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.

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

What is the Data Ethics Canvas?
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What is data ethics?
The Open Data Institute defines data ethics as:

A branch of ethics that evaluates data practices and the potential to adversely affect people and society. It concerns 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?
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 consider 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 learn risks around a project, without precluding 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 you on managing and discussing 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 as you go. 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
- Consider data literacy

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.

The Data Ethics Canvas is also available at 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

Find out more at: theodi.org/theory-of-change

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.