

AI Task Force Report FAQ:

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What is the purpose of this report?

The Inform USA AI Task Force was formed to support the Information-and-Referral sector in developing clear, appropriate, and effective terms of engagement for the responsible use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools. [The report summarizes the Task Force's findings.](#)

What do you mean by AI?

We observed that AI is often associated with a range of ambiguous and potentially misleading definitions. We've acknowledged several definitions, though the shortest might also be the most useful: AI refers to "a mathematical method for prediction" (Broussard, 2019).

Many (though not all) of the examples of AI analyzed by the Task Force involve "Large Language Models" (LLMs) that mathematically predict which word is likely to follow a sequence of other words in response to a given prompt.

This is a long document! What's in it?

[This single-page Preface](#) explains the objectives of the document and every section in it.

Can you just summarize it for me?

An [Executive Summary immediately follows the Preface](#). Pages 5-6 present the primary findings and recommendations, which are explained in greater detail throughout the report.

Why was the Task Force formed? What was its purpose?

"Artificial Intelligence" is increasingly a topic of interest for Community Navigation providers, so Inform USA chartered a Task Force to assess the challenges and opportunities associated with these technologies. The Task Force comprised a representative cross-section of Inform USA members, with diverse experiences in AI technologies and human service information-and-referral delivery. The Task Force gathered and synthesized findings from hundreds or thousands of resources – research, news, expert guidance, etc – and gathered feedback from Inform USA membership across multiple contexts. The findings in this report reflect the balance of perspectives that were articulated through this process. The Task Force has [indexed these materials in a Knowledge Base](#).

How is this document intended to be used?

Inform USA members, and their partners in the field, are encouraged to review the materials in this report – and the materials referenced in our Knowledge Base – to educate themselves about the emerging opportunities and challenges pertaining to the use of AI in information-and-referral and community navigation processes. These materials can inform organizational strategy, and can also give structure and substance to discussions with prospective partners and funders. The document includes [an example "acceptable use policy,"](#) which can be referenced by organizations engaging in their own internal policymaking processes. The document also [includes recommendations for the Inform USA membership and leadership as a whole](#), intended to set an agenda for future discussion about sectoral interventions that Inform USA can take to build capacity for the field as a whole to benefit from AI technologies in equitable and responsible ways.

How did the Task Force decide what to prioritize in its analysis?

The Task Force first adopted [Inform USA's statement of institutional values](#) – these set the boundaries within which we considered “what matters.”

Then we analyzed [a wide range of “statements of principles” gathered from many sectors and institutions](#); we identified common patterns among these statements, and then collaboratively translated these patterns into language specific to our sector. The result is [our working draft of Principles for the Use of AI in Community Navigation](#). These principles provide normative guidance (i.e. *What should we do?*) with which all matters pertaining to the use of AI in Community Navigation can be considered.

What are the opportunities associated with AI that are analyzed by this report?

The Task Force analyzed various opportunities afforded by AI technologies to automate routine and repetitive administrative tasks in ways that enhance the work of Community Navigation staff – promoting human resources to focus on the production of local, specialized, context-sensitive knowledge.

The Task Force gathered dozens of examples of “use cases” (i.e. beneficial uses of AI tools) from across our own experiences, literature from the field, and input from Inform USA members. We organized these into a loose set of categories, and analyzed many (but not all of them). This set of opportunities is indexed in [Appendix B: Types of Use Cases](#).

This is a living document and additional analysis – and/or suggestions for new types of use cases – are welcome. **Please use the Comment feature in this doc or the Task Force Report doc to provide feedback or ask questions in the document – and/or reach out to Inform USA at technology@informusa.org.**

What are the risks associated with AI that are analyzed by this report?

[Appendix C](#) summarizes our findings about types of risks that the Task Force considered in its analysis. Rather than start from scratch in this process, the Task Force consulted research and repositories assembled by experts in resources such as [The MIT AI Risk Repository](#), and [A Collaborative, Human-Centred Taxonomy of AI, Algorithmic, and Automation Harms](#) – which themselves analyze thousands of informational resources. We then considered which of the risks described in these resources are most relevant to the Community Navigation sector. The resulting array of risks guided our analysis of individual use cases and the topic as a whole.

