

Home Office Digital, Data and Technology

Design ethics toolkit



Digital, Data
& Technology

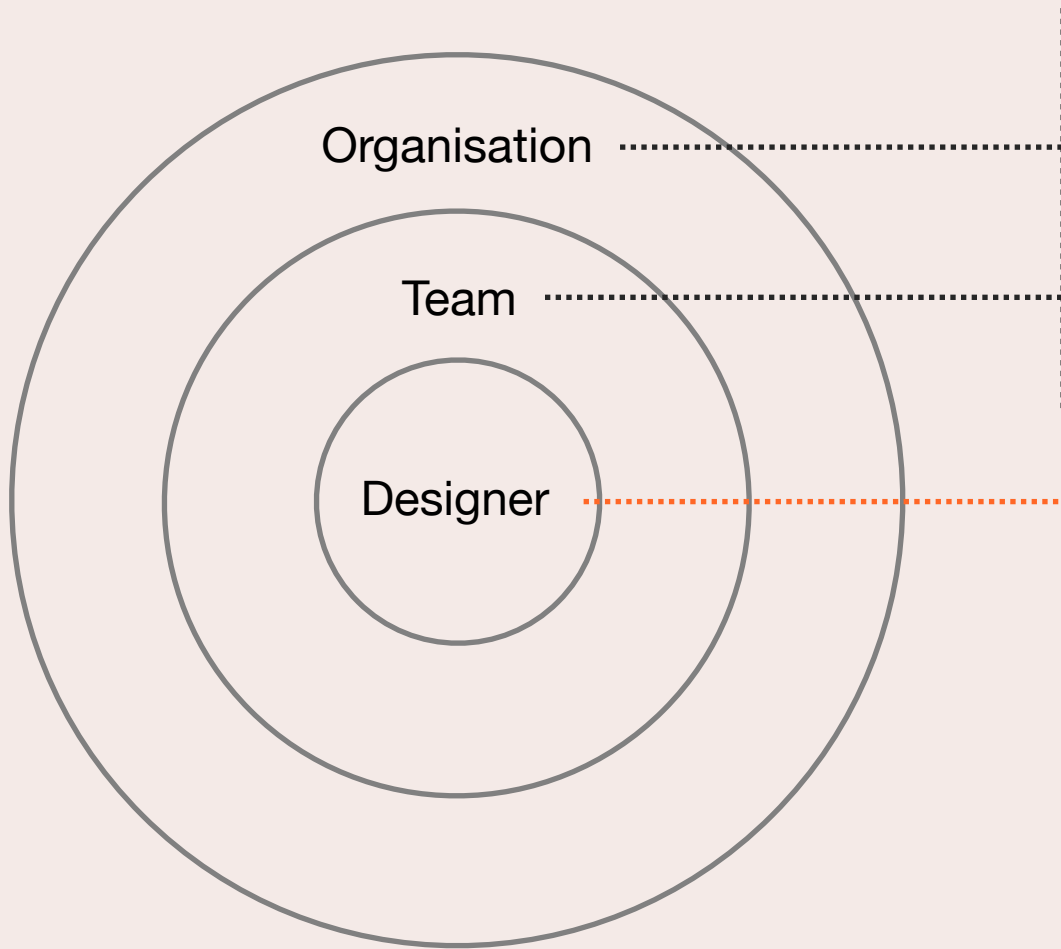
Why design ethics is important

- At the Home Office, we work on some of the most challenging and important government services. Our work helps to keep people safe and the country secure. This means that our designs can have a big impact on people's lives.
- Sometimes our designs have an impact in ways we don't expect. Design ethics is about being aware of how your designs can impact the welfare of people, society and the environment. It helps reduce the risk of causing harm.

Purpose of this toolkit

- Provide tools and strategies to help designers think about what ethics means for them in design
- Understand that there may be different perspectives on ethical design and its implications and to work out how best to approach ethical design as a team

Different levels of ethical awareness needed



Is it consistent with One Home Office values of being Respectful, Courageous, Collaborative and Compassionate?

Do we all agree on what 'good' is? Have we considered how the design might be misused or impact people or society?

Would I use it myself?
Would I like it if someone else designed it for me?
Can my design get misused?
Do I really believe this is helping someone?
Is my work helping one group of people, but making another suffer?

