tools to combat online misinformation and strengthen democratic resilience.

She holds a Bachelor's degree in Software Engineering from McGill University, where she graduated top of her class and received the Ernst Brown Gold Medal and the École Polytechnique Memorial Prize, and a Master's in Technology Policy from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), where her research explored how societies can ensure that artificial intelligence is developed and governed responsibly.

Before joining Mila, Taylor worked as a technology consultant at Ernst & Young (EY), advising large organizations on how to use technology ethically and effectively. Today, she works at the intersection of AI development, governance, and public accountability, bridging the gap between how AI systems are built and how they affect people's everyday lives.

Taylor is passionate about empowering young people to have a voice in the future of technology and democracy. She believes that shaping the digital world should be a shared civic project, one that reflects the values, creativity, and curiosity of the next generation.

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