Why is this report so focused on risks?

The report reflects the Task Force's findings as gathered from members' lived experiences, assessments from this field, review of the literature produced by experts across various other fields and disciplines, and resources produced by institutions across public sectors and civil society. The Task Force has [indexed these materials in a Knowledge Base](#). The Task Force prioritized review of materials based on a specific set of criteria: internally, [our values and principles](#), and externally, a preference for perspectives that are free of conflicts of interest. The Task Force acknowledged but did not take at face value any claims or materials put forth by companies with financial interest in the sale of AI technologies and services, or those funded by such entities.

The result is a report that has sections that focus on opportunities (such as the index of case studies, the examples of appropriate use policies, and the recommendations for the development of sectoral infrastructure that can be owned and governed by Inform USA on behalf of the sector) and also a careful attention to the range of risks that have been articulated by experts in socio-technical systems, our peers in the field, and members of the Task Force.

This approach is intended to reflect the core mission of a professional association such as Inform USA: to promote appropriate professional practices (those that assure a high degree of professionalism and reliability in the sensitive work of our field) while discouraging inappropriate practices (those that may be inadvisable or even unacceptable given the potential for harm to organizations, staff, clients, and communities).

At every phase in its work, the Task Force solicited examples of successful precedents for the use of AI in community navigation activities. Any significant contributions of this sort have been included in this report. **This invitation remains open: all readers are encouraged to share documented evidence of beneficial use of AI tools.** Please use the Comment feature in this doc or the Task Force Report doc to provide feedback or ask questions in the document, and/or reach out to Inform USA at technology@informusa.org

To the extent that any readers find fewer examples of opportunities for beneficial use than they had anticipated, that may be a significant finding itself – one deserving of reflection.

Why isn't this report more focused on risks [like killer robots / environmental catastrophe from exponentially increasing usage of energy and water / etc]?

Experts and practitioners have identified a vast array of risks associated with these technologies – as one can find by consulting already-existing resources such as [The MIT AI Risk Repository](#).

The Task Force did not have the time or capacity to consider the implications of every possible risk for any possible use of these technologies in any given social context; instead, we prioritized. The Task Force ranked each risk listed in MIT's taxonomy of risks by its perceived level of relevance to the work of community resource navigation – and then set out of scope any risks that are not specifically within the control or direct context of Community Navigation members. As a result, some risks that receive prominent attention in other contexts – such as the advent of hostile superintelligence, or the environmental impacts of energy and water usage – were set “off the table” for our analysis. The decision not to analyze these risks does not have any bearing on whether they are serious or worthy of consideration in general; it merely reflects a decision to prioritize focus on matters that are within the remit and control of Inform USA's members.

What about the risks of *not* doing AI? If we don't take action, aren't we guilty of failing to do all of the good things that would happen if we did act?

This question is *very* frequently asked; it's a version of the philosophical thought exercise known as [the Trolley Problem](#). The asker implies that the harms of an action might be outweighed by its benefits.

The AI Task Force considered this question at some length, and the following is a summary of the resulting discussion:

In life, many decisions involve tradeoffs between costs and benefits, and uncertainties about each. The role of an industry association is to set the bar for professionalism in decision-making – and professionalism entails the formal delineation of responsible behavior and appropriate practice from irresponsible and inappropriate conduct. In this context, known risks of actual harm should carry more evaluative weight than speculative opportunities for hypothetical benefits.

Though the various benefits of AI tools are exciting, they remain largely speculative. After many requests for “success stories” the Task Force found and documented a few independently-verified real-world precedents for demonstrable benefit from AI tools – such as [identifying differences between style guides](#), and [data cleaning for reporting](#) or quality improvement. **Notably, the Task Force found *no precedents* for successful *customer-facing* implementations.** (This request for success stories is still open! Please reach out to technology@informusa.org with any details about successful implementations that you would like to share.)

Various already-existing harms from AI tools, however, have been repeatedly preceded and extensively documented.

In other words, most benefits are still imagined and hypothetical while many harms are real and demonstrable.

