![Partnership on AI logo] **PARTNERSHIP ON AI**

Guidance for Inclusive AI

For Developers and Deployers New to Public Engagement

For use with PAI's Guidance for Inclusive AI: Practicing Participatory Engagement

Why does public engagement matter?

Imagine launching an AI product that seems flawless in production — only to find, once it reaches market, that it overlooks critical risks, alienates key user groups, or even causes harm. This scenario, more common than you might think, often stems from one major oversight: failing to engage the right set of impacted people early in the development process.

Working with users and other impacted members of the public isn't just a box to check. It offers strategic advantages, fueling innovation, strengthening products, and ensuring that AI will serve people in ways that are ethical, sustainable, and effective. By involving a diverse range of voices, companies can identify risks before issues escalate into real-world consequences. Take, for instance, workers and labor organizations: Consulting them before deploying AI-driven automation can reveal hidden threats to job security, worker rights, and overall well-being. These issues might otherwise go unnoticed until it's too late.

The benefits go far beyond risk mitigation. Meaningful public engagement broadens developers' understanding of the historical and social contexts in which their technology will operate. It ensures that AI products are designed not just for theoretical users but for the full spectrum of people who will interact with them in their daily lives. Without such insight, developers risk missing crucial aspects of the problem context and may pursue solutions that don't solve the targeted problems.

The final, often underestimated advantage is trust. When companies actively involve the public — whether users, advocacy groups, or impacted communities — they foster a sense of shared ownership over the technology that's being built. This trust can translate into stronger consumer relationships, greater public confidence, and ultimately, broader adoption of AI products.

Moreover, individuals, teams, and organizations may elect to engage with the public for a number of reasons:

- **Desire to improve the product.** Seeking user and public input in design choices is integral to the practices of user research and user experience (UX), which are concerned with improving a product or feature by better tailoring it to the target population's needs and interests. Soliciting feedback from a variety of users and others will help inspire a better product. As such, product managers may be more likely to adopt public engagement for product improvement because this follows their organizational remit to build a product that is usable by, and desirable for, a broad array of people.

> Interfacing with — and getting insights and feedback from — people outside the development process is a necessary step in the AI development life cycle for several reasons:
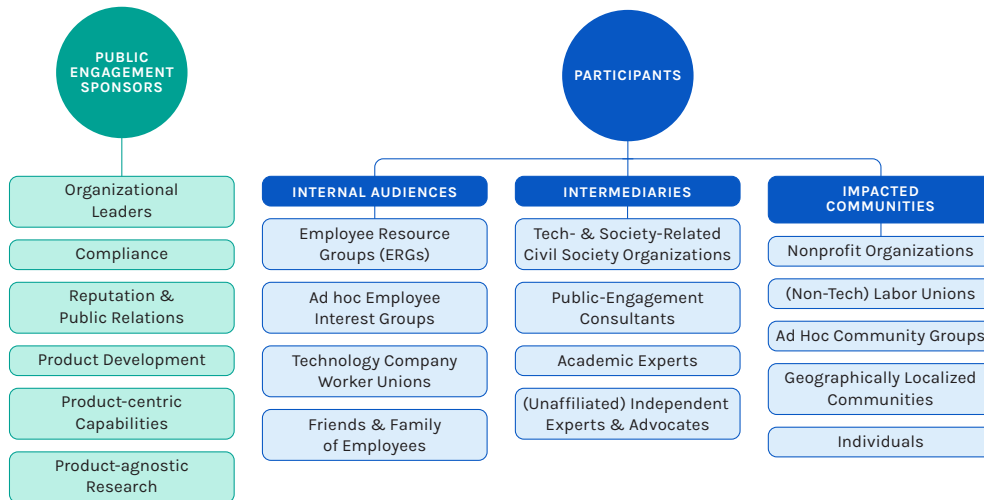>
> - To identify issues that can be resolved through — or markets that can be served by — the application of AI technologies (or when AI-driven technological innovation is not the best approach)
>
> - To identify potential risks and harms as they may arise for different people or groups
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> - To identify circumstances in which the technology does not work as intended
>
> - To identify friction points that make the technology difficult to use or inaccessible to certain people
>
> - To align with general democratic principles and promote greater access and adoption of new technologies

- **Increase market share or profit.** Public engagement is also a profit-generating practice on the basis that higher levels of input from users or affected people/communities will in turn create higher-quality products. The perception that an organization is open to feedback from the public and users may also increase trust and consumer loyalty. This may help organizations distinguish themselves in the wider market.

- **Reputational gains.** Disclosing details about public engagement can be seen as good PR for a company, an easy win for tech companies seeking to improve public perception and consumer trust.

- **Personal passion for community engagement.** Many AI researchers and practitioners report strong feelings of personal motivation to work more closely with socially marginalized communities and other members of the public, due to academic orientation, continuation of previous experience outside tech (such as in community organizing), or a sense of personal ethical duty.

Understanding these various incentives can help you better advocate for public engagement and set realistic expectations for its outcomes with decision-makers and leaders in the organization. In addition, it is crucial to identify common ground between an organization's incentives for public engagement and the benefits of integrating public input at different stages of AI development.

Working with users and other impacted members of the public isn't just a box to check. It offers strategic advantages.

Who is involved with public engagement?

