



Connect to People

How people use technology matters. Knowing the risks of texting while driving or how to use the Internet safely at any age can help us make better choices. Learn how we're helping to meet the diverse needs of technology consumers and fostering a workplace that supports all employees.



Human Rights

Materiality Assessment Topic: Freedom of Expression

Issue Summary

Worldwide deployment of advanced technology is enabling an unprecedented ability to communicate and exchange information around the globe. This free flow of information can provide enormous social and economic benefits. Governments are responsible for protecting human rights and advancing other important public objectives such as national security, public safety, law enforcement and preventing harm to children. Companies also have an important role to play in respecting human rights.

Our Position

AT&T supports and respects the protection of human rights, and we believe that freedom to access information, freedom of communication and respect for personal privacy are essential to advancing human potential and integral to our relationship with our customers.

Our Action

AT&T makes services available to customers in more than 175 countries around the world. We respect the freedom of expression of our users. We promote the right of our users to hold and freely share opinions without interference, and to access a full range of ideas and information. We believe restrictions on freedom of expression using communications services and the Internet will diminish the usefulness of these resources – dampening the exchange of ideas and reducing innovation and commercial opportunities.

Our commitment to this issue is detailed in our [Human Rights in Communication Policy](#). We were also the first American company to sign onto the guiding principles of the [Telecommunications Industry Dialogue on Freedom of Expression and Privacy](#); we continued this engagement through 2016. Our work is also supported by our [Code of Business Conduct](#), our [Privacy Policy](#) and our [Principles of Conduct for Suppliers](#).



AT&T Human Rights in Communications Policy

Our Human Rights in Communication Policy includes a commitment that we will respect and protect the freedom of expression of our users. The policy is owned by our Chief Sustainability Officer, with input from our Chief Privacy Officer and other business units affected by this issue, including: supply chain, legal and compliance. The policy includes a commitment to protect our users, particularly children, from harmful content by providing tools and information related to Internet safety. The Chief Sustainability Officer reports several times a year on sustainability issues, such as human rights, to the Public Policy and Corporate Reputation Committee of the AT&T Board of Directors.

We take very seriously our responsibility to protect customer information and privacy. We pledge to continue to do so to the fullest extent possible, and to always act in compliance with the law of the country where the relevant service is provided. Like all companies, we must provide information to government and law enforcement agencies to comply with court orders, subpoenas, lawful discovery requests and other legal requirements. We ensure that these requests are valid and that our responses comply with the law and our own policies. Our [Transparency Report](#) provides specific information regarding the number and types of demands to which we responded, both in the United States and internationally. We issue reports on a semi-annual basis.

We post our Human Rights in Communication Policy online, and we publicize it in a variety of ways, such as blogging, speaking at public events or sharing with policymakers. We make it available to our employees, particularly those most likely to interact with human rights issues. We also communicate the human rights policy to our suppliers; it is posted on AT&T's Supplier Portal, along with other policies and materials that explain our supply chain sustainability approach. We have implemented a sustainability-focused contract clause that specifically highlights the policies and obligates suppliers to adhere to programs in a manner consistent with these policies. We conduct periodic reviews and scorecards to measure suppliers on their sustainability efforts, based on survey responses that include questions about their human rights practices.

Telecommunications Industry Dialogue on Freedom of Expression and Privacy

In 2013, we became the first American company to join the [Industry Dialogue](#) (the "Dialogue") and sign onto its [guiding principles](#). The Dialogue included a number of telecommunications operators and vendors (both infrastructure and technology providers) who worked together to address the issues of privacy and freedom of expression as they relate to the telecommunications sector.



The full principles are available [here](#). In general, companies commit to:

- Establish human rights policies.
- Conduct human rights impact assessments.
- Create procedures to handle government requests.
- Adopt strategies, where feasible, to minimize impact of government requests on human rights.
- Protect personnel.
- Train relevant employees on policies.
- Share knowledge with stakeholders.
- Report on progress implementing principles.
- Inform development of policy and regulations.
- Examine possibilities for implementing grievance mechanisms.

Our 2016 report on Implementation of the Telecommunications Industry Dialogue's Guiding Principles is available [here](#). While other members of the Industry Dialogue became members of the Global Network Initiative in early 2017, AT&T will continue to adhere to and publicly report its work to implement the I.D.'s guiding principle, which provides a useful tool for aligning company operations in support of privacy and freedom of expression.

Engaging with Stakeholders

We are committed to working with governments, industry, consumers and civil society to promote human rights around the world in areas associated with our operations. We also believe these issues merit a society-wide conversation, so we regularly engage with stakeholders to explain our point of view, share best practices and learn from our peers.

We engage with groups such as:

- **The Center for Democracy and Technology (CDT):** AT&T has been an active supporter of [CDT](#) and regularly participates in its [free expression working group](#), as well as a number of its other formal and informal working groups addressing issues that affect human rights and freedom of expression on the Internet.
- **The Global e-Sustainability Initiative (GeSI):** Since 2012, AT&T has participated in [GeSI's](#) Human Rights Working Group, which is pursuing a practical means of implementing the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights across the ICT (Information and Communications Technology) sector – which includes Internet providers, telecoms and manufacturers. The working group is also coordinating GeSI's involvement in the European Commission's project to develop human rights guidance for the ICT sector.



- **Internet Governance Forum (IGF):** AT&T regularly attends IGF meetings, actively participating in the multi-stakeholder process that has historically governed the Internet. During these meetings, the company advocates against local storage mandates and other impediments to the free flow of information.
- **Multi-Stakeholder Processes:** AT&T has participated in a number of multi-stakeholder processes, including the Stockholm Internet Forum, events hosted by the Council of Europe, and in RightsCon (organized by Access Now). Through the Industry Dialogue, AT&T has also participated in a variety of stakeholder sessions with socially responsible investors, government officials and representatives of non-governmental organizations. In these various venues, we routinely speak in support of the free flow of information, freedom of expression and privacy online.