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This guide is for employees in city agencies (or product teams in non-profit organizations or industry) exploring the use of a new AI system, or midstream in a pilot to elicit and respond to critical feedback before the system proceeds. It is based on the core tenet that AI systems should be evaluated with the needs of vulnerable and marginalized people in mind. Previous work has demonstrated that these communities are more likely to be harmed by the adoption of new AI systems. Careful consideration to these risks will lead to stronger commitments to digital rights for everyone.

Consider the city sidewalk. People without mobility impairments might not notice a lack of curb cuts, but people in wheelchairs are first to notice and raise their absence as a concern. Responding to this risk before it happens by incorporating curb cuts would benefit people in wheelchairs, as well as parents with strollers, bicyclists, and delivery workers. So, too, can designing new technologies in response to concerns of impacted people protect the digital rights of all residents: surfacing and addressing needs for transparency, privacy, equity, accountability, efficacy, and recourse.

Algorithmic impact assessment often involves technical assessments of how a given system performs for different demographic groups. The premise of this guide is that under resource constraint, organizations that do not have large technical teams can conduct impact assessment via focused engagement with the people who will be affected by a given system. We found that these conversations surface essential insights about prospective impacts and provide the opportunity to reimagine a project—or mitigate its failures—before the system is deployed.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide is the result of 18 months of piloting and experimentation at the Data & Society Research Institute's Algorithmic Impact Methods Lab, which we launched in May 2023 to develop methods of conducting algorithmic impact assessment. Our approach to algorithmic impact assessment looks for ways to anticipate adverse impacts before a system is deployed by connecting with vulnerable residents and eliciting their questions and concerns. This process does not quantify the changes introduced by a system. Instead, it helps your organization identify blind spots, answer community questions, and surface key risks to mitigate before the project moves forward. It can also help your organization better understand people's needs on the

ground and direct attention toward community-identified opportunities to address the same problem differently, in ways that may be more effective.

WHEN TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

PROJECT PHASE

HOW IMPACT ASSESSMENT CAN HELP

— Problem Formulation

This is the best time to start using the AIM Lab algorithmic impact assessment toolkit. It is important to seek public input as early as possible. System impacts can vary dramatically across complex and intersecting variables—these differences may not be visible until the system is deployed to a wider group of people. Organizations cannot afford to “leap first” and look at impacts later—especially when adverse impacts create hardship (or even harm) for residents.

— Request for Information (RFI)

This is where projects’ budget and scope start to materialize. Impact assessment can help you ask the right questions and evaluate prospective systems against community members’ concerns and expectations.

— Pilot

Deploying a pilot without first addressing community context can result in strong reactions and misconceptions. Ideally, impact assessment has already begun. If that’s not possible, pairing a pilot with engagement can help a pilot do what it is intended to do: garner feedback, test glitches, and prepare for equitable deployment in the future.

— Pilot Assessment

Did your pilot create any unintended impacts? For whom? How will you address those impacts? Do you have proof that fully deploying the system is worth it? Impact assessment can help you identify and address these questions.

— Deployment

Community engagement should ideally precede deployment. Even when this is not possible, conducting engagement on deployment builds technology awareness and fosters critical thinking about data and technology; it also positions the public and local organizations to engage more in the future.

— PR Emergency

(Hopefully not.) But miscommunications at any point in the process can result in strong reactions and a need to move quickly and increase transparency. Resources in this toolkit can be quickly used to hear multiple perspectives and prevent this from happening in the future.

(The earlier, the better.)

RESOURCES NEEDED

- ☐ 2x 90-minute sessions with staff and constituents, per CBO
- ☐ Lots of outreach, across multiple channels, to make sure the sessions are adequately known-about and well attended.
- ☐ Publicly accessible meeting space that is ADA-accessible with a screen or projector.
- ☐ Moveable tables is a plus
- ☐ Trained interpreters (from the city or the CBO)
- ☐ Gift cards for participants.
- ☐ Honorarium for the CBO.
- ☐ Snacks for sessions.
- ☐ Childcare options for parents who want to attend.
- ☐ A point of contact for questions from the public moving forward. An online form is ok, if it is monitored.
- ☐ Ample time to prepare the above.

HOW TO ADAPT THE TOOLKIT

These materials are a set of templates, frameworks, and best practices. Browse and fill them in the order that best serves you and your project. For public-facing materials like sessions slides, informed consent forms, and reports, use your City's style guide, letterhead, and templates. This makes your material more authoritative and reduces confusion.

These materials have been created to work within the real-world constraints of agencies like yours, but we encourage you to adapt and remix them to fit your organization's needs. If you encounter a section that your department doesn't have the time or resources to complete, ask, "why not?" and "how might I address this somewhere else?" before cutting it. Please also send us feedback so we can improve the Toolkit for others.

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Using the toolkit? Let us know here: <https://forms.gle/D3Aog4fcYnE62TyB8>