The Basics - Informed consent

Understand the technology

Meaningful informed consent depends on a clear understanding of how a technology works and what its use implies for individuals and communities.

This includes knowing what data is collected, how it is stored, processed, and shared, and who may have access to it under different circumstances. It also requires considering how people will interact with the technology in practice, including the devices required and the level of connectivity needed.

Encourages teams to examine these aspects critically, identify potential risks, and ensure that consent is based on transparent, accessible, and contextually relevant information.

1. How to use this template

Use this template as a team reflection and preparation tool before engaging with crisis-affected people. The goal is to ensure the team can clearly explain the technology, its implications, and the choices people have—in language that is understandable and honest.

What is the technology and how does it work in practice?

Describe in simple terms

- What problem is the technology intended to address?
- What does the technology actually do?
- How will people interact with it in their daily lives?

Practical considerations

- What devices are required?
- What level of connectivity is needed?
- Are devices shared? If so, how does that affect use?

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What data is involved?

Identify clearly

- What data is collected?
- Is any of this data personally identifiable (directly or indirectly)?
- Is data collected actively (provided by people) or passively (generated by use)?

What happens to the data?

Map the data lifecycle

- How is the data processed?
- Who has access to it?
- With whom can it be shared, and under what circumstances?
- Where is the data stored?
- How long is it kept?

How is the data protected?

Clarify safeguards and limits

- What technical or organisational protections are in place?
- What risks cannot be fully eliminated?
- What would happen if data were accessed by unauthorised actors?

What decisions does technology influence?

Be explicit about impact

- Does the technology support or automate decisions?
- What decisions might affect access to services or assistance?
- Is there human oversight?
- Can decisions be questioned or challenged?

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What are the risks and benefits?

Consider realistically

* What benefits are expected, and for whom?
* What risks exist for individuals or the community?
* Are some groups exposed to higher risks than others?

What choices and control do people have?

Ensure agency

* What happens if someone chooses not to use the technology?
* Are there non-digital or lower-risk alternatives?
* Can consent be withdrawn later? How?
* Can data be corrected or deleted?

What happens if things change?

Plan for the future

* Could the technology be reused or expanded?
* How will people be informed of changes?
* How will renewed consent be sought if needed?

2. Final check before engaging communities

Before asking for consent, confirm that

- [ ] The team can explain the technology without technical jargon
- [ ] Risks and limitations are acknowledged, not minimised
- [ ] People have a real option to say no
- [ ] Consent is treated as an ongoing process
- [ ] Information will be updated if circumstances change

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3. Clear and actionable tips for facilitators

These tips are organized into the three key and cross-cutting moments of the process: how to communicate, how to validate, and how to record understanding of the technology within informed consent.

How to communicate

(making technology understandable)

If you can't explain it without slides or documents, it's probably not clear yet.

Use everyday language

- Avoid technical, legal, or abstract terms.
- Replace complex concepts with examples from everyday life.
- If you use a technical word, explain it immediately with an example.

Start with the experience, not the system

- First explain what the person will have to do and what will change for them.
- Leave the technical details for later (if necessary).

Adapt format and pace

- Use formats appropriate to the context: oral, visual, illustrations, audio.
- Speak slowly and in short blocks.
- Leave space for questions, silences, and reflection.

Acknowledge limits and doubts

- Say explicitly when something is uncertain or not yet defined.
- Avoid promises or absolute guarantees.

How to validate

(confirm understanding, not seek approval)

Understanding does not mean agreeing. Both are valid.

Don't ask "Did you understand?"

- That question often elicits automatic responses.

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- Instead, use open-ended questions.

Use the "explain in your own words" technique

- Ask people to explain what they think the technology will do.
- Listen without immediately correcting; identify misunderstandings first.

Validate critical points
Make sure people understand in particular:

- What data is collected
- What risks exist
- What happens if they decide not to participate

Observe nonverbal cues

- Doubts, silences, discomfort, or evasion are important signals.
- Adjust the pace or re-explain if necessary.

How to record
(document ethically and responsibly)

Recording is also an act of power: document carefully and respectfully.

Record learnings, not people

- Avoid names, personal data, or identifiers.
- Document patterns, frequently asked questions, and shared concerns.

Distinguish facts from interpretations

- Clearly separate what people said from what the team interprets.
- Use anonymous quotes only when they provide clarity.

Include what didn't work

- Record confusion, resistance, and rejection.
- This is key information for improving the design.

Close the loop

- Make it clear what will be done with the records.
- Whenever possible, return to the community with lessons learned or changes.

4. Risks, benefits, and essentials

Risks to consider

- Exposure of sensitive data
- Secondary use of technology
- Automation without explanation
- Technological dependence
- Non-obvious social consequences

Benefits that must be explained carefully

- What it really improves
- Who it works best for
- In what situations it does not help

Ethical essentials

- Real option to say no
- Comprehensible language
- Time to decide
- No pressure
- Transparency about limits and failures