

We L Robotics

THE POWER OF LOCAL

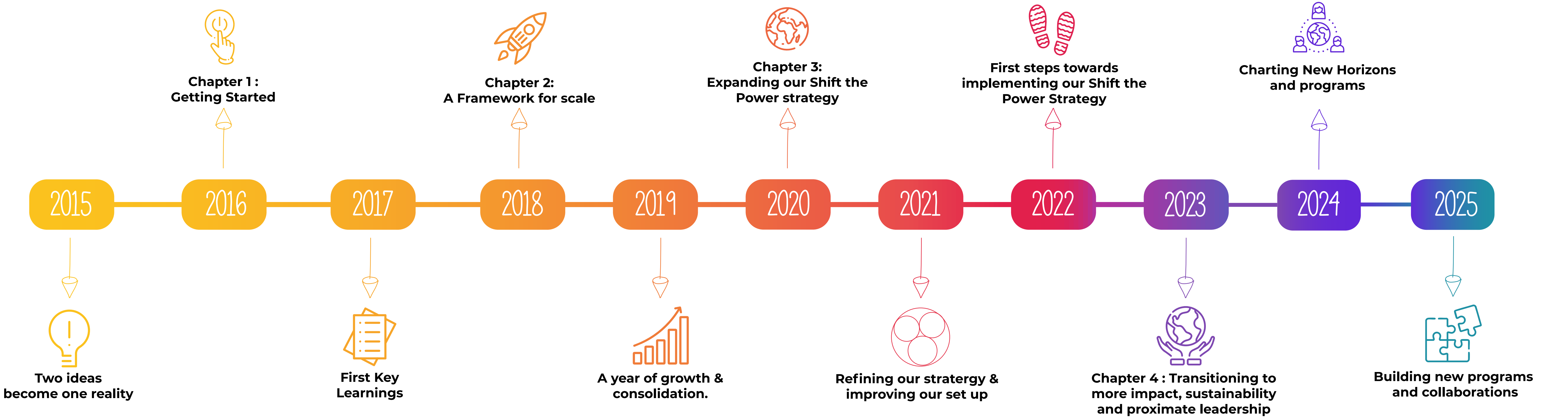


OUR HISTORY

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2015 - 2025

Our History



Our History



2015



◀ Two ideas become one reality

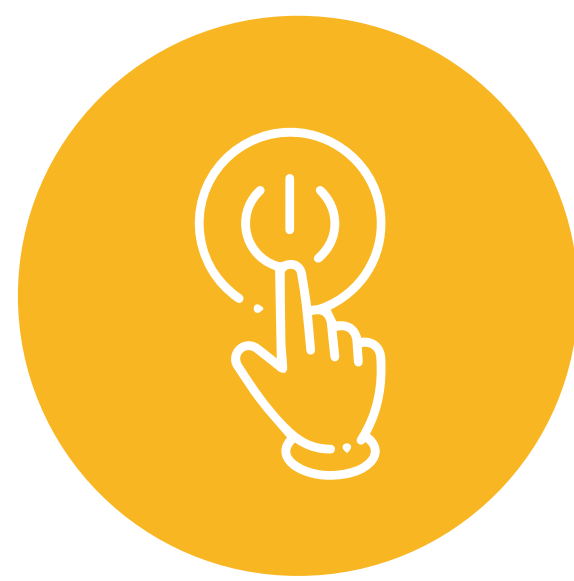
WeRobotics sees the light as a new collaboration of two existing initiatives: Drone Adventures and UAViators and , initiated by 4 Co-Founders: Sonja Betschart and Adam Klaptocz of Drone Adventures and Patrick Meier and Andrew Schroeder of UAViators..

The goal of this new collaboration: scaling the use of drones for social good and the opportunities that come with them in the hands of local experts. This co-creative, collaborative and open sharing approach of founding the organization becomes integral part of WeRobotics DNA.

After the decision of the 4 Co-Founders in September 2015 to join forces, the initial vision, mission and ideal legal structure are defined in calls and discussions. The new organization's name is agreed upon unanimously.

