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How to Conduct an Internet Impact Brief

Internet Impact Assessment Toolkit

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How to Conduct an Internet Impact Brief

Introduction

Using the Internet Impact Assessment Toolkit can help you perform a quick analysis of a legislative proposal, business decision, or technological development to promote informed decisions about the Internet. In this document we provide simple explanations of the goals, critical properties and enablers of the Internet, and a step-by-step guide to conducting and writing your own Internet impact brief.

What is the Internet Impact Assessment Toolkit?

The Internet Impact Assessment Toolkit (IIAT) was designed by the Internet Society to help people around the world assess the implications of changes that may affect the Internet, both at a fundamental level and as part of our shared vision of a thriving Internet.

The toolkit provides a framework for the analysis of proposed changes in policies, legislation, technologies, applications, business models, and regulations. Our goal is to help Internet stakeholders identify the possible effects, both positive and negative, and make more informed decisions.

Using the analytical tools within, you will get a clearer view of the potential effects of proposed policies, and be able to make alternative suggestions that can achieve the intended goals without harming the Internet. And based on your analysis, you will be able to clearly explain the pros and cons of a proposed regulation in a balanced way.

The Internet Way of Networking and the Internet Goals

The toolkit focuses on both the foundation of the Internet (what we call the “Internet Way of Networking”) and commonly accepted targets for the Internet (what we call the “Internet goals”).

The Internet Way of Networking describes key features of the networking model that is the Internet, i.e. what makes the interconnection of networks “the Internet”. It is defined by a set of critical properties that underpin the growth and adaptability of the Internet. Specific technologies and business models may come and go, but the Internet Way of Networking has been a constant foundation for the success of the Internet. The Internet Society believes that the critical properties of the Internet Way of Networking need to guide the evolution of the Internet to protect both innovation and stability. In this toolkit, these critical properties constitute the benchmark against which we can assess the impact on the networking model.

The Internet goals refer to shared aspirations for the Internet we want, meaning a network that is open, globally connected, secure, and trustworthy. Time and again, different groups and organizations worldwide with different viewpoints find common ground on this set of goals for the Internet. These goals guide our collective journey to a better Internet. They tell us how we want the Internet to be, now, and in the future. The Internet Society’s mission is also based on these goals, and to support discussions and analyses we have identified a series of supporting characteristics that advance the Internet, its infrastructure, and its use

towards these universal goals. We call these supporting characteristics “enablers”: they advance and enable the targeted goal. In this toolkit, these enablers constitute the benchmark against which impact on these aspirational goals can be assessed.

Using the Toolkit

The basic premise of the toolkit is that the Internet Way of Networking and the four goals for the Internet unlock the broader benefits of the Internet for everyone. Should legislation be proposed that could potentially affect the Internet, you can use the toolkit to build a picture of what the likely effect on the Internet will be.

The target of your analysis is to determine if the issue at hand impacts the critical properties of the Internet Way of Networking, and/or enablers of the Internet goals. Don’t be surprised if you find that proposed changes have mixed effects, positive in some ways and negative in others. Very few proposed changes have a cut-and-dried clear effect on the Internet, and you should be prepared to acknowledge both types.

In this case, a valuable part of your analysis is to describe whether the effect is strong or weak.

Use a two-pass approach: evaluate, and then analyze in depth.

First evaluate...	...then analyze
Evaluate the proposed change against each of the critical properties and the enablers. When looking at the goals, use the enablers to deep-dive and better understand the effects. Typically, this evaluation stage will turn up only a few things worth evaluating in depth.	When you find an enabler or critical property that will be affected, rate the effect of the proposed change as positive or negative. It is also helpful at this point to divide any effects into strong and weak effects to focus on the most important issues.

The evaluation stage is based on asking yourself questions: does this proposed change affect a critical property or an enabler of the Internet goals? Start by going down the list of critical properties and enablers and make a few notes on whether there is an effect.

