



AURORA
HUMANITARIAN INITIATIVE

AURORA 2.0 STRATEGY

APRIL 2026



A LETTER FROM OUR CEO

Dear friends,

Thank you for your interest in Aurora 2.0, our next phase. Before we dig into where we are going next, a word on where we come from:

The Aurora Humanitarian Initiative was founded in 2015 on behalf of survivors of the Armenian Genocide and in gratitude to those who saved them. We are named for Aurora Mardigian, a survivor who used her voice to raise funds for Armenians enduring the same horrors she escaped, helping save a generation.

She was just one person, but she refused to look away. In her honor, so do we.

That is *Gratitude in Action*, the impulse to take positive action when you've benefited from the kindness of others. Aurora thanks those who saved our families over a century ago by awarding the \$1M Aurora Prize to their spiritual descendants, modern-day grassroots humanitarians. Because of them, another generation will live to put their own *Gratitude in Action*, continuing the positive cycle. So far, **over 3.7 million Aurora beneficiaries** stand to do so, and more join their ranks every day.

As we developed this strategy, the world grew darker: year after year of humanitarian funding cuts and rising humanitarian fatalities. We asked ourselves: **What would the world look like if there were enough humanitarians?** What if the best of humanity were properly resourced?

For years, we had watched something special happen when two or more humanitarians met. Often strangers to friends in minutes, they would surface countless ideas for collaboration, ways to help each other. These teachers, preachers, doctors, activists formed a community before our eyes. Already **over 100 strong** and working across **73 countries and territories**, the [Aurora Humanitarian Network](#) is how we answer these big questions.

Aurora 2.0 is how we show up for these frontline humanitarians in this moment of massive need. We'll introduce **flexible funding** that reaches humanitarians directly. We'll offer **capacity building** shaped by what our network *actually* needs. We'll use our **convening power** to bring humanitarian leaders, funders, and partners together to accelerate change.

We are putting the **"human" back in humanitarian** and **awakening the humanitarian in each and every one of us**.

On behalf of the Aurora Team and Community, humanitarians all, I proudly invite you to explore what's next. If you feel so compelled, join us in standing with those who stand for others.



With my deepest gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Armine'.

Armine Afeyan
CEO, Aurora Humanitarian Initiative

HUMANITARIAN LANDSCAPE

1. Demand for humanitarian aid is at a record high and increasing...

- **120 million people driven from their homes** by ongoing conflicts globally, the largest since World War II. 2x increase in number of displaced persons since 2010. *UNHCR*
- Parties to conflict are increasingly treating international humanitarian law as optional, leading to heightened targeting of civilians and the highest number of deaths on record. *ICRC*
- **Climate change exacerbates the problem**, fueling new conflicts and more displacement.

2. ...and our capacity to respond is eroding in real time

- **Destruction of USAID and cuts by other major donors** have closed programs and exposed vulnerable populations. 14 million likely preventable deaths from US funding cuts alone. *Lancet*
- **4x increase in aid workers killed** annually in the past four years. International Humanitarian Law routinely violated in conflicts. *AWSD, OCHA*

3. All the while, we face a growing crisis of humanity

- **People not directly experiencing crisis** are increasingly aware only of high-profile conflicts or **disconnected** from humanitarian concerns altogether. *Reuters, CARE*
- **Political polarization** continues to increase, driving cynicism and apathy. *Edelman Trust Barometer*
- **Trust** in collective institutions (religion, government) is declining or at risk. For many people, their basic **faith in humanity is being tested**. *Pew, UN DESA, Edelman*
- **Even the term “humanitarian” has become controversial**, narrowly understood and co-opted for political gain.
- **Artificial Intelligence is here**, and it is challenging what it means to be human in an age of increasingly integrated technology.

And still, Aurora humanitarians prove that individual acts of courage persist and continue to inspire.

Our mission is more relevant and critical than ever. This is the moment to set our course and strengthen our resolve.



Aurora Prize Laureate Dr. Denis Mukwege meets with women in the DRC, 2018.
Photo: Endre Vestvik

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over a decade of Aurora Prize cycles, Aurora has built a global network of humanitarian leaders through rigorous selection and a distinctive trust-based approach. That network is the foundation of Aurora 2.0, a strategic shift from celebrating courageous, life-saving acts of the past to proliferating humanitarianism into the future.

