



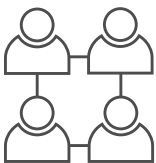
## Transparency, Accountability, and Governance (TAG)

The Principles for Digital Development community recognizes that digital development work inherently involves those with power acting in ways that impact people who hold less power. As such, development actors should be answerable for their actions, and they have a duty to act visibly, predictably, and understandably to promote participation and accountability. This includes making relevant, timely, and accurate information about their actions and allegiances available in easily digestible and accessible ways so that those who are affected by their actions can hold them accountable. There should be redress and other consequences when they do not meet their duties and commitments.

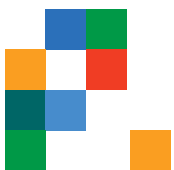
Development actors should be answerable for their actions, and they have a duty to act visibly, predictably, and understandably to promote participation and accountability.



**Transparency** is the principled duty for those in power to act visibly, predictably, and understandably in order to promote participation and accountability. It is not sufficient to make information available. Information should be relevant, accessible, timely, and accurate as well.



**Accountability** is an institutionalized relationship between a set of people or organizations held to account (accountees) and another set who are holding them to account (accounters). This ensures accountees are answerable for actions and decisions, and that there is appropriate reparation when duties and commitments are not met.

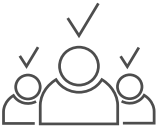


### ABOUT THE DIGITAL PRINCIPLES

The Principles for Digital Development are nine living guidelines that are designed to help integrate best practices into technology-enabled programs and are intended to be updated and refined over time. They include guidance for every phase of the project lifecycle, and they are part of an ongoing effort among development practitioners to share knowledge and support continuous learning. [The Digital Principles](#) were created in a community-driven effort, the result of many lessons learned through the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in development projects.



**Governance** encompasses the determination of who has power, who makes decisions, how others make their voice heard, and how accountability is rendered.<sup>1</sup>



**Transparency** and **accountability** are mutually reinforcing concepts. In the digital development space, the two work together to enable citizens to have a say about issues that matter to them and to have opportunities for influencing decision-making. In so doing, citizens can directly affect development outcomes and hold those in **governance** to account.<sup>2</sup>

Digital development work routinely includes accountability mechanisms such as monitoring and evaluation, which usually sets up vertical accountability for donors and grantor implementing partners.<sup>3</sup> Frameworks and standards like the Digital Principles can be a form of formal accountability, particularly if there is some consequence for not meeting them.

In the digital development space, it's also important to document the outcomes of interventions carried out for public benefit or using public funds. By sharing our learnings and documenting the evidence of the impact of our work, we can improve our practice and make our work more valuable for those we are trying to help.

This paper sets out some of the areas where TAG does and does not come into play regarding the Principles and makes some proposals for broadening our understanding of transparency, accountability, and governance.



### ABOUT THE PULSE ON THE PRINCIPLES PAPER SERIES

The Digital Principles were created in 2008 by practitioners primarily working for Global South organizations on donor-funded digital projects taking place in the majority world. In the years since, the community of organizations endorsing the Principles has grown to include academic institutions, multilateral organizations, donors, NGOs, and private-sector companies. The Principles have become a core part of how we understand responsible digital development practice—as a standard, a capacity-building framework, a project design practice, and a curriculum. Yet the Principles don't cover everything we now know to be good practice, and their design focus at the project level can mean they miss important longer-term or systemic considerations. [This series](#) applies the nine Principles to different ethical considerations to help practitioners ensure that their work takes these critical areas into account and to encourage community conversations about the future development and improvement of the Principles.

<sup>1</sup> This definition comes from the Institute on Governance. <https://iog.ca/what-is-governance/>.

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from definitions used by the Transparency and Accountability Initiative. <https://www.transparency-initiative.org/blog/1179/tai-definitions/>

<sup>3</sup> Accountability is sometimes thought of as directional, where there are vertical, horizontal, and diagonal types of accountability. Vertical accountability includes situations where people directly hold the powerful to account, for example, through elections or by campaigning against powerful institutions or individuals. With horizontal accountability, there are checks and balances across actors who can demand explanations or impose penalties on one another. For example, different state actors can be sanctioned by other state actors. Horizontal accountability can also apply to peer organizations or corporations who hold each other accountable to industry standards. Diagonal accountability mechanisms are situated somewhere between the vertical and horizontal dimensions. These are when people engage in policy-making, budgeting, expenditure tracking, and other similar activities directly with horizontal institutions as a way of improving participation and accountability.