It may not be immediately obvious if the critical property or enabler is affected by the issue you are analysing, so we suggest that you carefully read the detailed explanations of each [critical property](#) and [enabler](#).

You may be able to record or predict at least some effect for every critical property or goal enabler. However, your final analysis will be most helpful when you focus on the most significant effects. Your final document should highlight the most significant issues and illustrate the most important trade-offs. An exhaustive list of minor effects may be best left to an annex for those interested in seeing your path of thinking, or why you believe that some goal enabler or critical property is not strongly affected.

If you believe that the exact same reasoning on an effect should apply to multiple critical properties or enablers, you can group them together in your analysis so that they can be considered and discussed together. Or, if you find that you are cutting and pasting chunks of your analysis, you should pause and consider whether the effect is either very weak or whether the affected critical properties or enablers should be grouped together into a single discussion and analysis point.

To help you with this part of the process, the IIAT includes a collection of Internet impact briefs that apply the toolkit to emerging issues and provide valuable examples for your own assessment.

Producing your Internet Impact Brief

The goal of producing an Internet impact brief is to answer the question "How might this issue impact the Internet, positively or negatively?" Your preliminary assessment can generate a real impact and be a valuable input into the decision-making process.

The steps below provide a guide to how to write your Internet impact brief. However, these are only guidelines. You can adapt what you find here so that it works for you and the issue you are trying to analyze.

1. Summarize the Issue

Clearly describing the context and the issue will make it easier for the reader to understand the conclusions you reach. By starting from a common base, sticking to facts (not opinions), and stating the issue and context clearly, you set the stage for the rest of the discussion.

As you write your summary, be sure to identify and document the sources that you are using to support the issue statement and surrounding context. This documentation step is important not just at the beginning, but throughout your analysis. Feel free to cite or quote the [Internet Impact Assessment Toolkit](#) as well.

Providing easily verified documentation (hyperlinks are best!) means readers will be able to check your work. A transparent analysis will be both credible and reliable. By adopting good practices for management and sharing of data with others, others will be able to build on your analysis and corroborate your conclusions.

Your summary should have two parts: a description of the surrounding context, and the proposed change.

At this stage you are still trying to summarize the issue and inform the reader of your base assumptions. When you stick to the facts, readers will understand that you want everyone to make an informed decision—and they will be more likely to consider what you have to say later on.

1.1 Document the Relevant Context

It is important to contextualize and provide any relevant historical background to the issue. For example, to situate a proposed law in its historical context, explain the general legal framework around it, the proponents' stated motivations, and their expected outcome.

Questions to help set the context include: Why has the policy been introduced, i.e. what problem is it intended to address? What previous policies existed, and were they considered to be effective or not? What

is the new technological development and why is it significant? What has given rise to the emerging trend, and which types of organizations and interests are moving it forward?

1.2 Describe the Proposed Change

Start by naming and describing the main topic you’re analyzing. Keep things short and concise: quotations are perfectly acceptable. Get everyone on the same page by agreeing that you’re talking about the same thing: a proposed regulation or law, a change in business model, a new application, or a change in governance, for example.

This part of the brief is also important for the rest of your analysis. Simply citing the legal text may not be sufficient to describe the effect of the proposed change. Often it is also valuable to describe your assumptions, and to summarize what you have identified as the effect of the proposed change. For instance, a law that imposes new obligations on online service providers to share users’ data with law enforcement may not explicitly prohibit the use of end-to-end encryption, even though this may be the *de facto* effect of the law.

2. Evaluate and Analyse the Proposed Change

2.1 Summarize your Analysis as you Go

The chart below may help to provide a concise way to record the results of the evaluation exercise, which can be helpful before you start writing your brief.