Grassroots humanitarians—their courage, commitment, and impact—are our most precious resource. They must be protected and championed. Aurora will continue to directly fund local responders through the Aurora Prize while also establishing stronger, sustained support for the [Aurora Humanitarian Network](#).

Aurora 2.0 centers on four connected areas of work that help frontline leadership endure, adapt, and grow:

- **Prize and Laureate Support** is anchored by the Aurora Prize for Awakening Humanity, which remains our flagship initiative and now runs on a biennial cycle, alongside tailored engagement designed to elevate each Laureate’s profile and expand their reach.
- We are introducing **Humanitarian Programming** through the Humanitarian Support Platform and the Humanitarian Advised Fund.
- With **Network Engagement**, we forge catalytic connections across the [Aurora Humanitarian Network](#), comprised of Prize nominees, through a biennial Humanitarian Summit and regular virtual gatherings that foster community and collaboration.
- Through **Storytelling and Influence**, we change the narrative around who humanitarians are and whose responsibility humanitarianism is. By mainstreaming Gratitude in Action as a global ethic, Aurora seeks to inspire everyone to recognize their own humanitarian potential and promote trust-based, participatory grantmaking.



*Aurora Prize Laureate Marguerite Barankitse in Rwamagana District, Rwanda, 2016.
Photo: Aurora Humanitarian Initiative*

VISION STATEMENT

*A world that empowers individual humanitarians,
awakening our collective humanity.*

In the mid-2020s, humanitarianism faced its biggest challenges since World War II. Decades later, because Aurora existed:

- **The humanitarian community** recognizes Aurora humanitarians as leaders whose courage and locally grounded solutions shape modern humanitarian practice.
- **Individual humanitarians** have the resources and capabilities to serve those in the greatest need in their communities. By acting together as a global network, they have increased their impact and decision-making power.
- **Major donors** have invested significantly in the trust-based funding and participatory grantmaking that characterizes Aurora.
- **Humanitarian response** is more effective and sustainable because power and resources have shifted closer to the communities most affected.
- **A large cross-section of society** understands humanitarian activity as a core expression of our shared humanity and is inspired to take meaningful action—big or small—to help uplift others.



*Humanitarian Summit at UCLA, 2025.
Photo: Aurora Humanitarian Initiative*

MISSION STATEMENT

To elevate individual humanitarians through recognition, partnership, and narrative change.

IMPACT AREAS

In Aurora's next phase, we will:

**Org
Level**

Strengthen and support our humanitarian network through new initiatives and sustained engagement

Build recognition of the Aurora Prize as the most prestigious global award for local humanitarian action

**System
Level**

Advocate with funders and humanitarian leaders to increase support for local actors, flexible trust-based funding, and participatory grantmaking

Expand global support for humanitarianism through storytelling that emphasizes the "human" in every humanitarian

**Societal
Level**

Elevate the concept of Gratitude in Action to a global ethic, commonly cited in public discourse, inspiring individuals and society

Mainstream intergenerational trauma as a catalyst for positive change, as survivors find the courage to harness their trauma to uplift their communities

THEORY OF CHANGE

IF Aurora identifies, supports, and elevates courageous frontline humanitarians,
THEN their work gains greater visibility, legitimacy and staying power,
SO THAT humanitarian action becomes more locally grounded, effective,
and widely practiced.

Effective Humanitarian Action

Pillar 1

The “Human” in Humanitarian...

Empower individual humanitarians working to create lasting impact in the lives of others by providing them with access to the resources, recognition, and relationships they need to succeed.

Empower Grassroots Humanitarians

- 1 Prize and Laureate Support**
 - Biennial **Aurora Prize**
 - Tailored **Laureate Support**
 - **Aurora Research Grants**
- 2 Humanitarian Programming**
 - Capacity-building **Humanitarian Support Platform**
 - **Humanitarian Advised Fund:** critical, emergent needs

Pillar 2

... And the Humanitarian in Every Human

Inspire the public to pick up the mantle in their daily lives, framing humanitarianism as a collective responsibility by telling stories of impact and advocating for important issues.