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SPONSORS
- Organizational Leaders
- Compliance
- Reputation & Public Relations
- Product Development
- Product-centric Capabilities
- Product-agnostic Research

PARTICIPANTS

INTERNAL AUDIENCES
- Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)
- Ad hoc Employee Interest Groups
- Technology Company Worker Unions
- Friends & Family of Employees

INTERMEDIARIES
- Tech- & Society-Related Civil Society Organizations
- Public-Engagement Consultants
- Academic Experts
- (Unaffiliated) Independent Experts & Advocates

IMPACTED COMMUNITIES
- Nonprofit Organizations
- (Non-Tech) Labor Unions
- Ad Hoc Community Groups
- Geographically Localized Communities
- Individuals

1. Public Engagement Sponsors

Sponsors are the individuals, team(s), or organization that seek input on their product, service, or system through public engagement, or that have the organizational authority to assign staff to conduct public engagement.

Sponsors are subdivided into clusters that are defined by their general role within a commercial, AI-developing, and deploying organization. Different sponsors tend to be involved in different (and possibly multiple) aspects of public engagement, such as requesting, designing, implementing, and/or providing the necessary financial resources to conduct public engagement. They also tend to play different roles and have varying levels of authority and decision-making power within the realm of public engagement. As sponsors of engagement, they have the authority to start or end an engagement at any time, and they retain control of the data or insights collected via the public engagement process to use as they see fit.

For the purposes of this resource, we are focusing specifically on corporate-led public engagement or individuals and teams that work in commercial, for-profit organizations that develop AI products, services, and/or systems.

Organizational Leaders

Individuals and groups which exercise the greatest amount of influence on or control over organizational priorities, budgets, and other key organization-wide decisions

EXAMPLE ROLES	DECISION-MAKING AUTHORITY & INFLUENCE	WHAT INFLUENCES THEM
• Executive (C-suite, VP-level) leadership • Board of Directors & Advisory Boards • Funders/Venture Capitalists	• Will generally be distanced from direct design of public engagements • Will generally have a higher degree of power to (dis)incentivize public engagement and set terms of engagement through such mechanisms as setting organizational directives and priorities and directing funding	• Profit margins • Shareholder demands • General market trends • Regulatory pressures • Input from other internal sponsor groups (e.g., Compliance)

Compliance

Individuals or teams responsible for ensuring the organization is in compliance with all regulatory and policy requirements related to their organization, including any new regulations or policies that might emerge in the near future

EXAMPLE ROLES	DECISION-MAKING AUTHORITY & INFLUENCE	WHAT INFLUENCES THEM
• Legal Compliance Teams • Trust & Safety Teams • Cybersecurity Teams • Government Affairs Teams • Policy Teams • Corporate Social Responsibility or Ethics Boards	• Will generally be distanced from direct design of public engagement • Some influence to shape company-wide policies/standards that operationalize organizational directives and priorities • May experience greater restrictions on what information about the organization's processes and priorities they can share with participant groups, including any statements that may indicate liability for harms related to the organization's AI systems or products	• Executive leadership teams • Current and proposed regulations and policies, including those outside their region but impacting large regions (e.g., EU AI Act) • Safety and ethics practices in their professional subfield

Reputation and Public Relations

Individuals or teams responsible for managing the public reputation of the organization

EXAMPLE ROLES	DECISION-MAKING AUTHORITY & INFLUENCE	WHAT INFLUENCES THEM
• Marketing/PR Teams • Corporate Inclusion & Diversity Teams	• Depending on scope and mandate of the team, can be directly involved in the design of public engagement • Can influence company prioritization of public engagement (to incentivize or disincentivize), especially if there is strong evidence that external factors may impact the organization (e.g., negative PR that caused harm to a comparable company)	• Executive leadership teams • External trends, including external media story cycles about the organization and interpretations of policy changes

Product Development

Individuals and teams responsible for the development and delivery of a given/specific AI product, system, service, or feature

EXAMPLE ROLES	DECISION-MAKING AUTHORITY & INFLUENCE	WHAT INFLUENCES THEM
• Data Scientists • Machine Learning/AI/Software Engineers • User Experience Researchers • Product Designers • Product Managers	• Can generally play an active role in designing and managing an engagement • Depending on scope and mandate of the team, may be responsible for conducting public engagement • Depending on the scope and mandate of their role or team, may have more authority/decision-making power for their specific project • Depending on seniority or role in organization, may have greater flexibility to share information about organizational processes and priorities or specifics about the AI product/service, as well as have more autonomy to navigate and build relationships with members of the public	• Product Team leadership • International standards and norms • Product shipping and other organizational deadlines • Organizational priorities/product strategy • Available budgets and staffing resources

Product-Centric Capabilities

Individuals and teams responsible for providing oversight of or input into the development of a specific/given AI product, system, service, or feature to ensure it works as intended for maximal target audience (depending on size of the organization, this function may be centralized or distributed across product development teams)

EXAMPLE ROLES	DECISION-MAKING AUTHORITY & INFLUENCE	WHAT INFLUENCES THEM
• Product Accessibility Teams • Data & Product Privacy Teams • Product Inclusion Teams • Quality Assurance Teams • Cybersecurity Teams	• Depending on scope and mandate of the team, may be responsible for conducting public engagement • Can generally play an active role in designing and managing an engagement, particularly as subject matter (e.g., public engagement) experts • Depending on scope and mandate of the team, ability to directly change features or other aspects of the product may vary (i.e., may have final decision-making authority to force a Product Development team to make changes, or may be permitted only to provide input) • Depending on seniority or role in organization, may have greater flexibility to share information about organizational processes and priorities or specifics about the AI product/service, as well as have more autonomy to navigate and build relationships with members of the public	• Trends in public engagement • Insights from participant groups • Product shipping and other organizational deadlines • Organizational priorities • Relationships with product development teams

