

## Data Ethics Canvas



Methodology and training tools

The **Data Ethics Canvas** is a tool for anyone who collects, shares or uses data.

It helps identify and manage ethical issues – at the start of a project using data, and throughout. It gives a framework to develop ethical guidance that suits any context.

This tool is part of the ODI's wider data toolkit. You can find all the tools and resources at [theodi.org/tools](https://theodi.org/tools)

## What is the Data Ethics Canvas?

The Data Ethics Canvas is a tool for anyone who collects, shares or uses data.

It helps identify and manage ethical issues – at the start of a project that uses data, and throughout.

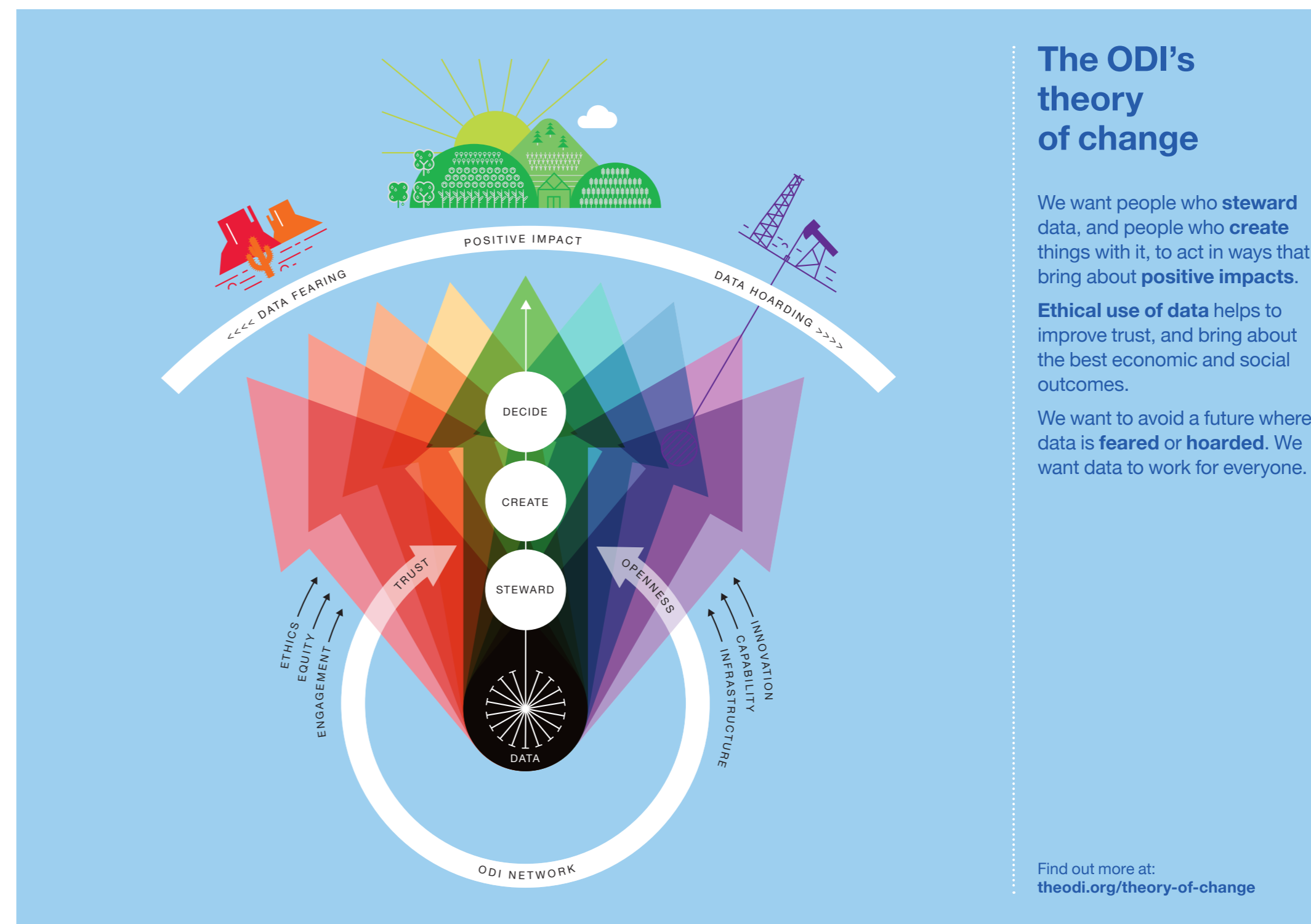
It encourages you to ask important questions about projects that use data, and reflect on the responses. These might be:

- What is your primary purpose for using data in this project?
- Who could be negatively affected by this project?

The Data Ethics Canvas provides a framework to develop ethical guidance that suits any context, whatever the project's size or scope.

### Original source

The Data Ethics Canvas is based on the Ethics Canvas, a higher-level framework for assessing the ethical implications of any project, developed by the ADAPT Centre for Digital Content Technology. The ADAPT Centre's Ethics Canvas is itself based on the original Business Model Canvas by Alex Osterwalder.



## The ODI's theory of change

We want people who **steward** data, and people who **create** things with it, to act in ways that bring about **positive impacts**.

**Ethical use of data** helps to improve trust, and bring about the best economic and social outcomes.

We want to avoid a future where data is **feared** or **hoarded**. We want data to work for everyone.

Find out more at: [theodi.org/theory-of-change](https://theodi.org/theory-of-change)

## What is data ethics?

The Open Data Institute defines data ethics as:

*'A branch of ethics that evaluates data practices with the potential to adversely impact on people and society – in data collection, sharing and use'*

Data ethics relates to good practice around how data is collected, used and shared. It is especially relevant when data activities have the potential to impact people and society, directly or indirectly.

For example, an automated data model might make decisions about whether someone is eligible for a mortgage, or what insurance they can be offered. And decisions about what data to collect – and what to exclude – might affect groups in a society.

Data ethics should be addressed at all stages:

- **Stewarding data** – collecting it, maintaining it and sharing it
- **Creating information from that data** – in the form of products and services, analysis and insights, or stories and visualisations
- **Deciding what to do** – informed by information from multiple sources along with experience and understanding

## Why use this tool?

### Improve project planning

The canvas helps you to consider potential risks and impacts from the start of your project. It prompts debate about project objectives, intention and impact, and helps you consider wider ethical issues, relevant laws and regulation.

### Grow impact and trust

Using the canvas, you can design better products and services while addressing bias. It helps you examine the impact that your data activities can have, and mitigate any harmful impacts for people and communities.

### Complement other ethics guidelines

The canvas helps to tease out risks around a project, without predisposing an outcome. It illustrates how one type of data activity can have many outcomes and consequences, depending on context, purpose and organisations involved.

### Manage data ethics in the long-term

The canvas guides how you manage and discuss data ethics, and how you develop ethical frameworks and guidance around your project. It also helps you raise awareness of data issues in your organisation.

## Before you get started

### Think about who to involve

We recommend involving people with a range of perspectives – from people within your organisation (if you have one) to people who may be impacted by your project.

### Get leaders onboard

Engage senior people in the process of completing the canvas, to support any decisions or changes that might emerge.

### Consider data literacy

You could run an introductory session about data ethics and key terms before completing the canvas, to help people understand the context.

## How to use this tool

You can start anywhere on the canvas and complete the sections in any order.

For each section, take time to consider your answers. It helps to note them on sticky notes and stick them to the sections as you go. Where you can, share and discuss your responses with others.

When you have completed the canvas, outline next steps and ensure there is a person responsible for each action.

Share notes about the discussion more widely if you can.