# TAG in the Principles for Digital Development

Transparency, accountability, and governance are not core aspects of the individual principles or of the Principles as a whole. Some of the existing principles could be interpreted broadly to better cover this aspect, and a wider discussion within the community could examine how to better incorporate TAG within the Principles.

## What is Governance

### Governance today is more important than ever.

It builds citizen trust in our democratic institutions. It builds social cohesion. It is the foundation for economic growth and stability. It is also founded on the rule of law.

### But what is it?



## TAG AND THE PRINCIPLES AT A GLANCE



### Design With the User

The *Design With the User* principle suggests an inherent responsibility to be transparent and accountable to users. Designing together means partnering with users throughout the project lifecycle, co-creating solutions, and continuously gathering and incorporating users' feedback. While participation and feedback are key aspects of accountability, this principle could have a stronger emphasis on how transparency and accountability happen within the digital design process and who is accountable to whom.



### Build for Sustainability

The *Build for Sustainability* principle refers to the need to address sustainability when designing programs, platforms, and digital tools. But a core part of sustainability is also clarity on the governance process for technology tools, platforms, and data. These aspects should be considered part of this principle to enhance TAG, thereby contributing to sustainability.



### Address Privacy & Security

*Address Privacy & Security* involves careful consideration of which data is collected, as well as how data is acquired, used, stored, and shared in order to protect confidential information. This principle should be interpreted as including data governance; the overall policies, procedures, and roles required for managing and protecting data throughout the lifecycle; and who is responsible in the case of data loss, mishandling, or misuse.



### Be Collaborative

*Be Collaborative* requires transparency and accountability among collaborators, as well as clear governance so that commitments and promises are spelled out in detail and collaborators are held accountable to one another. Emphasizing this within the principle can help build trust and make collaboration more successful.

# Transparency, Accountability, and Governance in the Principles for Digital Development



## TAG AND DESIGN WITH THE USER

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*Design With the User* encourages us to partner with users throughout the project lifecycle, co-create solutions, and continuously gather and incorporate users' feedback. While these participatory methods are all key aspects of accountability, we should interpret this principle broadly to include how transparency and accountability happen and who is accountable to whom.

- **Clarify what happens after the design process is complete.** Users will want to know what happened with their input and who will benefit. Agencies and organizations need to be clear about how people's ideas will be used, what the next steps are, and if/how they will be informed about the ways their input was used. Agencies will also want to engage with users post-design to gather feedback from them about how well designs are working. Agencies should be thoughtful about seeking input from participants in a way that compensates them for their time and is not extractive.

Where elements of governance are missing, governments could engage with civil society to develop legal frameworks and policies that support transparency, accountability, and broad participation.



## TAG AND BUILD FOR SUSTAINABILITY

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Sustainability requires clarity on the governance process for digital platforms and data. This principle should expand to include an emphasis on transparency, accountability, and governance as an important factor in sustainability of digital development initiatives. In order for initiatives to be sustainable, they will need to adhere to national law. Where elements of governance are missing, governments could engage with civil society to develop legal frameworks and policies that support transparency, accountability, and broad participation. This can be especially important for ensuring [responsible data use and inclusion](#).

- **Define the data governance process early on.** As agencies design digital platforms or digital data collection, it's important to establish the ways and means by which they will ensure transparency to stakeholders. Agencies should lay out how the technology or data will be governed, by whom, and how, as well as who will participate in making decisions. Other questions to ask include: What policies and procedures will be put in place to enable data governance to happen? How will these be managed over time and by whom?
- **Monitor, evaluate, learn, and adapt.** The Principles encourage sustainable programming, yet we know that many digital development initiatives fail in this area. A key part of better implementation and greater sustainability is learning from failure and incorporating that learning into new design cycles. There should be a strong emphasis on the need to conduct ongoing monitoring and adapt programming, as well as to conduct rigorous evaluation on digital development programming to better understand which kinds of programming work, for whom they work, and why and how they work. This should include carefully designed and accessible feedback mechanisms. This learning should inform future initiatives and be shared transparently so that we do not repeat the same failures. This may require earnest commitment at the leadership level.