Product-Agnostic Research

Individuals and teams responsible for conducting research on issues and topics relevant for the overall success of the organization (as it relates to their AI products), but not in direct association with a specific AI product, system, service, or feature; may often sit "outside" the Product Development realm of the organization to protect research integrity or operate across the organization to support many different product teams

EXAMPLE ROLES	DECISION-MAKING AUTHORITY & INFLUENCE	WHAT INFLUENCES THEM
• Responsible/Ethical AI Teams • User-Experience Researchers • Research & Development Teams	• Depending on scope and mandate of the team, may be responsible for conducting public engagement • Can play an active role in designing and managing an engagement, particularly as subject matter (public engagement) experts • Depending on scope and mandate of the team, ability to directly change features or other aspects of the product may vary (e.g., may have final decision-making authority to force a Product Development team to make changes, or may be permitted only to provide input) • Depending on seniority or role in the organization, may have greater flexibility to share information about organizational processes and priorities or specifics about the AI product/service, as well as have more autonomy to navigate and build relationships with members of the public • Less likely to have sufficient decision-making authority, relative to other sponsor functions, to directly transform product design and/ or strategies	• Organizational priorities • Availability of resources • Higher field-level research questions • Trends in public engagement • Insights from participant groups

2. Participants

Participants are individuals outside the immediate development team or organization whose input is being sought as part of public engagement. Participants are organized by:

- their proximity to the sponsoring entity (have existing direct contact or no existing relationship with the teams or individuals implementing public engagement)
- the extent to which the participant group is formally organized into a coherent group or collective entity

Participants in the engagement have the ability to choose if and when they will participate, but may not have the ability to determine whether or how the public engagement takes place; they may have little to no control over how the information collected is interpreted, applied, or used by the engagement sponsor.

For the purposes of this resource, we are focusing specifically on the insights, experiences, and needs of socially marginalized communities, or the people whose experiences do not align with that of the majority or average user or market audience because of structured forms of inequality (including those organized around social identities like race or gender), such as having a physical or developmental disability or identifying as LGBTQIA+.

INTERNAL AUDIENCES

Internal audience refers to individuals outside the group or team sponsoring the public engagement but who are directly associated with the company as employees, contractors, members of employee families, etc., and may be asked to participate in public engagement to offer input as participants.

Participants from the internal audience category have a higher degree of direct accessibility by the sponsor because they are often based within the same organization or have a formal relationship with that organization.

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)	
Formally organized groups of full-time employees at the organization, usually centered on a shared social identity or lived experience. These groups are voluntary (both in terms of leadership and membership), typically employee-led, and aim to help foster a sense of inclusivity and belonging for its members at the organization.	
EXAMPLES	• LGBQTIA+ employees • Employees with disabilities • Employees who served/are serving in the military • Racial- or ethnic identity-based • Nationality-based
ACCESSIBILITY TO SPONSOR	• Easily accessible by public engagement sponsor because they are part of the same organization
AREAS OF INSIGHTS AND EXPERTISE	• Personal experiences shaped by social identities and other social dimensions • May have limited insights about the experience of the larger community due to significant differences across such other identities as economic class, educational attainment, nationality, etc.
CAPACITY TO INFLUENCE SPONSOR	• Input may be adopted easily, due to proximity to the Product Development teams • Members of ERGs may have personal and professional relationships to decision-makers that can be leveraged to influence final decisions
INCENTIVES & RISKS FOR ENGAGEMENT	• Shared organizational priorities and aims increase likelihood to participant and offer input • May not want to provide critical feedback out of concern for job security

Ad-hoc Employee Interest Groups

Informally organized groups of full-time employees at the organization, usually centered on a shared interest or topic. These groups are voluntary and employee-led, may not have formal support or sponsorship by the organization, and may disband as member priorities shift.

EXAMPLES	• AI Ethics Reading Group • Accessibility Working Group
ACCESSIBILITY TO SPONSOR	• Easily accessible by public engagement sponsor, as they are part of the same organization • May be difficult to identify inside the organization if the group is loosely organized or not well-known outside its membership
AREAS OF INSIGHTS AND EXPERTISE	• Personal experiences shaped by social identities and other social dimensions • May have limited insights about the experience of the larger community due to significant differences across such other identities as economic class, educational attainment, nationality, etc. • Familiarity with the AI ethics literature and its emphasis on the importance of public engagement (including self-taught knowledge about community group dynamics and histories gained through desk research and consultations with experts)
CAPACITY TO INFLUENCE SPONSOR	• Input may be adopted easily due to proximity to the Product Development teams • Members of ad hoc groups may have personal and professional relationships with decision-makers, which can be leveraged to influence final decisions
INCENTIVES & RISKS FOR ENGAGEMENT	• Shared organizational priorities and aims increase likelihood to participant and offer input • May not want to provide critical feedback out of concern for job security

Technology Company Worker Unions

Formally organized groups of workers engaged by the organization (full-time, part-time, contractor, or sub-contract) whose aim is to protect the labor rights and interests of the workers.