This context should help us resolve the Trolley Problem: as professionals, we should proactively avoid the known risks of actual harms, while exploring potential benefits only through processes that are carefully designed to responsibly mitigate known and unknown risks.

This is not to say that we are denying the possibility that previously-unprecedented benefits might emerge from innovative new practices, nor insisting that Inform USA members should never try something new. Rather, it is to say that, as professionals, our first order of business is to mitigate against known risks of actual harm that might unintentionally result from our work; only in so doing can we then responsibly experiment with the hypothetical potential for benefit through new approaches.

How should we make decisions? How should we mitigate risks and promote benefits?

Ultimately, Inform USA can offer guidance and even standards, but we cannot tell our members what to do. We can advise our members on how to answer the question “How should we decide what to do?” This question probably deserves to be answered on its own terms before starting to think about specific tools and processes.

The Task Force report offers several resources to guide members in this process. First, it includes guidance for conducting “risk/benefit analysis” of any given opportunity: in this analysis, you can specify what potential task a given tool might help with, and then enumerate the various expected benefits and potential risks associated with use of this tool for that purpose. The Task Force has conducted several such analyses of various popular use cases, which [are aggregated in Appendix B: Use Cases](#). The Report also includes [an example of a specific analysis](#) followed by [an “Acceptable Use policy”](#) that operationally addresses the concerns revealed by the analysis. Together, these demonstrate a process of analyzing and deciding how and when to use AI tools.

The report also includes a section on [Guidelines for Ethical Procurement and Policymaking](#), which offer *principles for the design of decisions*: who should be involved, what should be decided upon, and how will decisions be evaluated and revisited over time?

Finally, the report also links to [a Decision Tree](#) that can walk nonprofits through every step in a logical process of consideration and decision-making.

As a reminder, [the executive summary of the report](#) offers the following broad recommendations.

We encourage careful experimentation with uses of AI that can automate routine and repetitive administrative tasks in ways that enhance the work of Community Navigation staff – promoting human resources to focus on the production of local, specialized, context-sensitive knowledge, the safeguarding of information integrity and data quality, and the promotion of human agency.

We recommend against uses of AI that make subjective decisions that might directly impact people's lives. Any such uses of AI tools – such as user-facing chatbots, risk-scoring, etc. – should be considered highly risky and carefully mediated by responsible humans or even refused altogether.

Which software vendor / AI model / tool should I choose?

This question should only be asked after many other questions have already been asked and answered – starting with, “What are we trying to achieve?” followed by “What are the most relevant precedents for successful achievements of this kind? How do we know that they were successful? And what were the necessary conditions for that success?” And eventually then “How should I evaluate software vendors?” and “What are the necessary contractual agreements that ought to be established as a condition of doing business with us?” After answering a string of questions like these, then you will be well positioned to consider which software vendors best fit your strategic objectives and approach.

The Task Force Report focuses on articulating principles for this kind of inquiry that ought to precede any decisions about software procurement. See the section on [Guidelines for Ethical Procurement and Policymaking](#), which offer *principles for the design of decisions*: who should be involved, what should be decided upon, and how will decisions be evaluated and revisited over time?

We encourage Inform USA members to seek and share each other's perspectives on particular software vendors through discussion among their peers in [the Connection](#).

Everything is changing so fast all the time, so why should we care about what the Task Force thought last year or last month?

Change is life's only true constant. Given this reality, the Task Force did not focus on particular details of the technology market at a given point in time; rather, we focused our attention on the development of capacities that can help our peers think critically about technology, and assert their agency in the use of technology, across any given context in a fast-changing world.

The Task Force intends this to be a starting point for future analysis, though the principles outlined within may prove to be a durable foundation. This report should be considered a “living document,” and the contents can be stewarded by the Inform USA Technology Committee, which has since been chartered to continue gathering input and developing guidance. Please use the Comment feature in this doc or the Task Force Report doc to provide feedback or ask questions in the document, and/or reach out to Inform USA at technology@informusa.org

I have experience trying this thing, and I have insights to share. How can I share our learned lessons?

Reach out to Inform USA at technology@informusa.org. You can also inquire about the Inform USA Technology Committee via that email address.

How can I get involved?

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