

ALGORITHM CHARTER FOR AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

Terms of Reference

New Zealand Government - Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa Algorithm Charter Community of Practice

December 2023

Purpose

The New Zealand Government Algorithm Charter Community of Practice (CoP) is focused on learning, collaborating, and aligning good algorithm use practices within government. This CoP provides a platform for the sharing of information, experience, challenges and practice in relation to implementing the commitments of the [Algorithm Charter for Aotearoa New Zealand](#).

Algorithm Charter context

Government agencies use data to help inform, improve, and deliver the services provided to people in Aotearoa New Zealand every day. Simple algorithms can be used to standardise business processes to ensure scarce resources are distributed equitably. More complex algorithms can be used to distil information from large or complex data sets, to both support human decision-making and reveal insights that could not easily be brought to light by human analysis alone.

These algorithms can be used to help government better understand New Zealand and New Zealanders. This knowledge can help government make good decisions and deliver services that are more effective and efficient. The use of algorithms can mitigate the risk that human biases will enter into the administration of government services, and result in real benefits for everyone.

However, the opportunities also bring fresh challenges. For example, human bias could be perpetuated, or even amplified by, algorithms that are not designed and operated in thoughtful ways. Transparency and accountability are critical to ensuring that the public can trust and support the government to use these tools in appropriate ways.

It would be impossible for government agencies to apply the Charter to every business rule and process. Rather, the first focus is on the use of algorithms that have a high or critical risk of unintended harms for New Zealanders. Signatories commit to assessing the impact of decisions informed by their algorithms.

The [Algorithm Charter for Aotearoa New Zealand](#) is a commitment by government agencies to carefully manage how algorithms will be used: to strike the right balance between privacy and transparency, prevent unintended bias and reflect the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

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Objectives

The objectives of the Algorithm Charter Community of Practice are:

- to provide a forum for sharing knowledge, experiences, challenges and ‘what works’ in the implementation of the [Algorithm Charter for Aotearoa New Zealand](#) commitments. The CoP can help generate and manage a body of knowledge for members to draw on.
- to raise awareness of initiatives and good practice (from across the New Zealand data system, and internationally) on how government agencies can carefully manage their algorithms’ use.
- to support each other and encourage collaboration on the use of algorithms.

Membership

Membership of the CoP is open to all staff across all government agencies who are either a) signatories of the [Algorithm Charter for Aotearoa New Zealand](#) or b) non-signatories, but individuals who are interested in ensuring New Zealanders have confidence in how government agencies use algorithms. All members must agree to this CoP Terms of Reference (ToR).

Non-members, such as stakeholders and interested parties outside of government, may be welcomed to join hui.

When confidential or sensitive matters are discussed, only CoP members (who should all be bound by a form of confidentiality deed / arrangement) will be involved in such forums.

For new CoP members to join, email SecretariatCoPAlgorithmCharter@stats.govt.nz

Roles and responsibilities

Organising Committee

The Organising Committee will be made up of 4 to 6 CoP members (from at least 4 agencies) who meet, as required, to undertake the organisation and scheduling of CoP hui and set the agenda.

A review of the membership of the organising committee will be carried out at least annually. New committee members will be sought at different times if numbers fall below 4. Any CoP member may volunteer to be on the organising committee and be brought on immediately if the committee is not already at the maximum of 6.

Stats NZ Tātaraunga Aotearoa is acting as the CoP secretariat. Multiple Stats NZ Tātaraunga Aotearoa people may be involved in the organising committee, but they will only count as a single person or agency in relation to the committee size.

Convenor

The hui Convenor will be a CoP member and will be selected by the organising committee for a particular hui (i.e. the role will rotate). The convenor is responsible for:

- facilitating and controlling the hui
- welcoming guests and introducing speakers
- ensuring that the hui runs to the agenda

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Hui

The CoP will meet at least quarterly. Additional hui, discussion groups or working groups will be arranged on members' interest and availability of resources. The length of hui will depend on the time needed to cover topics scheduled.

In-person and online options will be provided where possible for all hui, so that members outside Wellington can participate.

Agendas for quarterly CoP hui will be developed by the Organising Committee with input from members, and may include introductions from new members, updates on current initiatives, presentations on topics of interest, and general open discussions. Hui agendas will clearly state when items are for CoP members only.

Convenors, venues and hosting agencies will vary depending on availability.

Digital space

A digital space, called the [Algorithm Charter CoP forum](#) has been set up on MS Teams for use by all CoP members. This is a space that members can use at any time to discuss, share knowledge and keep updated. Access will be given by Stats NZ Tātaranga Aotearoa to new CoP members as they join. Any questions or issues with the digital space, email SecretariatCoPAlgorithmCharter@stats.govt.nz

Ground rules/kawa

A Community of Practice is defined as: 'a group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly'.

This Community of Practice is:

- a place to seek advice
- a place to learn
- a place to share and connect
- a safe place: all questions, viewpoints and contributions are welcome.

This Community of Practice is not:

- a place to get approval or formally consult
- a place to lecture
- a forum for venting frustrations
- everlasting - we will review at least annually.

Sponsorship

This CoP is sponsored by the Government Chief Data Steward and supported by Stats NZ Tātaranga Aotearoa.

Review

These terms of reference were originally interim but were accepted by the CoP as permanent on 6th December 2023. They will be reviewed at least annually, and earlier if the need arises.