EXAMPLES	• Alphabet Workers Union • Amazon Labor Union • Turkopticon
ACCESSIBILITY TO SPONSOR	• Can be easily accessed by sponsor, as they are directly adjacent to the organization • Might be difficult to build a relationship with, depending on sponsor's relationship with the union
AREAS OF INSIGHTS AND EXPERTISE	• Personal experiences of union members shaped by social identities and other social dimensions • Union staff may have insights into overall labor and worker trends experienced by its members
CAPACITY TO INFLUENCE SPONSOR	• Some members of full-time employee labor unions may have personal and professional relationships with decision-makers that can be leveraged to influence final decisions • Contractor or subcontractor unions may not directly engage with any public engagement sponsors in any other capacity, so they may not have leverage to have their insights adopted
INCENTIVES & RISKS FOR ENGAGEMENT	• Shared organizational priorities and aims increase the likelihood to participate and offer input • May not want to provide critical feedback out of concern for job security

Friends and Family of Employees

Loose network for friends and family members related to members of the public engagement sponsors or full-time employees of the organization.

EXAMPLES	• Family members of the public engagement sponsors
ACCESSIBILITY TO SPONSOR	• Easily accessed by public engagement sponsor, as they have a direct relationship with someone who is part of the public engagement design and organization • May be difficult to identify people who are interested in volunteering
AREAS OF INSIGHTS AND EXPERTISE	• Individual personal experiences
CAPACITY TO INFLUENCE SPONSOR	• May be able to leverage personal relationships to decision-makers to influence final decisions
INCENTIVES & RISKS FOR ENGAGEMENT	• May want to support the sponsor due to their personal relationship • May not want to provide critical feedback out of concern for their relationship with the sponsor

INTERMEDIARIES

Intermediaries are individuals or organizations that are not directly associated with the sponsoring group or company and who can offer expert knowledge and insights about the impacted community that is being targeted for public engagement by providing technology-oriented lenses to help translate insights for sponsors. Intermediaries may not personally identify as members of an impacted community but have deep knowledge of key issues affecting that community due to their scholarly work, advocacy, or direct community organizing work (e.g., the intermediary may not be actively working as a data-enrichment worker but conducts scholarly empirical research on data-enrichment work in the field of AI). With their dual expertise in technology and issues impacting the community, they can also help coordinate public engagement environments to enhance participation by impacted community members.

Participants from the intermediary category have a some direct connection to the sponsor, especially if they are from well-known academic institutions or civil society organizations or are experts formerly employed by a technology company.

Tech- and Society-Related Civil Society Organizations

Formal not-for-profit (nonprofit), non-governmental organizations, whose mission is to ensure that the development and governance of AI and other digital technologies benefit and empower all members of society through different mechanisms such as research, discourse, and advocacy. Their organizational mandate may or may not include connecting impacted communities with technology companies.

EXAMPLES	• Ada Lovelace Institute • Data & Society • The Data Tank • The De|Center • Partnership on AI
ACCESSIBILITY TO SPONSOR	• Accessible by public engagement sponsor, as they are easily identifiable due to their reputations as civil society organizations with a strong interest in technology-related issues • May be difficult to have the organization commit to a project or a collaborative relationship, due to other priorities or commitments
AREAS OF INSIGHTS AND EXPERTISE	• Expert on both technology-related issues and the impact of technology on society • Depending on the focus of the organization, may have expertise on specific communities, as well as relationships with other organizations and groups that represent those communities • Individuals in the organization are likely to have personal experiences shaped by social identity and other social dimensions
CAPACITY TO INFLUENCE SPONSOR	• Depending on the reputation of the organization, may have the ability to leverage public pressure to adopt their recommendations • Can influence who is selected from impacted community groups to participate in public engagement
INCENTIVES & RISKS FOR ENGAGEMENT	• May want to work with tech company to gain insights on company processes and priorities • May want to work with tech company to provide avenues for their impacted communities to have direct relationship with decision-makers • May not want to work with tech company if it has the potential to negatively impact the reputation of the organization for too closely aligning with a tech company • Sponsor may not want to work with the organization if there is concern about negative PR due to the organization's publicly criticism of the sponsor • May demand permission to publish some part of the work, which could conflict with some industry intellectual property requirements

Public engagement Consultants

Individuals or groups whose professional mandate is to connect their clients (e.g., sponsors) with participants meeting the various identity parameters needed for the public engagement. Their role may include identifying and enlisting participants, designing the public engagement, and summarizing participants' insights.

EXAMPLES	• Market research firms • Digital agencies • Individual consultants
ACCESSIBILITY TO SPONSOR	• May be easily accessed by public engagement sponsor, if sponsors have awareness of them
AREAS OF INSIGHTS AND EXPERTISE	• Accessible by public engagement sponsor, depending on how effectively the intermediary has developed its reputation • Difficult for sponsor to determine the quality of the consultant's relationships with impacted communities and the engagements it designs and implements
CAPACITY TO INFLUENCE SPONSOR	• Can include expertise on, and relationships with, impacted communities (individuals and groups) that can be targeted for participation, as well as formal expertise on the experiences and histories of specific impacted communities • Can include expertise on public engagement design and implementation
INCENTIVES & RISKS FOR ENGAGEMENT	• May want to work with tech company to provide avenues for impacted communities to have direct relationship with decision-makers • May want to work with tech company to gain insights on company processes and priorities • The quality of the expertise offered to help design the public engagement and/or identify and enlist participants from impacted communities may vary greatly, depending on the individual or group

Academic Experts

Individuals who conduct research and publish findings in their field of expertise. They are typically affiliated with a formal academic institution (e.g., college or university) and publish their research and insights in peer-reviewed venues (e.g., academic journals, conferences) wherein the validity of their claims can be reviewed (and verified or contested) by their peers.