Proposed Change:			
Internet Goal or Critical Property	Enabler (if a Goal)	Effect (Positive/Negative; Strong/Weak)	Discussion

For example, consider the following hypothetical scenario: a new regulation requires anyone connecting to the Internet to post a \$1,000,000 bond with a government as security against misuse. In this case, the result of analysis might look like this:

Proposed Change:	All new organizations connecting to the Internet must post a \$1,000,000 bond as security against misuse.		
Internet Goal or Critical Property	Enabler (if a Goal)	Effect (Positive/Negative; Strong/Weak)	Discussion
Globally connected	Unrestricted connection	Negative, Strong	Few organizations will be able to afford to connect, reducing global connectivity.

Globally connected	Unrestricted use	Negative, Strong	Fear of arbitrary charges against a security bond may cause organizations to severely restrict their use of the service, indirectly “self-censoring” and reducing global connectivity
Trustworthy	Accountability and authenticity	Positive, Weak	Shifting responsibility for self-policing to user organizations may increase overall accountability, creating a more trustworthy Internet.

The table above will help in your own analysis but can also be included in the Brief to help focus discussions. The results may not always lead to a clear conclusion on whether a proposed change is inherently “good” or “bad” for the Internet. With these issues on the table, the toolkit serves as a neutral reference point for readers to make informed decisions.

2.2 Dive Deep on the Impacts

A table format is great for summarizing information, but you should expand and explain your analysis of the most important strong effects. Be specific and explain how and why the proposed change affects the critical properties or goals of the Internet.

Your task is to connect the effect of the proposed change with the critical properties and enablers by explaining, in practical terms, what the impact is and how this results in harms or benefits to the Internet. You need to explain why and how that happens.

The more relevant data and expert knowledge you can apply, the more robust your analysis will be. How deep you can go will vary a lot from case to case. Data and information that supports your case by explaining impacts will help decision-makers understand context that they may not have access to otherwise. Where possible and advisable, more data and analysis—presented in a way that shows you understand the goals and drivers behind the issue—can help open up the discussion of alternative actions.

3. Write the Beginning, and the End

Up to this point, you may have a high-level analysis of the problem. Now is the moment to turn your thinking into a document that allows others to share in your assessment. Introduce your argument, present your facts, and then summarize your conclusion—including potential recommendations.

3.1 The Abstract

At this point you should have a good understanding of how the issue you’ve assessed will impact both what the Internet needs to exist (the critical properties) and what it needs to thrive (the enablers). A short abstract will provide a useful introduction to your Internet impact brief, as it will give the reader a quick peak of what your report intends to prove.

Write a short and concise one-paragraph summary of how the issue will impact the Internet in a clear and understandable “If that, then this” style, e.g. “If data localization goes ahead, our national economy will be prevented from accessing the full choice of services and range of opportunities of the global Internet.”

This will help to focus the reader/policymaker clearly on the problem at hand.

3.2 The Analysis

Once you have clearly stated what the problem is in your abstract, you should go on to present your analysis as described in steps 1 and 2.

3.3 The Summary and Conclusion

At the end of your report you should include a clear conclusion and, if applicable, recommendations on how to avoid harming the Internet.

Your analysis can have a positive and practical effect on discussions and decision-making. Through it, you may have the opportunity of a direct conversation with a policymaker, participate in discussions and consultations, build allies and knowledge, and even work with other people or organizations on issues of concern to you.

Sometimes, you will use the toolkit to analyze hypothetical issues—for example, you might be dealing with informal proposals, ideas that circulate in public debates, or draft laws that are under discussion but not yet published or introduced. In those cases, your analysis can provide essential and pre-emptive guidance on what is beneficial, harmful and helpful to securing the Internet’s benefits.

Sometimes, however, your analysis will deal with concrete issues already in place and producing discernible impact on the Internet, such as an existing law or technology. In these cases, your task is to provide input on how to correct the course in a way that is aligned with a healthy Internet.

Keep us in the Loop

The Internet Society has produced the Internet Impact Assessment Toolkit as a resource for everyone. Our intention is to create a library of information that stakeholders can ultimately turn to in order to learn how to do impact assessments and how or whether various policy decisions impact the Internet, and to also become part of a wider community that seeks to preserve the Internet way of networking. We welcome your feedback on the toolkit.