Ethical design principles

Use our ethical design principles to help you think about and spot potential ethical issues in your everyday work. These were co-designed by the Home Office user-centred design community and align with several of the [Civil Service values](#).

Helpful

The products we design should be helpful to people and society. They should not knowingly cause harm to people's physical and psychological health, dignity and autonomy. Don't design products that introduce or exacerbate other problems.

Honest

Do not mislead or deceive, for example by hiding important content or making content deliberately vague.

Inclusive

Do not favour some users over others.

Sustainable

Actively promote sustainable outcomes. Choose sustainable approaches and solutions and aim to design products that can be produced indefinitely without depleting resources or harming the environment or economy.

Good

Promote the welfare of people over the agenda of an organisation.

Empowering

Design to empower your users. For example, by enabling them to manage their data or challenge decisions that affect them.

Responsible

Fulfil your duties and obligations as a civil servant responsibly, following any laws and codes. Do not misuse your official position.

Fair

Use evidence to make decisions. Carry out your responsibilities in a way that is fair, just and equitable and reflects the Civil Service commitment to equality and diversity.

Thoughtful

Consider the intended and unintended consequences of your design. Work as a team to ask questions about the impact of the product on people and society

Ethical design decision making framework

Follow these step and guidance to help you make the right decisions.

This framework aligns with the [ethical decision-making model](#) the policy and strategy teams are using in the Home Office.



1. Identify ethical consequences

ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS...

Would I use it myself?

What do I value?

How do my values influence what is right or wrong?

Would I like it if someone else designed it for me?

How might my design be misused or have unintended consequences?

Do I really believe this is helping someone?

Is my work helping one group of people, but making another suffer?

WHAT

What is it?

What problem does it solve?

What impact do we want?

What do we know?

What don't we know?

What concerns us?

What do we define as 'good'?

HOW

How do people use it?

How do we know?

How will it affect people and society?

How might it be misused?

WHY

Why does it exist?

Why are we designing something now?

1. Identify ethical consequences

Work as a team to consider the designs from different ethical angles. Use [the social impact canvas framework](#) (Mural board) to help you do this



Thinking through all the work you've done to date, ask yourself/your team the following questions. Each connection connects you to an ethical approach that prioritises different values in order to determine what good or right looks like.

1. Imagine you are wildly successful in your endeavours and suddenly everyone wants to follow your lead. Which option would leave the world better off?
2. Which option would create the best outcome for communities, as opposed to only certain members?
3. Which option would create the greatest good, for the greatest number of people?
4. Which option would create the most happiness and the least displeasure for most people?
5. Which option would make you feel most proud if it became a headline in the national news?
6. Which option treats all people equally rather than favours one group over others?

2. List possible solutions and know what falls under your ethical scope

SEEK INPUT FROM OTHERS WITHIN AND OUTSIDE YOUR TEAM

WE TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR...

Which situations fall within your ethical scope of the project? Why?

WE DO NOT TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR...

Which situations fall outside your ethical scope of the project? Why?

Which might be someone else's responsibility?

ASK YOUR TEAM THESE QUESTIONS...

Is it consistent with One Home Office of being Respectful, Courageous, Collaborative and Compassionate?

How would you approach it if it was published in the media?

3. Decide the approach

- Follow the decision-making model. Take the time to reflect on the consequences you've identified and discuss it as a team and with key stakeholders.
- Most concerns can be resolved within the team. There might be other designs you could try or more research you could do.
- If you need more support, talk to lead practitioners in your area or a head of role.
- Get in touch with the policy teams related to your work if you're concerned that something in the policy may cause unintended harm. If policy makers have solid evidence that something needs to change, they can present evidenced recommendations to ministers through ministerial submissions.
- If you are personally affected by something you have come across in your work, the [Employee Assistance Programme](#) and [Mental Health First Aiders](#) are available to support you.

Recommended resources to explore and use in team activities and workshops

- [Not another ethics talk – Lisa Moretti](#)) [video]
- [Ethical design manifesto](#)
- [Ethics for designers](#)
- [Ethics kit](#)
- [The elements of digital ethics](#) [article]
- [Ethical explorer](#) [site]
- [Tarot cards of debt](#) [site]
- [Biased by design](#) [site]