WeRobotics is incorporated on December 15, 2015 as a US 501c3 non-profit organization.

2016



◀ Chapter 1 : Getting started

The 4 Co-Founders of WeRobotics organize their first in-person retreat in Amsterdam in January 2016. Three full days are filled with passionate discussions to refine the vision and mission, decide on the strategy and plan forward and distribute actions to each Co-Founder.

The first innovation grant funding received from the Rockefeller Foundation allows WeRobotics to test the development of local knowledge hubs focused on drones and other robotics applications over an 18-month proof of concept phase in three countries: Nepal, Tanzania and Peru. The funding lays the basis for what will become the Flying Labs Network.

Initial industry partnerships are made with key technology companies including Esri, Pix4D, DJI, Parrot and senseFly.

All four Co-Founders decide to volunteer their time during the first year of operations, which allows WeRobotics to dedicate the first funding round entirely to local activities and the proof of concept around the first Flying Labs.

The organization received its 501C3 status.

2017



◀ First key learnings

Additional funding arrives from USAID, the Hewlett Foundation, the Inter-American Development Bank, and MIT Solve.

New resources allow WeRobotics to expand and diversify our activities. These include the first locally-driven medical cargo drone projects, drone & data capacity strengthening for the Flying Labs and other local stakeholders, as well as the setup of new Flying Labs in Fiji and Panama to explore activities in the South Pacific and Central America.

New funding also allows us to create the first small team of WeRobotics core employees, both in the USA and Switzerland. These include an engineering department as well as dedicated Admin, HR and Finance.

A new legal entity of the organization is created in Switzerland, and incorporated as a civil association with public interest in February 2017. Adam Klaptocz becomes the first Co-Founder to join the organization as a paid staff member.

The 18-month proof of concept allowed us to gather invaluable learnings regarding many of the key questions posed by the creation of the initial Flying Labs network. The definition, identity, legal status, goals, and common standards of the labs start to come into clear focus.

Groups distributed across 10 additional countries contact WeRobotics to learn how they can start their own Flying Labs. These strong signs of demand confirm the need for locally owned and operated drones, data, robotics and AI knowledge hubs.

Towards the end of the year, WeRobotics organizes its first global conference, hosted by the Rockefeller Foundation in New York. The conference allows us to bring together 50 stakeholders, including the Flying Labs from Nepal, Peru, and Tanzania, as well as all of our key initial partners and supporters for an intense day of open dialogue on drones, data, and locally-driven practices for social good in the Global South.

A new strategy for the rapid establishment and scaling of Flying Labs to bring the network to scale is crafted in the wake of the WeRobotics Global conference.

2018



◀ A framework for scale

The first version of the framework supporting the Flying Labs Network is put into place. Existing local organizations that have the needed expertise can apply to open their Flying Labs, based on a type of social franchise model. Throughout the year, the Network grows very quickly, from 5 to 17 Flying Labs. All of these labs are based on local needs and are driven through organic growth.

The Engineering strategy is updated to ensure that it is fully in line with our vision and mission of localization.

On the Co-Founders front, Patrick and Sonja join the organization full time and share the Executive Management positions as co-leads while Adam decides to leave the organization and Andrew continues to support operations on a pro-bono basis. New team members for drone & data technical support, finance, communications and HR/admin join WeRobotics throughout the year.

The Hewlett Foundation, the Autodesk Foundation, IADB and WFP join the growing list of funders and the Rockefeller Foundation renews its innovation funding.

Discover the details of our activities, including all operational activities and highlights in the **2018 Annual Report**.

2019



◀ A year of growth & consolidation

The organization grows with the addition of a dedicated team for the Flying Labs Network coordination and facilitation. Co-Founder Andrew transitions from his operational pro-bono role to take the lead of the Board of Directors, representing the Co-Founders on the board level.

The second Global conference, hosted again by the Rockefeller Foundation in New York also serves as the backdrop of the first Flying Labs Network retreat, bringing together 14 Flying Labs and the growing partner ecosystem of WeRobotics.