Encourage and Inspire Individuals and Society

- 3 Network Engagement**
 - Biennial **Humanitarian Summit**
 - Year-round virtual gatherings and networking
- 4 Storytelling and Influence**
 - Stories from the Aurora Humanitarian Network
 - **Young Aurora**

OUR PROGRAMMING

With its next phase, Aurora builds on the strengths of the flagship Prize program to expand support for and awareness of grassroots humanitarians the world over. Aurora seeks to proliferate humanitarianism at a crucial time by **fortifying humanitarians** working in the most challenging situations and **inspiring others** to realize their *own* potential to act as humanitarians, wherever they are.

1. Prize and Laureate Support

The **\$1M Aurora Prize for Awakening Humanity** will continue to be awarded to an outstanding grassroots humanitarian. With its unique participatory grant model, the Prize directs \$300,000 to the Laureate and a further \$600,000 to other impactful humanitarians, as designated by the Laureate. The Aurora Humanitarians (finalists) receive the remaining \$100,000 for their remarkable achievements.

With a new Laureate announced every other year, the **Laureate Support** program extends to two years of personalized partnership, including targeted advocacy and media, participation in major global convenings, and operational guidance, including fundraising strategy, organizational capacity building, and program monitoring and evaluation. Further strengthening the Prize process is the introduction of **Aurora Research Grants**, which engage hundreds of nominators to surface courageous humanitarians in the most overlooked places.

2. Humanitarian Programming

The **Humanitarian Support Platform** brings new capacity- and community-building opportunities to the [Aurora Humanitarian Network](#), comprised of Prize nominees, through both group-based and individualized programming. In parallel, Aurora will launch its first **Humanitarian Advised Fund** to deliver flexible, trust-based funding to Aurora humanitarians, building on the participatory grant model of its signature Prize.

3. Network Engagement

Aurora will continue to serve as a trusted bridge-builder in the humanitarian sector, connecting grassroots humanitarians, donors, international aid agencies, capacity-building organizations, and other key stakeholders. These efforts are advanced by the **Humanitarian Summit**, a biennial gathering of the Aurora Humanitarian Network for learning and working sessions focused on the most pressing issues. Aurora also convenes regional events and webinars and participates in leading global forums.

4. Storytelling and Influence

Through media engagement and audiovisual production, Aurora casts the humanitarian impulse as a natural response to crisis and a shared commitment to humanity. By finding new and creative ways to tell stories from the [Aurora Humanitarian Network](#), we shape a narrative that recognizes the “human” in humanitarian and awakens the humanitarian in every human. **Young Aurora** engages the next generation by enabling students to design and implement solutions to humanitarian challenges in their local communities.



*Aurora Prize Laureate Jamila Afghani with women she supports in Afghanistan, 2017.
Photo: Aurora Humanitarian Initiative*

THANK YOU

With Aurora 2.0, we renew our commitment to helping the helpers, those who deliver life-saving support to communities in crisis. We're all in on sustaining grassroots humanitarians, advancing long-term solutions, and moving resources closer to those who need them most. Building on our first decade of Gratitude in Action, Aurora will continue to grow its global impact in the years ahead. But it will take all of us to make it happen.

Here's how you can be a part of it:

- **Support Aurora**
Donate to expand Aurora's ability to fund and sustain frontline humanitarians and the long-term work that follows.
- **Grow the circle**
Subscribe to our newsletter, follow Aurora on social media, and share what resonates. Or simply tell five friends about our work.
- **Show up and stay close**
Attend Aurora events, live or streaming, to hear directly from Aurora humanitarians and partners.
- **Celebrate a humanitarian**
Nominate a grassroots humanitarian for the Aurora Prize for Awakening Humanity.

Together, we can ensure that those who stand up for others are not alone. Join us.



*Aurora Prize Laureate Dr. Tom Catena in Sudan, 2017.
Photo: Aurora Humanitarian Initiative*

Support Us



AuroraHumanitarian.org

AuroraLuminaries.com