EXAMPLES	• Professors employed by universities and colleges • Advanced Ph.D. candidates (have completed preliminary exams and are "all but dissertation")
ACCESSIBILITY TO SPONSOR	• May be easier to identify based on the individual experts' publication record • May be harder to identify experts who operate outside well-known academic institutions, as well as those who live and research outside the U.S. or the United Kingdom
AREAS OF INSIGHTS AND EXPERTISE	• Empirically based insights on any topic/subject matter • May already be conducting research or collaboration with socially marginalized communities or other members of the public • Can include expertise on, and relationships with, impacted communities (individuals and groups) that can be invited to participate, as well as formal expertise on the experiences and histories of specific impacted communities • Can include expertise on public engagement design and implementation
CAPACITY TO INFLUENCE SPONSOR	• Depending on the reputation of the individual, might have the ability to leverage public pressure to adopt their recommendations • Can influence who is selected from Impacted community groups to participate in public engagement • Can influence how the public engagement is designed
INCENTIVES & RISKS FOR ENGAGEMENT	• May want to work with tech company to gain insights on company processes and priorities • May desire inroads to funding opportunities (sponsorship by the tech company) • May want to work with tech company to provide avenues for their impacted communities to have direct relationship with decision-makers • May not want to work with tech company if it has the potential to negatively impact the expert's reputation for too closely aligning with a tech company • Sponsor may not want to work with the organization if there is concern about negative PR due to the academic expert's public criticism of the sponsor • May demand permission to publish some part of the work, which can conflict with some industry intellectual property requirements

(Unaffiliated) Independent Experts and Advocates

Individuals who conduct research and publish findings in their field of expertise. Unlike academic experts, they are typically not affiliated with a research institution (nonprofit or academic) and may publish their findings in non-peer-reviewed venues, such as self-published blogging platforms or mass media publications. Independent experts may have formal expertise in the field as former practitioners or as former academic researchers, but this is not a prerequisite.

EXAMPLES	• *None provided*
ACCESSIBILITY TO SPONSOR	• May be easier to identify based on an individual expert's publication record
	• May be harder to identify experts who operate outside of well-known academic institutions, as well as those who live and do research outside the U.S. or the United Kingdom
	• Difficult for sponsor to determine the credibility of the independent expert
AREAS OF INSIGHTS AND EXPERTISE	• Can include expertise on, and relationships with, impacted communities (individuals and groups) that can be targeted for participation, as well as formal expertise on the experiences and histories of specific impacted communities
	• Can include expertise on public engagement design and implementation
	• Can include empirically based insights on any topic/subject matter
CAPACITY TO INFLUENCE SPONSOR	• Depending on the reputation of the individual, might have the ability to leverage public pressure to adopt their recommendations
	• Can influence who is selected from impacted community groups to participate in public engagement
	• Can influence how the public engagement is designed
INCENTIVES & RISKS FOR ENGAGEMENT	• May want to work with tech company to gain insights on company processes and priorities
	• May want to work with tech company to provide avenues for their impacted communities to have direct relationship with decision-makers
	• May not want to work with tech company if it has potential to negatively impact the expert's reputation for too closely aligning with a tech company
	• Sponsor may not want to work with the organization if there is concern about negative PR due to the academic expert's public criticism of the sponsor
	• Difficult for sponsor to determine the credibility of the independent expert

IMPACTED COMMUNITIES

Impacted Community refers to individuals or organizations that are not directly associated with the sponsoring group or company and that possess lived experiences related to the set of social issues the sponsoring group would like to address as part of the public engagement. For the purposes of this resource, we are focusing specifically on the insights of individuals likely to experience risk or harm in their lives because of the development and/or deployment of the technology (e.g., negative impact) as it relates to their membership in at least one socially marginalized community.

Participants from the impacted community category have the least direct connection to the sponsor (in terms of decision-making influence); their primary interests are in other social equity issues not directly related to digital technology issues. If the technology company has a corporate giving, philanthropic giving, or "AI for social good" division, some impacted community subgroups may have a preexisting relationship with a technology company as recipients of a philanthropic grant or donated services.

Nonprofit Organizations Addressing Issues Faced by Members of Socially Marginalized Communities
Formal not-for-profit (nonprofit), nongovernmental organizations whose mission is to address social issues impacting socially marginalized communities through direct service (i.e., providing a service that alleviates the direct impact of a given social issue to people of socially marginalized communities) or advocacy (i.e., conduct research or lobbying for policy change). Their organizational mandate likely does not include connecting impacted communities with technology companies or directly working on "tech and society" topics.

EXAMPLES	• Coworker.org (US-based organization supporting worker/labor movements, an alternative labor group) • Médecins Sans Frontières (international organization providing direct emergency aid and medical care) • NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, a US-based civil rights advocacy organization) • San Francisco LGBT Center (local organization serving the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer community of San Francisco)
ACCESSIBILITY TO SPONSOR	• May be easier to identify based on the reputation and tenure of the organization • May be harder to identify organizations that operate locally (rather than nationally or internationally), particularly in areas outside the U.S. • Difficult for sponsor to determine the credibility and legitimacy of the nonprofit organization • May not be open to participating in public engagement as tech issues may fall outside its organizational purpose and mandate
AREAS OF INSIGHTS AND EXPERTISE	• Can include expertise on, and relationships with, impacted communities (individuals and groups) that can be invited to participate, as well as formal expertise on the experiences and histories of specific impacted communities • Can include knowledge on how to design and implement public engagement with their specific audience
CAPACITY TO INFLUENCE SPONSOR	• Depending on the reputation of the organization, may have the ability to leverage public pressure to adopt their recommendations • Can influence who is selected from impacted community groups to participate in public engagement
INCENTIVES & RISKS FOR ENGAGEMENT	• May want to work with tech company to gain resources (financial or otherwise) and other forms of support for their social issues and/or work • May not want to work with tech company if it will distract or otherwise take staff time and resources away from their core mission and work • May not want to work with tech company if it has the potential to negatively impact the organization's reputation (or sense of trustworthiness with their constituents) for too closely aligning with a tech company • Sponsor may not want to work with the organization if there is concern about negative PR due to the organization's public criticism of the sponsor • Difficult for sponsor to determine the credibility of the organization