The Omidyar Network, The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Tides Foundation and the Jansen PrimeSteps Foundation join the growing list of donors while the Hewlett Foundation renews its funding with a 30-month grant. The Flying Labs Network grows from 17 to 26 Flying Labs.

2019 is the year for a number of key organizational achievements, such as:

- An updated M&E strategy in collaboration with Columbia University SIPA and publishing of our first impact numbers publicly on our website
- A new board strategy, including a consolidated board for both legal entities
- Our first official financial review

Discover the details of our activities, including all operational activities and highlights in the **2019 Annual Report**.

2020



◀ Chapter 3 : Expanding our Shift the Power strategy

Though our organization has always been a fully digital organization with all team members – apart from the Swiss-based Engineering team – working 100% remotely, we struggle with the isolation and anxiety that Covid brought as much as any organization.

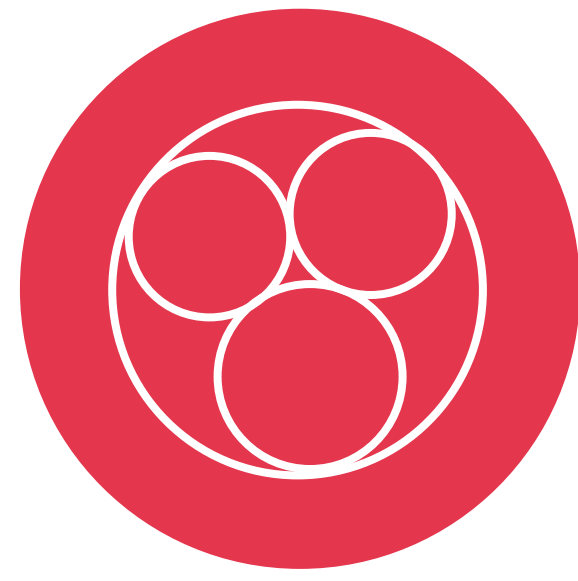
Our organization keeps on growing with additional team members to our Drone & Data as well as engineering teams, so does the Flying Labs Network, passing the bar of 30 Flying Labs.

We reorganize our activities and 2020 becomes one of our busiest years, with important achievements to strengthen the Flying Labs Network:

- Co-Creation of Flying Labs Network governance model that also allows for qualitative growth of both the network and individual Flying Labs
- Implementation of Knowledge Sharing Platform that allows for broader sharing of WeRobotics' resources for Flying Labs and network-wide sharing of inter-network expertise.

We also concentrate on refining our Shift the Power strategy by lining out 3 distinctive systems change initiatives that we refine over the second part of the year. To support one of the initiatives, the Flying Council is launched, with xx Flying Labs members representing the Network in co-creating the transition strategy.

2021



As part of our Shift the Power strategy, we review our Board of Directors to reflect the representation of the continents of our work also in our BOD and start exploring the idea of a spin-off together with the core team members of the engineering team.

We successfully pass our first financial audit in the first half of the year and undertake our first cybersecurity audit towards the end of the year, to keep on strengthening our organizational processes and setup.

Discover the details of our activities, including all operational activities and highlights in the **2020 Annual Report**.

◀ Refining our strategy and improving our setup

We decide to test and trial a new organizational setup to support our Shift the Power strategy. We opt for a Holacracy-inspired organizational approach and onboard teams one after the other to this new setup throughout the year. In September, we host our first in-person team retreat since 2019 and jointly refine our Holacracy-inspired approach with co-creating our initial version of the organizational constitution.

We expand our team with new team members to support coordination and communication for the Flying Labs Network. To take first steps towards our transition, we exclusively hire new team members and interns based in the continents of our work.

We keep on refining our three Shift the Power strategies and update our website accordingly. Throughout the year, we work with the Flying Council to build a detailed plan of our transition strategy. We also initiate numerous discussions with external partners to draft detailed concept notes and plans for the other 2 strategies: creating a replicable model of our network framework and ways for INGO to measure and pledge power.

