

# Communities of Practice: Discussion Paper

## Read this first: Contributing

This is a shared document, and anyone with the link is able to edit it. Please use the comment feature to make suggestions or leave specific feedback for others. All discussions here are subject to our [Code of Conduct](#).

## Introduction

This discussion document has been drafted to help Code for Australia and other interested parties collaborate on the design and operation of new “[Communities of Practice](#)”. These are informal and loosely organised networks of individuals and organisations who have come together online and in person to discuss common areas of interest and solve challenges we face in our own work.

## A living document

This document will serve as an ongoing reference and charter for the operation of our Communities of Practice. All participants are encouraged to contribute and decisions made as a community will be captured here.

## Code for Australia’s role

Code for Australia’s mission is that by 2030, Australia has a world-class digital government that is built by, and for, everyone. One of the ways we’ll help achieve this is by building community platforms—bringing people together to solve challenges with technology and maintaining systems that everyone in society can leverage.

We’re currently a small organisation with big ambitions, and have always seen great value in collaboration and networking with the broader technology community. As leaders in the civic technology movement, we play a novel role as a conduit between the public service and people hoping to influence how government teams develop policy and deliver services.

We want to ensure that human rights and ethics are always considered when government teams are embracing emerging technology, and by aligning with other groups working towards the same goals, we can create more impact together.

Want to know more about this work?

Reach out to @Sawks and @Esther via the [Code for Australia Slack](#) or [info@codeforaustralia.org](mailto:info@codeforaustralia.org)

## Code for Australia's role

Code for Australia's mission is that by 2030, Australia has a world-class digital government that is built by, and for, everyone. One of the ways we'll help achieve this is by building better relationships between digital practitioners inside and outside of the public sector.

## The problems we're trying to solve

The complexity and size of the public service means that teams typically work in silos, and are not incentivized to collaborate on or share the outcomes of their work with others. As a community, we have the opportunity to build connections between related projects and raise awareness of successful outcomes that we support.

Experts working outside the public service, in academic and community settings, often struggle to influence policy making. We want to help ensure external voices have a "seat at the table" when our government is considering emerging technology and new ways of working.

## The outcomes we'd like to see

- Collaboration between community members and public sector teams, to share the work of solving common challenges.
- Ensuring a fair representation of society through diversity and inclusion when decisions are made and policy is developed by the government.
- The ability for the Australian public to hold government agencies and corporations accountable, and prevent harm being done to individuals through misuse of technology.

## Where we're starting

Code for Australia is proposing forming two initial Communities of Practice, around the topics raised most frequently in our discussions with individuals and other organisations. More detail around each of these topics is on the following pages.

**Digital Maturity** – Increasing the capability and capacity of organisations to embrace both digital technology and culture, with new ways of working creating better outcomes for the people they serve.

**Rules as Code** – An emerging field of practice where computers are used to implement laws and regulations. As technologists responsible for implementing these models, how do we ensure that ethical considerations and human rights are at the forefront. This Community of Practice has been initiated in partnership with a group from LaTrobe University and the Australian Society for Computers & Law.

Code for Australia are also open to facilitating further Communities of Practice around new topics or distinct themes that emerge from the initial topics.

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## Our Principles

### How we'll treat each other

Our Communities of Practice will be **open to anyone** interested in participating – including practitioners and community members who are impacted by the government policies we're trying to shape. We will not seek to exclude anyone based on their personal or professional background. Behaviour of individuals will be governed by a [Code of Conduct](#) maintained by the community.

The communities of practice will work to create **a positive experience for new members**. This will involve maintaining documentation and other systems to help people learn about community standards and the work done to date at their own pace.

While working as a community, we'll ensure we always **recognise the source** of concepts. Individuals should feel empowered to share their ideas without losing ownership.

### Our Communities of Practice will be...

**Virtual and physical** – discussions will be hosted and captured using digital platforms, and completed by in-person meetings and working groups. No particular channel or medium for collaboration will be prioritised over another.

**Distributed and decentralised** – no single individual or organisation will lead or organise the community. Decisions will be made as a group and we'll embrace platforms and models that support this.

**Open and transparent** – all discussions and documentation will be publicly available to anyone who is interested. Our work together and management of the community itself will be done in the open. Intellectual property developed as a community will be licensed appropriately for sharing and reuse by others.

**Local in scope** – initially, our focus will be on collaboration around challenges in our local context. For us this means Australia and New Zealand. While we welcome participation from international community members, and the active exchange of knowledge with individuals and organisations working in the same field around the world, we want to prioritise shared challenges we can impact on directly through our own practice.

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## Community of Practice: Digital Maturity

Digital Maturity describes an organisations capability and capacity to use technology in their operations, and embrace the culture and ways of working—such as open collaboration, design standards and agile delivery—that are associated with digital products and services.

The concept of maturity over other terms such as “digital transformation” recognises that this is an ongoing process, and that an organisation can evaluate and reflect on where they’re at and where progress needs to be made.