(Non-Tech) Labor Unions

Formally organized group of workers in a trade, industry, or company whose purpose is to represent the member workers in negotiations with company management over labor issues including pay, benefits, and working conditions.

EXAMPLES	• NEA (National Education Association, a traditional labor union in the US) • SEIU (Service Employees International Union, a traditional labor union in the US and Canada) • WGA (Writers Guild of America, a traditional labor union in the US)
ACCESSIBILITY TO SPONSOR	• May be easier to identify based on the reputation and tenure of the organization • May be harder to identify organizations that operate locally (rather than nationally or internationally), particularly in areas outside the US • May not be open to participating in public engagement as tech issues may fall outside its organizational purpose and mandate
AREAS OF INSIGHTS AND EXPERTISE	• Can include expertise on, and relationships with, impacted communities (individuals and groups) that can be invited for participation, as well as formal expertise on the experiences and histories of specific impacted communities • Can include knowledge on how to design and implement public engagement with their specific audience
CAPACITY TO INFLUENCE SPONSOR	• Depending on the reputation of the organization, may have the ability to leverage public pressure to adopt their recommendations • Can influence who is selected from impacted community groups to participate in public engagement
INCENTIVES & RISKS FOR ENGAGEMENT	• May not want to work with tech company if it will distract or otherwise divert staff time and resources from their core mission and work • May not want to work with tech company if it has the potential to negatively impact the organization's reputation (or sense of trustworthiness with its constituents) for too closely aligning with a tech company, especially as tech companies may be seen as an adversary in union negotiations • Sponsor may not want to work with the organization if there is concern about negative PR due to the organization's public criticism of the sponsor

Ad Hoc Groups Formed to Address Issues Faced by Members of Socially Marginalized Communities

Groups of individuals who organize around emergent issues in their locality or domain but lack the formal organization of a nonprofit organization, including the absence of clear organizational leaders or point people, fixed commitments from members or constituents, and expectations for the tenure of their group (how long the group will remain organized).

EXAMPLES	• Neighborhood group that forms to address a local issue such as gentrification • Workers who form a group to discuss labor issues in their company
ACCESSIBILITY TO SPONSOR	• May be difficult to identify such groups, as they may not be known outside their specific community or locality • May be difficult to build a relationship, as they may lack clear points of contact or leaders to reach out to • Difficult for sponsor to determine the credibility and legitimacy of the group
AREAS OF INSIGHTS AND EXPERTISE	• Knowledge based on lived experience and relationships with impacted communities (individuals and groups) that can be invited to participate • Can include knowledge on how to design and implement public engagement with their specific audience
CAPACITY TO INFLUENCE SPONSOR	• Depending on the level of collective organization and capacity, might have the ability to leverage public pressure to adopt their recommendations
INCENTIVES & RISKS FOR ENGAGEMENT	• Might not want to work with tech company if it will distract or otherwise take staff time and resources away from their core mission and work • Might not want to work with tech company if it has the potential to negatively impact the organization's reputation (or sense of trustworthiness with their constituents) for too closely aligning with a tech company, especially as tech companies may be seen as an adversary in union negotiations • Sponsor may not want to work with the organization if there is concern about negative PR due to the organization's public criticism of the sponsor • May need additional accommodations for full participation

Geographically Localized Communities that are Underserved

Individuals who live in geographic localities that are underserved (politically, socially, economically), but who do not coordinate their efforts with one another in the form of a nonprofit organization or even as an ad hoc group formed to build collective bargaining power.

EXAMPLES	• People who live in a neighborhood that lacks social services and well-built infrastructure
ACCESSIBILITY TO SPONSOR	• May be difficult to build a relationship with; they may lack clear points of contact or leaders to reach out to, and might view outsiders warily
AREAS OF INSIGHTS AND EXPERTISE	• Their individual lived experiences, especially as it relates to their specific underserved environments • Connections (relationships) to others with similar lived experiences
CAPACITY TO INFLUENCE SPONSOR	• Limited to what they can contribute and influence as individuals
INCENTIVES & RISKS FOR ENGAGEMENT	• May not want to work with tech companies due to direct experiences, or have heard stories from others about exploitative behavior by tech companies • May be in need of financial compensation • May not have the time required to participate in extracurricular activities like public engagement with tech companies • May need additional accommodations for full participation

Individuals Who Identify as Members of Socially Marginalized Communities

Individuals who personally identify as a member of at least one socially marginalized community but who may not engage in activities that center those identities or allow them to coordinate with others who similarly identify.