### Tips

- Use the ODI's online template to record your notes and actions
- Complete the canvas in a group with a range of people
- Be sensitive to any power dynamics that might be in the room

## What next?

Completing the Data Ethics Canvas is a starting point for transforming how your team or organisation handles data. To get the most of the tool, we recommend the following:

- **Share your notes and actions** from completing the canvas as widely as you can, particularly with people affected by how your project collects, shares or uses data
- **Review progress made** towards your actions
- **Monitor the ongoing impact** of your work on individuals, groups and society
- **Review and update your answers** on the canvas, eg quarterly or at project milestones
- **Run a retrospective** or evaluation at the end of your project, to review your answers on the canvas and inform future work

You can share feedback, thoughts and ideas about the Data Ethics Canvas with the ODI at [policy@theodi.org](mailto:policy@theodi.org).

The Data Ethics Canvas is also available at [theodi.org/data-ethics-canvas](https://theodi.org/data-ethics-canvas) There you can access:

- A print-at-home version of the canvas
- An online template to use alongside or instead of this hard-copy canvas

## Data sources

Name/describe your project's key data sources, whether you're collecting data yourself or accessing via third parties.

Is any personal data involved, or data that is otherwise sensitive?

## Limitations in data sources

Are there limitations that could influence your project's outcomes?

Consider:

- > bias in data collection, inclusion/exclusion, analysis, algorithms
- > gaps or omissions in data
- > provenance and data quality
- > other issues affecting decisions, such as team composition

## Sharing data with others

Are you going to be sharing data with other organisations? If so, who?

Are you planning to publish any of the data? Under what conditions?

## Ethical and legislative context

What existing ethical codes apply to your sector or project? What legislation, policies, or other regulation shape how you use data? What requirements do they introduce?

Consider: the rule of law; human rights; data protection; IP and database rights; anti-discrimination laws; and data sharing, policies, regulation and ethics codes/frameworks specific to sectors (eg health, employment, taxation).

## Rights around data sources

Where did you get the data from? Is it produced by an organisation or collected directly from individuals?

Was the data collected for this project or for another purpose? Do you have permission to use this data, or another basis on which you're allowed to use it? What ongoing rights will the data source have?

## Your reason for using data

What is your primary purpose for collecting and using data in this project?

What are your main use cases? What is your business model?

Are you making things better for society? How and for whom?

Are you replacing another product or service as a result of this project?

## Communicating your purpose

Do people understand your purpose – especially people who the data is about or who are impacted by its use?

How have you been communicating your purpose? Has this communication been clear?

How are you ensuring more vulnerable individuals or groups understand?

## Positive effects on people

Which individuals, groups, demographics or organisations will be positively affected by this project? How?

How are you measuring and communicating positive impact? How could you increase it?

## Negative effects on people

Who could be negatively affected by this project?

Could the way that data is collected, used or shared cause harm or expose individuals to risk of being re-identified? Could it be used to target, profile or prejudice people, or unfairly restrict access (eg exclusive arrangements)?

How are limitations and risks communicated to people? Consider: people who the data is about, people impacted by its use and organisations using the data.

## Minimising negative impact

What steps can you take to minimise harm?

How could you reduce any limitations in your data sources? How are you keeping personal and other sensitive information secure?

How are you measuring, reporting and acting on potential negative impacts of your project?

What benefits will these actions bring to your project?

## Engaging with people

How can people engage with you about the project?

How can people correct information, appeal or request changes to the product/service? To what extent?

Are appeal mechanisms reasonable and well understood?

## Openness and transparency

How open can you be about this project? Could you publish your methodology, metadata, datasets, code or impact measurements?

Can you ask peers for feedback on the project? How will you communicate it internally?

Will you publish your actions and answers to this canvas openly?

## Ongoing implementation

Are you routinely building in thoughts, ideas and considerations of people affected in your project? How?

What information or training might be needed to help people understand data issues?

Are systems, processes and resources available for responding to data issues that arise in the long-term?

## Reviews and iterations

How will ongoing data ethics issues be measured, monitored, discussed and actioned?

How often will your responses to this canvas be reviewed or updated? When?

## Your actions

What actions will you take before moving forward with this project? Which should take priority?

Who will be responsible for these actions, and who must be involved?

Will you openly publish your actions and answers to this canvas?