Code for Australia’s mission involves improving the digital maturity of the public sector in Australia, an area which is acknowledged as lagging behind other organisations—the private sector in particular—and where significant impact can be achieved for the people of Australia by making improvements.

Code for Australia frequently engages with NFP organisations who would like to improve their own digital maturity, as well as communities and individuals hoping to drive positive change in this space. While our size and available resources limit the help we can provide teams outside of government, we would love to take a more structured approach to sharing resources and learnings from our work, and collaborating with other practitioners working in this space.

### Further reading

- Code for Australia’s Digital Maturity Indicator [info](#) | [methodology](#)
- [Digital Maturity Mapping in the Charity Sector](#)
- [Teaching Public Service in the Digital Age](#)
- [Digital Profession](#) – Aus Gov
- [Digital Maturity, not Digital Transformation](#)

### Potential Community of Practice Members

- [Our Community](#)
- CfA Board members, previous applicants and community members with a personal interest in building organisational capacity
- Practitioners from the [DTA](#)
- Civic Tech/Civic Engagement community groups (eg Civic Tech Institute)
- Other Training providers with a focus on digital literacy and capability building

### Next Steps...

- We’re seeking feedback and contributions on our overall approach to setting up the Communities of Practice and the topic of Digital Maturity from interested parties

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- We'll then select and configure a suitable platform for facilitating Community interaction, share invitations with potential members from our network and encourage them to invite others
- The community will work together to further define scope, shared values and types of projects we will collaborate on

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## Community of Practice: Rules as Code

Rules as Code, “coded rules” and related concepts such as “government as a platform” is an emerging model where legislation is developed directly in human and machine readable language. This approach has obvious benefits in efficiency and maintainability when creating digital services that implement that legislation and provide interfaces to users and other software.

This is a space where Code for Australia and other Civic Technology organisations around the world have developed a close working relationship with innovation and delivery teams inside government, who leverage our expertise in design, development and “open government” practices.

As this approach evolves, and in the wake of projects such as Robodebt, members of the rules as code and legal tech community working outside of government, are passionate about ensuring solutions in this space are implemented without causing harm to citizens — human rights need to be considered from the outset as part of the design and delivery process.

Despite the best intentions of government teams working on Rules as Code projects, traditional barriers to openness and collaboration—such as project based roles and procurement that doesn’t incentivise knowledge transfer—can still make it difficult to share findings and outcomes of this work with others teams.

This landscape presents a clear and important opportunity for technologists, legal professionals and academics to collaborate on standards and practices that will ensure ethical concerns are prioritised over economic ones when working in this space.

The Rules as Code Community of Practice has been initiated in partnership with [La Trobe LawTech](#) and the [Australian Society for Computers & Law](#).

### About the AUSCL

The Australian Society for Computers and Law (AUSCL) is one of Australia’s leading interdisciplinary think tanks on issues arising at the intersection of technology, law and society. It is a registered Australian non-profit charity established for the purpose of advancing education and advocacy at that intersection, and promoting the rule of law. AUSCL is honoured to have as its Patron the Hon Justice Michael Kirby and a National Advisory Council of distinguished leaders from across academia and industry.

AUSCL is Australia’s representative on the International Federation of Computer Law Associations and boasts a strong member network of legal and technology professionals, business leaders, government officials, academics, barristers, students, leaders of civil society and members of the judiciary from across the globe.

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## Further reading

- [‘Rules as Code’ will let computers apply laws and regulations. But over-rigid interpretations would undermine our freedoms](#)
- [“Today, let’s talk about the impact of algorithms for social benefits. In France, an unemployment advisor has been fired because he was helping unemployed people bypass the algorithm to get the benefits they had the right to.”](#)
- [Extreme poverty and digital welfare: New report from UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty raises alarm about the rise of a digital welfare dystopia](#)
- [Algorithm charter for Aotearoa New Zealand](#)
- [Examining the boundaries of law and technology – ADM+S Announcement](#)
- [Report Launch – OPSI Innovation Primer on Rules as Code](#)
- [NZ Gov – What is Better Rules?](#)
- [Rules as Code in 2020: The Year in Review – Tim de Souza](#)
- [OpenFisca – Write rules as code](#)
- [Catala is a domain-specific programming language designed for deriving correct-by-construction implementations from legislative texts](#)

## Potential Members

- [Data61](#)
- [Debias.ai](#)
- [ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society \(ADM+S\)](#)
- [Australian Human Rights Commission](#)
- Community representative groups such as [ACOSS](#)
- [Dr Catriona Wallace](#)/Ethical AI Advisory
- Representatives of underrepresented and disadvantaged groups

## Next Steps...

- We’re seeking feedback and contributions on our overall approach to setting up the Communities of Practice and the topic of Rules as Code from interested parties
- We’ll then select and configure a suitable platform for facilitating Community interaction, share invitations with potential members from our network and encourage them to invite others
- The community will work together to further define scope, shared values and types of projects we will collaborate on

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