EXAMPLES	• An individual who identifies as gender non-binary • An individual who identifies as a wheelchair user
ACCESSIBILITY TO SPONSOR	• May be easy to identify and solicit participation by specifying what social identities are sought for the public engagement • May not be easy to verify an individual's social identity without violating laws or individual privacy
AREAS OF INSIGHTS AND EXPERTISE	• Their individual lived experiences, although these may be difficult to extrapolate in order to make assertions about a larger group experience • Connections (relationships) to others with similar lived experiences
CAPACITY TO INFLUENCE SPONSOR	• Limited to what they can contribute and influence as individuals
INCENTIVES & RISKS FOR ENGAGEMENT	• May not want to work with tech companies due to direct experiences, or have heard stories from others about exploitative behavior by tech companies • May be in need of financial compensation • May not have time required to participate in extracurricular activities such as public engagement with tech companies • May need additional accommodations for full participation

What are the determinations and steps for public engagement?

Now that we've established that public engagement is beneficial for any AI product being developed in a fast-developing and loosely regulated arena and identified the challenges with current public engagement practices, let's outline key principles, steps, and decisions that are part of planning for public engagement.

Where do you start?

There is no single approach to conducting "good" public engagement. The purpose of this resource is not to establish a single methodology that can be adapted to all use cases. Rather, it is designed to help you:

1. more clearly identify the purpose or aim that motivates the public engagement;
2. recognize the ways in which your organization's purpose may differ from that of the community you seek to work with; and
3. establish a public engagement strategy that is better aligned with the needs and benefit of the various communities whose help is being sought.

At its core, this Guidance for Inclusive AI simplifies the often complex process of public engagement, breaking it down into clear, manageable components. It highlights key factors that experts consider when deciding how to approach public engagement — factors that determine whether an engagement strategy is both effective and aligned with the well-being of the communities involved. Most important, it helps assess whether a chosen approach will genuinely serve the needs of those affected, or cause unintentional harm. By offering a road map for thoughtful, well-executed engagement, this Guidance for Inclusive AI ensures that public input will not just be collected but will be meaningfully integrated into decision-making.

Effective public engagement requires a structured approach that balances organizational goals with the needs and perspectives of those impacted. The process involves:

- **Understanding the incentives and risks:** evaluating the practical purpose for engaging communities, as well as the incentives and perceived risks of participation, both for those sponsoring the engagement and those participating in it.
- **Identifying key actors:** understanding who should be involved and what roles they will play.
- **Determining organizational capacity:** assessing the organization's internal mechanisms and resources available to support engagement
- **Defining the relationship:** designing communication and working styles and cadences — both formal and informal — between the organization and participants to help define the structure of the relationship
- **Assessing the overall process:** ensuring the participant insights and data collected are used appropriately and establishing clear accountability and transparency mechanisms to build trust

With these foundations in place, organizations can design an engagement process that aligns with their objectives while fostering meaningful collaboration. Flexibility and iteration are essential: Engagement strategies should be adaptable to feedback, evolving needs, and unforeseen challenges. A willingness to adjust the process will ensure that public input remains relevant and valuable. Ultimately, a well-structured, responsive approach will foster trust, encourage collaboration, and ensure that public insights drive positive outcomes.

UNDERSTANDING THE INCENTIVES AND RISKS FOR ENGAGEMENT

Before you embark on engaging the public, especially socially marginalized communities, it is important to understand the organizational and social context shaping and impacting your engagement. This includes understanding your organization's motivation to engage with the public and the organizational incentives and restrictions you must navigate, as well as those for the members of the public you wish to work with. By understanding these varied dynamics, it is possible both to encourage more meaningful participation and mitigate issues that might arise.

TOPIC	ADDITIONAL GUIDING QUESTIONS
Organizational Motivation for Engaging the Public *What individual, team, and organizational incentives are in place to encourage (or discourage) public engagement activities?*	• What or who is driving the call for public engagement on your specific project? • How integral are public engagement activities to the product development work cycle? • Is the engagement of participants established as a team or organizational objective, or is it a personal/individual goal? • How explicit are the organizational incentives? • What rewards and disincentives exist for conducting public engagement?
Engagement Goals *What are the general goals/aims of working with the public?*	• Who determines these goals (i.e., who has final decision-making authority on the goals and key performance indicators of the engagement)?
Participant Benefits/Value *What are ways to ensure that participants are better off by participating?*	• Who determines what benefits, compensation, and risk-mitigation resources are needed for the public engagement? • How are participants being recognized for their contributions and participation? • Will participants benefit materially (e.g., direct compensation, public recognition, future partnerships) if the product is successful or generates profit? • What risks or potential harm might participants incur by participating? • What support mechanisms are in place to address any harm participants may experience due to their contributions?

IDENTIFYING KEY ACTORS

Understanding the potential actors and what roles they can play allows you to assess who should be involved in the public engagement. It also helps better determine incentives and identify risks by recognizing what motivates and discourages various actors to support public engagement activities.

TOPIC	ADDITIONAL GUIDING QUESTIONS
Participant Selection *How are participants selected to join the engagement?*	• What are the selection criteria for choosing and excluding individuals from the process? • Who determines the selection and exclusion criteria? • How transparent is this decision-making process to the participants? • How are participants recruited?

Participant Expertise
What expertise and knowledge is needed to meet the goals of public engagement?
	• What types of insights are being sought?
	
	  • General or historic background on a topic or group of people
	
	  • Individual experience with a product
	
	  • Empirically-derived patterns of behavior that can be applicable for a broader group
	
	  • Unintended or unexpected behavior by users or customers
	
	• Are the participants being asked to provide feedback on a broad concept or a highly specific issue?
	
	• Do participants require formal training or expertise on a topic prior to engaging?

