

Community Data Recommendations

Preamble

These recommendations cover how Common Space imagery is accessed, shared, and used. They rest on three anchoring commitments, not internal preference alone:

- Our own values and principles: imagery is shared global infrastructure, governed by the community it serves, not a commodity controlled by whoever can pay.
- International Humanitarian Law (IHL): distinction, proportionality, and precaution protect civilians and civilian objects in conflict, and our data must never become a means to violate them.
- International human rights law: privacy, non-discrimination, self-determination (including Free, Prior, and Informed Consent), and the right to access information protect the people our imagery depicts, not only the people using it.

1. Consent should flow toward communities, not away from them

International human rights law recognizes Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) as the standard for Indigenous peoples, and privacy protects any community from unwanted surveillance of home and movement. Common Space's own governance principle — authority sits with the community, not only the funder or requester — extends that same logic wherever a community can be identified, whether or not FPIC is a strict legal requirement there.

- Formalize an FPIC-modeled consent pathway for routine monitoring of sites where a specific community, Indigenous group, or local authority can be identified and reached.
- Give communities a pathway to request and opt out of being imaged at all and have that request reviewed by our working groups.
- Prioritize outreach (e.g., in-country ambassadors) and making imagery accessible (e.g., jpegs in news digests) to vulnerable communities

2. Sensitive contexts needs sharper safeguards

Data protection frameworks share a duty of precaution: avoid creating information that endangers the people it's meant to help (e.g., displacement/refugee sites, active conflict zones, informal settlements, sites tied to protected groups, anything combining imagery with enumeration or identity-adjacent analytics).

- Train members on best practices, especially for sensitive contexts, rather than restrict data usage or delay access
- Consider building a network of trusted go-to experts and those who know local contexts well enough to guide users

3. Local voices belong inside the governance structure

Participation in decisions that affect a community is a recognized human rights principle, not just good practice. Community input on tasking shouldn't be a one-time consultation — it needs a standing seat where routine decisions are actually made.

- Reserve standing community seats on the Routine Monitoring Working Group and the Tasking Committee as well as the Ethics Working Group
- Consider by what process communities can opt out of being imaged and how to explain what this means in terms of collections and data access

4. Transparency, weighed against protection

IHL's own accountability architecture depends on documented evidence — satellite imagery has helped establish grave breaches, from mass graves to unlawful attacks on civilian infrastructure. But documentation that identifies victims or witnesses can expose them to retaliation, which is exactly why release decisions can't default to full openness.

- Publish aggregate, non-identifying summaries of active monitoring sites and any community objections received and resolved.
- Do not publish or include locations and requester identities for any site carrying a sensitivity flag

- Report annually on how many FPIC or objection processes were initiated, and their outcomes, without naming the communities involved.

5. Licensing that enables sharing and commercialization

Open licensing extends our reach; commercialization sustains it. Neither is in tension with our mission. But no license, tier, or exception may create a path to a use that violates international humanitarian law — distinction and proportionality aren't one value among several to be weighed, they are the floor beneath every other recommendation here.

- Default public releases to an open license (a CC-BY-equivalent) rather than restrictive bespoke terms
- Enable commercialization for private sector members who are already paying a membership fee. This will make the initial data collections more valuable for those stakeholders, especially as we grow our archive.
- Write a categorical, non-negotiable exclusion into the data license: no use that facilitates targeting of civilians or civilian objects, indiscriminate or disproportionate attack, or any other IHL violation — regardless of requester, sector, or stated purpose.
- Separately exclude extractive or high-harm industries whose business model runs counter to the mission (unconsented resource extraction, surveillance-for-profit, mass repression), via a concrete prohibited-industry list rather than a values statement alone.

6. Democratize access: for individuals, not only institutions

The right to seek and receive information is a recognized human right, and “community-governed” should also mean community-usable. As currently scoped, access concentrates in institutional membership, which risks leaving out the independent researchers, journalists, students, and community members the mission exists to reach.

- Create a lightweight individual-access tier with a verification burden proportional to actual risk, not institutional-grade review for every individual user.
- Treat this as core to the democratization claim: access only institutions can use is not meaningfully more democratic than today's commercial default.

7. Meet users where they are

Many users already have workflows and tools for satellite imagery. Adoption depends on fitting into those, not requiring a new bespoke approach or system.

- Align data products and catalog formats with existing standards (e.g., STAC, common GIS formats) and distribution norms (e.g., Humanitarian Data Exchange) so partners can integrate without translation overhead.
- Build imagery product architecture to align with widely adopted existing tools like HOT's tasking manager, OpenAerialMap, QGIS, arcGIS and others.
- Establish partnerships with other organizations who are analyzing the imagery and creating derived data products
- Support multiple points of technical entry, from GIS specialists and legal fact-finders to field responders on basic connectivity, consistent with the low-bandwidth field-use mode already scoped for the imagery access portal.

8. Counter misuse through training and capacity-building, not just enforcement

Every safeguard depends on the people using the system understanding it. A rule that exists only in a policy document doesn't stop misuse; a requester who's trained on what "sensitivity-flagged" means, why the delay exists, or what counts as an IHL violation is far less likely to trigger the enforcement mechanisms in the first place. Treating training as a compliance afterthought misses that it's one of the strongest misuse-prevention tools available, and cheaper than adjudicating violations after the fact.

- Require a short onboarding module that covers the tasking protocol, prohibited uses, the consent and sensitivity-flag system, and how to report suspected misuse as a condition of membership, not an optional resource.
- Provide training materials and opportunities for user communities, including but not limited to humanitarian responders, researchers, journalists, and civil society organizations as well as decision-makers
- Build Common Space's internal capacity to evaluate sensitive requests from a shared, current understanding of IHL and human rights obligations (e.g., the Ethics Working Group, the Routine Monitoring Working Group, the Tasking Committee)
- Partner with existing training infrastructure (e.g., HOTOSM, UNITAR/UNOSAT, ICRC's IHL training programs) rather than building a parallel curriculum from scratch. This also reinforces our "meet users where they are" recommendation by using standards and institutions the sector already trusts.
- Treat repeated minor violations as a training gap to close, reserving revocation for willful or serious misuse. This keeps enforcement proportionate and signals that the goal is a well-functioning sector, not a punitive gate.
- Publish an annual, non-identifying summary of training uptake and reported-misuse trends alongside the transparency dashboard in section 4, so capacity-building progress is visible, not just enforcement outcomes.