### 3.

## TAG AND ADDRESS PRIVACY & SECURITY

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Transparency and accountability are key for protecting data. This principle could recommend that data privacy and security policies are spelled out and that agencies and their partners clarify how data will be managed and kept safe. Areas where transparency, accountability, and data governance could be strengthened include:

- **Specifying roles and responsibilities along the data lifecycle.** These roles and responsibilities should be laid out in clear, written agreements that have signoff from the various parties. They should include who is responsible for making decisions, who has access to the data, and who implements decisions about technology or data. These mechanisms should be clear and transparent to stakeholders, accessible, impartial, and be empowered to generate consequences for noncompliance.
- **Transparency about how data is used.** Organizations should be able to explain to users what happens to their data along the full lifecycle, including how it moves between systems. They should also ensure that they have informed consent or have determined another lawful basis for transparently collecting and processing their data.
- **Complaints and redress.** For any data collection, organizations need to transparently communicate the channels for questions or complaints about the data or technology process. There should be a plan for how to manage any breach, loss, or unintended use of data.

Organizations should be able to explain to users what happens to their data along the full lifecycle, including how it moves between systems.



### 4.

## TAG AND BE COLLABORATIVE

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Collaboration is a key area where transparency, accountability, and governance come into play. This principle should include an emphasis on clear agreements among partners about how digital development initiatives and the data associated with them will be governed.

- **Establish clarity among partners in writing.** It's important to have clear roles and responsibilities for data and for management of digital initiatives. They should be established in writing through legal agreements that address aspects such as:
  - Ownership of the intellectual property involved in digital tools or digital data sets and models derived from any data analysis
  - Licensing agreements
  - Transparency around who can access what data, and who is responsible for maintaining or sustaining the digital tool or data set over the long term
  - Whether data can be shared outside of the current partners and how this is decided
  - What happens if the technology, platform, or data set is sold or transferred to a new entity
  - How any collaboration would be dissolved, should that be required
  - Consequences for breaching the agreement
  - Any other legal aspects

While the Principles have been used as a tool for evaluating digital development, and there have been some efforts to measure the impact of the Principles on the quality and sustainability of such programs, an ongoing effort should be made to understand how well the Principles are working for users.



## 5.

### TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE PRINCIPLES THEMSELVES

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TAG should be considered in terms of the Principles as a whole.

- **What is the impact of the Principles?** While the Principles have been used as a tool for evaluating digital development, and there have been some efforts to measure the impact of the Principles on the quality and sustainability of such programs, an ongoing effort should be made to understand how well the Principles are working for users. At present, DIAL's stewardship of the Principles is evaluated as part of DIAL's work, including at the project level for in-country implementation and through trainings on the Principles that include evaluation exercises. However, a more thorough, regular measurement exercise could uncover more useful information.
- **What happens if an agency signs on as an endorser but doesn't comply with or follow the Principles?** Almost 300 organizations have signed onto the Digital Principles since their creation. But what about organizations who have signed onto the Principles and are not actually using the Digital Principles in good faith in their design of digital development initiatives? Should organizations have to prove that they are implementing the Principles after signing on? What would accountability mechanisms look like for the Principles?

## Join the discussion and debate

This is our current thinking on how the Principles and the guidance around them should evolve to better incorporate TAG. However, we know we have our own blind spots and may be missing crucial perspectives. Therefore, we want to hear from you.



Specifically, we're seeking answers to two questions:

1. **What good governance models can we draw from** for managing data and digital tools or platforms?
2. **Should the Principles have “sharper teeth,”** so that organizations who sign onto them are accountable for implementing them? How could this be done?



### WAYS TO ENGAGE

- **Listen:** Subscribe to our podcast, [Pulse on the Principles](#), or join one of our webinars.
- **Comment:** Join the conversation on our [Forum](#) or on Twitter at [@digiprinciples](#) using [#digitalprinciples](#).

These Principles are yours. We want them to evolve to be as useful as possible for you. This is an invitation to help us shape them.

## Further resources and guidance

- Institute on Governance. [What is Governance?](#)
- Transparency and Accountability Initiative. [How Do We Define Transparency and Accountability?](#)
- Feedback Labs. [Learn about the Loop](#)
- Institute for Development Studies. [Making All Voices Count](#)
- UK Information Communication Officer. [Orientation on the GDPR](#)
- OCHA. [Data Responsibility Guidelines and Guidance Notes](#)
- Contracts for Data Collaboration (C4DC). [Library and Frameworks for Data Agreements](#)
- GovLab. [Public Deliberation on the Reuse of Data](#)