DETERMINING ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

When organizations invite socially marginalized communities or other members of the public to participate, the level of support provided can greatly influence the overall engagement experience. Assessing organizational capacity early on helps set realistic expectations for the depth and scope of the engagement. It can also help determine engagement approaches; limits can be set on what kinds of tactics or activities can be carried out with the resources available.

TOPIC	ADDITIONAL GUIDING QUESTIONS

Organizational Resource Alignment
What organizational resources are provided to enable public participation?
	• What skills and expertise do the developers of the public engagement strategy need in order to develop the most suitable approach?
	
	• Are staff time and budget allocations sufficient to fully implement the proposed engagement strategy, including follow-up activities after main engagement is complete?
	
	• Do staff members have the authority to use resources and meet with participants in environments most suitable for the participants, such as:
	  • Adjust working hours to maintain time zone flexibility when hosting sessions with global participants
	  • Pay for the translation of materials into other languages and into plain, non-technical language

Resources for Participants
What accommodations are provided to ensure full participation and benefit?
	• Is budgeting allocated to provided material compensation for participant involvement, such as:
	  • Pro bono services for participants
	  • Travel support to attend sessions
	  • Participant stipends or honoraria
	
	• What resources are in place to reduce costs (e.g., spending, time, effort) borne by participants, such as:
	  • Childcare reimbursements
	  • Transit fees to attend sessions
	  • Support for arranging visas for travel to participate in sessions
	
	• Is budget allocated to provide support services to ensure all can participate meaningfully, such as:
	  • Translation and linguistic support (e.g., sign language interpreter, non-English language interpreters, materials in braille or other support for people with vision impairment)
	  • Physically accessible meeting sites (i.e., they can be easily accessed and navigated by people using wheelchairs or other mobility devices)
	  • Computing access (i.e., access to devices capable of remote teleconferencing, costs for data access to ensure reliable internet connectivity)
	
	• What resources are in place to address any harm participants might experience due to their participation, such as:
	  • Spaces with accessibility for all gender and sexual identities (e.g., all-gender restrooms)
	  • Mental health professionals to aid in post-participation follow-up
	  • Whistleblower or anti-retaliation policies to protect people if they publicly expose issues revealed during the engagement)

Adapting Organizational Processes *What deviations from "standard operating procedures" are permitted in order to advance public engagement?*	• What internal mechanisms are in place to alter standard operating procedures in order to support participant engagement, such as: • Allowing participants to engage without formal non-disclosure agreements • Permitting participants to "own" the data that was collected as part of the engagement process

DEFINING THE RELATIONSHIP

Establishing clear expectations for how the organization and public participants will interact is important to build and maintain trust and ensure transparency. This includes understanding the level of involvement participants will have, how their input will be valued, and what kind of communication and support they can expect. This will help to clarify the roles and responsibilities of both parties throughout the engagement process.

TOPIC	ADDITIONAL GUIDING QUESTIONS
Participant Consent Provision & Withdrawal *Are participants fully aware of what the engagement will involve?*	• How are the expectations, terms of participation, and potential risks or harms explained to participants? • Do participants have full awareness of how insights they provide will be used by the organization sponsoring the engagement? • Can participants withdraw consent for use of their data, insights, or other contributions at any time, including after the engagement?
Decision-Making Authority of Participants *Who has ultimate decision-making authority about the public engagement process and what changes are adopted to the final product?*	• To what extent can participants determine what is built or deployed? • Can participants exercise veto power over a product or change thereof (i.e., it cannot be built or deployed without their consent)? • Can participants change the public engagement process while it is underway?
Structure of Relationship *How is the relationship with participants structured to support their engagement and well-being?*	• What harm or risks to participants might arise from public disclosure of their relationship to the company coordinating the public engagement? • How does a formal, legally binding contract or other agreement required for participation support or harm the participant? • How are the specific obligations that participants and the company must fulfill as a part of the public engagement communicated and enforced? • Whose interests are ultimately protected by the structure of the relationship?
Timing of Engagement *How do the temporal and procedural considerations impact the kind of relationship built with participants?*	• How frequently through the full development lifecycle will the public be engaged? • Whose schedules and timelines are prioritized in scheduling public engagement activities? • Are the public engagement activities scheduled at times that are convenient/easily fulfilled for the participants?

ASSESSING THE OVERALL PROCESS

A public engagement is only as good as its ability to analyze the insights collected and follow through on the feedback provided during the engagement. Resources should be in place to ensure insights and data collected from participants are used appropriately. Assessing an organization's commitment to transparency and accountability in engagement findings helps set clear expectations for both the process and the participants involved.

TOPIC	ADDITIONAL GUIDING QUESTIONS
Data Analysis *What expertise is in place to ensure participant data is fully and appropriately utilized?*	• What expertise in quantitative *and* qualitative data analysis is available in the team and organization? • Will additional research be conducted to properly situate the participant insights in their social and historical contexts? • Will participants have the opportunity to revise and validate their insights?
Disclosures & Accountability Mechanisms *What organizational mechanisms are in place to support transparent communication and accountability to commitments and promises made?*	• What type of information will be provided and shared with the public? • How are participants to access the information that is to be shared with them? • Will information be provided in documents with plain language, or will participants require support to understand the information? • How frequently will participants receive updates on the project's progress and the use of their feedback/insights? Will they be notified when the project has been completed?
Documentation *How is the public engagement process being documented for others to benefit?*	• How are the project and public engagement — including participants and the insights/ input they provide — being documented? • Will the documentation be made available to the participants or the broader public? • How will the documentation be maintained to avoid the loss of institutional memory/ knowledge?