FAIR Process Framework: WHY FAIR?

More information on responsible and ethical data

What is responsible and ethical data?

The terms ‘responsible data’ and ‘ethical data’ are closely related and often used interchangeably, but they can have nuanced differences in focus and scope. Both concepts emphasize the importance of handling data in ways that respect individual rights and societal norms, but they approach this objective from slightly different angles.

Responsible data

Responsible data describes the practices and policies implemented to ensure data is managed in a way that is accountable, transparent, and in compliance with legal and regulatory requirements. It encompasses a broad range of considerations, including data security, privacy protection, data accuracy, and the lawful use of data. The focus is often on the operational aspects of data management:

- **Compliance with laws and regulations**: Ensuring data practices adhere to all applicable data protection and privacy laws (e.g., GDPR, CCPA).
- **Data security**: Implementing robust measures to protect data from unauthorized access, breaches and loss.
- **Data quality and accuracy**: Maintaining the integrity and reliability of data throughout its lifecycle.
- **Transparency**: Being open about data collection, processing, and sharing practices.

Responsible data practices are about doing things the 'right way' from a legal and procedural standpoint.

Ethical data

Ethical data handling, while encompassing many principles of responsible data use, delves deeper into the moral implications of data practices. It considers not just whether data practices are lawful or efficient, but whether they are right and just. Ethical considerations might include:

- **Fairness and non-discrimination**: Ensuring that data collection and analysis do not perpetuate bias or inequality.
- **Consent and autonomy**: Respecting individuals' autonomy by obtaining informed consent for data collection and use, beyond what is legally required.
- **Beneficence and nonmaleficence**: Weighing the benefits of data use against potential harm to individuals or communities, aiming to do good and avoid harm.
- **Respect for individual rights**: Prioritizing individuals' rights to privacy and control over their data, even when such priorities conflict with organizational interests or efficiency. Furthermore, the individuals should retain ownership and control over data and, where so desired, can withdraw consent for further data processing.

Ethical data practices are about doing things the ‘right way’ from a moral or ethical standpoint, even if the law may not mandate them, considering the broader impact on society and individual rights.

Ethical data considerations also include grievance redressal, including the ability to rectify errors, or complain against misuse of personal or sensitive data and seek redressal of the same.

Additional resources

Introduction to Data Ethics

Open Data Institute (ODI) training PowerPoint document on data ethics, which distinguishes between ethical and responsible in a useful way.

Considerations for Using Data Responsibly at USAID

Document from Development Informatics team at the US Global Development Lab, which includes a clear explanation of what it means to use data responsibly.

What is Responsible Data?

The RD community provides resources including a list of the key elements of responsible data, with questions to consider.

Ethical Decision-Making Framework (EDMF)

The EDMF offers a structured methodology encompassing six stages: Information gathering, Developing options, Testing, Application and Action. It emphasizes a systematic approach to aligning decisions with ethical principles and codes of conduct. This provides a comprehensive step-by-step process, integrating legal, professional and ethical considerations. It facilitates thorough analysis, stakeholder engagement, and continuous learning, ultimately asking: are you willing to accept responsibility for your decision?

UK Government Digital Service (GDS) Framework

The GDS framework focuses on ethical considerations related to digital services and technology. It emphasizes user-centricity, transparency and accountability in design and delivery. It introduces ethical considerations at the design stage, aligning technology development with user needs, underscoring the importance of user trust and clear communication.

Singapore’s Approach to AI Governance

Singapore's framework for AI governance focuses on accountability, transparency, fairness and robustness. It promotes responsible AI development and deployment to ensure societal benefits.

This framework aligns with the overarching principles of transparency, accountability and fairness, while also addressing the challenges posed by AI technologies.

IEEE Ethically Aligned Design (EAD) Framework

The IEEE EAD framework addresses a wide range of ethical considerations in technology design, including data ethics, privacy and security. It emphasizes the integration of ethics into the design process. The EAD sets forth scientific analysis and resources, high-level principles, and actionable recommendations. It offers specific guidance for standards, certification, regulation or legislation for design, manufacture and use of A/IS that provably aligns with, and improves, holistic societal well-being.

Open Data Institute's Data Ethics Canvas

The Data Ethics Canvas is a tool that helps organizations consider ethical implications and identify potential risks when working with data. It prompts critical questions related to data collection, use and sharing. This offers a practical approach to data ethics, enabling organizations and individuals to visualize and address ethical concerns throughout the data lifecycle. It includes elements of the legal, wider ethical, and consequence scanning activities, but definition and use of guiding principles is left to the organization applying the canvas to a particular scenario. It is a tool to dig into the details of data ethics during the analysis stage rather than an overarching framework for ethical decision-making.