



ALIA submission in response to the CSIRO Data61 Artificial Intelligence: Australia's Ethics Framework Discussion Paper

May 2019

1. About us

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) is the professional organisation and peak body for the Australian library and information services sector.

On behalf of our 5,000 personal and institutional members, we provide the national voice of the profession in the development, promotion and delivery of quality library and information services to the nation, through leadership, advocacy and mutual support. We represent school, public, academic, research, corporate, law, health, government, National, State and Territory libraries and the people who staff them.

2. Ethics, values and digital transformation

The library and information sector is an industry that has adapted to new technologies well. Transformation is nothing new for us and we have taken digital transformation in our stride, overcoming the barriers and taking advantage of the exciting opportunities to provide our communities with even greater access to information on a global scale.

We are no longer limited by the parameters of the library collection. Through the internet and digital resources, we can provide our library users with a previously unimaginable level of access to the world's knowledge. At the same time, we have maintained our ethical human-centred values around equity, fairness, safety, well-being and inclusion – all features of the [OECD principles for AI](#).

We see AI as a further opportunity to extend and improve our services, tailor our offering to individuals, make our processes more efficient, but we also acknowledge people's fears about the dark side of AI – threats to our personal freedoms and to our physical and digital security.

In 2019, ALIA is running the '[Truth Integrity Knowledge](#)' campaign, which focuses on why librarianship is one of the most trusted professions in Australia and how people working in libraries promote the free flow of information and ideas in the interests of all Australians. We talk about trust, freedom of information, evidence-based information, digital expertise and inclusion, Indigenous knowledge, freedom of expression, equity, privacy, open access and collaboration.

Our values and practice, as trusted professionals, providers of information, with an acknowledged place in the fabric our society, make us well placed to comment on this discussion paper.

4. Questions for consideration

Q1 Are the principles put forward in the discussion paper the right ones? Is anything missing?

We support the core principles in the discussion paper and commend CSIRO Data 61 for their clarity. The authors have captured the essential high-level principles and expressed them in plain English, reducing complex concepts to a few simple sentences.

We suggest adding a further sentence to principle 3, regulatory and legal compliance. Not only should AI initiatives comply with all relevant government obligations, regulations and laws, but also, when constructing new regulations, legislators should take into account the potential impact of AI.

We also suggest adding a ninth principle covering independent oversight. Contestability and accountability require an independent third party to ensure a fair and just outcome.

Q2-Q4 Yes.

Q5 What other tools or support mechanisms would you need to be able to implement principles for ethical AI?

Library and information professionals will need training and ongoing learning to enable us to understand and apply principles for ethical AI in our business practices. We will need to be across best practice guidelines and industry standards, not only for the management of our libraries, but also for our work with data producers. In universities, library staff work closely with researchers and are often responsible for research repositories.

We will also need training and support in order to share this knowledge and understanding with our library users.

School, college and university libraries already provide students with information and digital literacy training. AI will be a further important element to include in these training sessions, helping students understand the implications of AI in society, engage in the ethics debate and have the critical thinking skills to question its appropriate use.

There are 1500 public libraries in metro, regional and remote communities around Australia. Our library users include people with lower levels of education, people who are not in the workforce, people whose first language is not English – groups who are at risk of having less access to information, fewer skills and less understanding of the issues. As trusted institutions and trusted professionals, with physical locations, public WiFi, PCs and community spaces, we offer a good partnership opportunity for government to inform and consult with the public about the use of AI.

Q6-Q7 No.

5. Summary

On behalf of our members, representing libraries and library and information professionals Australia-wide, ALIA welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to this discussion paper.

We would be pleased to be involved in further discussions about Australia's ethical framework for AI.

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