The BOD review is implemented at our General Assembly, with 4 new board members from Africa and Asia joining our board. The 4 board members leaving move to the Advisory Board to keep on supporting us with their expertise and knowledge.

We keep on improving our internal processes thanks to our second financial audit that we pass successfully. In addition to the financial audit, we invest in our first Cybersecurity audit that allows us to implement improvements related to cybersecurity.

Other investments we make throughout the year for our organizational setup include an important website update, improvements to our impact measurements and investigating ways with support from pro-bono legal counsel on possibilities to spin-off the engineering department, an important first internal step we want to take in relation to our transition strategy.

Discover the details of our activities, including all operational activities and highlights in the **2021 Annual Report**.

2022



◀ First steps towards implementing our Shift the Power strategy

Throughout the past 2 years, we have refined our systems change strategy in relation to “Shifting Power” and already made headway by expanding our team with colleagues from and based in the Global South. The Flying Labs Network has also grown expansively, both in size and expertise.

Time has thus come for our organization to:

1. Share openly the learnings made over the past 5 years with our localization model in a detailed report co-authored by WeRobotics and Flying Labs ([link](#))
2. Take an important but difficult step and walk the talk in relation to “Power of Local” and “Local expertise”: we decide to close our engineering department based in Switzerland that has grown in 2021 to make up half of our team, and organization. Over the past 4 years, the engineering team has advanced innovations in drone applications, such as low-cost solutions for medical cargo deliveries, mosquito-vector control and more.

The key learning we are making in 2022 with the publishing of our report and the difficult decision taken on closing the engineering department: showing new ways for international organizations to localize. And experiencing ourselves that shifting power has many facets and that doing so asks organizations and their teams for much courage and resilience.

Almost 5 years after implementing the Flying Labs Network framework, it is also time to challenge and revise the framework and the multiple ways of contributions, collaborations and our facilitation of the network. We collectively convene in-person (WeRobotics team as well as Flying Labs) in Nairobi, Kenya in October for an in-person Flying Labs retreat filled with co-creation sessions addressing framework improvement, network growth as well as strategic initiatives such as WeRobotics’ transition strategy.

2023



An invaluable wealth of ideas, inputs and collective wisdom is collected throughout the 2-day retreat, ready to be implemented throughout 2023 to improve the Flying Labs Network's qualitative growth and sustainability.

We strengthen our Board of Directors with 2 new members and review our transition strategy thanks to the invaluable feedback from Flying Labs and external transition mentors.

Discover the details of our activities, including all operational activities and highlights in our **2022 Annual Report** that will be available in May 2023.

◀ Chapter 4 : Transitioning to more impact, sustainability and proximate leadership

In 2023, the Flying Labs Network has grown to pass the 40 mark, closing the year with 41 Flying Labs. To support this continuous growth, the key focus of the year lay on implementing the decisions taken and needs validated jointly by Flying Labs and WeRobotics at the 2022 in-person Flying Labs retreat. The year focused on refining the Network's structure to accommodate its growth.

Key initiatives included enhancing processes, expanding the "Turning Data into Action" program, and developing a framework for support for drone regulations support by Flying Labs. Efforts also included fostering STEM programs and establishing a sector-focused expertise hub.

All along the year, we documented our work in blog posts and learning reports, and participated as speakers in key conferences for more open sharing.

To build on the implementation of decisions taken together in 2022, and to continuously evolve the collaboration between Flying Labs and WeRobotics, we co-organized 4 regional Flying Labs retreats. Coming together regionally allowed us to discuss progress made since the last retreat in a more intimate, regional setting, and to co-create together new ideas for the growth and sustainability of Flying Labs and the Network.

On the organizational side, Co-Founder and Co-CEO Patrick Meier decided in early February to leave the organization. Renee Welch joined our organization in May as the new Administrator of the US legal entity and Co-Pilot in the Executive Management team.

To build a stronger base to support our continued growth, we also decided on outsourcing our back office services. This allowed us throughout the year to increase our organization's efficiency and expand HR and finance expertises with targeted outsourcing partners

2024



◀ Charting New Horizons and Programs

We started and ended the year on a strong note, with the launch of the brand new WeRobotics website in January and Flying Labs Network website in October. These two new websites not only feature fresh designs and user-friendly interfaces but also provide enhanced platforms to share our organization's and the Flying Labs' work more effectively and engagingly.

One of our key goals for 2024 was to build on the activities of 2023 and further strengthen the base and backbone for this 4th chapter of our organization. Following the decisions made at the regional Flying Labs retreats in Q4 of 2023, one other key goal was to lay the foundation for new programs and pathways that support the growth and sustainability of Flying Labs and the Network. A significant step in this direction was the introduction of 3 Sector Expertise Hubs, which focus on vertical collaboration between Flying Labs, WeRobotics, and partners of our global ecosystem. The first achievements of these initial Sector Expertise Hubs already speak for themselves:

1. Co-organizing the inaugural Southern Africa Drones, AI, and GIS Disaster Risk Management Conference in partnership with South Africa Flying Labs and Esri in November 2024
2. Replicating the CAA Engagement framework co-created with Namibia Flying Labs and Deloitte D2i in Kenya
3. Participating as keynote speakers and panel contributors in numerous regional and global conferences together with Flying Labs.

Each of these activities gave us the opportunity to learn, gather feedback, challenge assumptions, and iterate on first new program ideas. As a result, we now have a strong foundation of new programs to implement in 2025. These programs will allow us and the Flying Labs Network to transition to more impact and sustainability, all the while expanding the power of local.

Another pivotal moment in 2024 was the launch of the Flying Labs Network Council in July. Comprising nine members from five regions, the Council provides strategic guidance and supports WeRobotics in its steward role for the Network with decision-making and network development strategies.

Additionally, our Glocalization Model gained traction, with three organizations—Ciber Voluntarios, Urban Better, and Aiducation—adopting or beginning its implementation. The model was also featured in a case study published by the Skoll Centre for Social Entrepreneurship as part of their report on social entrepreneurship, commissioned by WIPO for the Global Innovation Index 2024.

We also made important investments in communications and Impact/MEL activities for our organization as well as Flying Labs and the Network. Alongside launching two new websites, which feature an initial approach on how we share our impact, we developed new communication strategies for WeRobotics and Flying Labs, published 108 blog posts, published 6 reports to share our learnings publicly, and introduced a new approach to tracking and sharing impact between Flying Labs.

On the organizational side, the year was marked by recognition and growth. Our Co-founder Sonja Betschart received prestigious accolades, including being named to Forbes' 50 Over 50 List and receiving the Global Leadership Award from Women in Tech® Europe. We also welcomed three new board members – Adriana Espinel Sánchez, Prof. Jonathan Makuwira, and Lorenzo Martelletti – who bring diverse new skills and a shared commitment to WeRobotics' mission. A key internal highlight of the year was our team retreat in the Swiss Alps, where our team members from all corners of this planet came together for four days of in-person sharing, learning, strategizing, and enjoying each other's company.

2025



◀ Building new programs and collaborations

Thanks to the strong base created in 2023 and 2024 on all levels (new collaboration pathways, reinforced network governance and coordination, proof of concepts for new programs and frameworks, backoffice, and more), we are starting out 2025 with a clear focus.

The growth in quality, impact, and sustainability of the Flying Labs Network will remain the key focus area of our work. To supplement this growth, 2 additional focus areas of the year will be:

1. The launch of the Drones, Data, and AI Solutions Platform for Disaster and Climate Resilience
2. The wide replication of the WeRobotics and Flying Labs CAA Engagement Framework.

The Glocalization Model represents our 4th key focus area, including the support of additional model adoptions as well as undertaking academic research to lay the groundwork for widespread model adoption in the near future.

In addition to these key focus areas, we will continue to strengthen Flying Labs' communications capacities and refine our approaches to monitoring and evaluating impact together.

Subscribe to the WeRobotics and Flying Labs Network email newsletters to stay updated on our progress throughout the year.



Our story of impact continues...