

Common Space Governance Policy

1. Purpose

The purpose of this Governance Policy at **Common Space** is to establish a comprehensive, values-based governance framework that ensures the organisation is managed ethically, transparently, and in alignment with its humanitarian mission. This policy integrates best practices in nonprofit governance with the organisation's commitment to human dignity, freedom and human rights, radical openness, community-informed decision-making, and responsible stewardship of space, data, and the environment.

This governance framework seeks to ensure that Common Space operates independently of geopolitical influence, prioritising public benefit, and upholding the rights, safety, and interests of impacted communities and individuals worldwide. As stated in the Governance Principles, *"imagery and data must never be used in ways that violate human rights or contribute to discrimination, repression, or violence."*

2. Definitions

Several reviewers noted that key terms used throughout this policy would benefit from a shared, explicit definition. The following working definitions are proposed for terms used elsewhere in this policy; several remain subject to further refinement (see the companion Unresolved Questions document).

Humanitarian practitioners: individuals and organisations engaged in the provision of humanitarian assistance, preparedness, early warning for all, anticipatory action, protection, or disaster response, consistent with international humanitarian principles.

Impacted communities / global community stakeholders: communities, individuals, and groups whose rights, safety, or well being may reasonably be affected by Common Space's operations, including but not limited to those experiencing natural disasters, armed conflict, displacement, or other humanitarian emergencies. Reviewers were split on whether

"impacted" or "global" communities is the more accurate framing; see Unresolved Questions.

Public good / non-excludable and non-rivalrous: Common Space data, outcomes, and products/services must not exclude any person or community from using and benefiting from them in a manner consistent with Common Space's principles, and one community's use must not reduce their availability to others. Common Space outputs are intended to benefit society as a whole rather than any single commercial or political interest. Common Space supports the development of other digital public goods which add value to this ecosystem of users (e.g., open AI models, open derived datasets).

Independent (Board members): a Board member who is not an employee of Common Space and who has no financial or other material relationship with Common Space that could reasonably be expected to compromise their objectivity. The precise scope of "independence" (e.g., independence from Common Space itself versus from members' own employers) requires further Board decision; see Unresolved Questions.

3. Governance Principles

(See separate document on Principles in the Governance Taskforce Folder)

4. Board of Directors

Composition

- The Board shall represent a broad range of stakeholders, including humanitarian practitioners, civil society, academia, ethics and human rights experts, technical experts, and global community stakeholders, chosen to reflect the organisation's commitment to community-informed governance.
- A majority of Board members shall be independent, to ensure objectivity and prevent conflicts of interest.
- Diversity of geography, lived experience, and disciplinary expertise is required to ensure global representation.

Roles and Responsibilities

- **Strategic Guidance:** Provide oversight of corporate governance and mission alignment to ensure that Common Space's goals are primarily aligned with satellite tasking, access models and policies, applications development, and partnerships that uphold humanitarian and human rights principles and remain independent of geopolitical influence.
- **Policy Approval:** Approve major governance policies, including ethical use frameworks, access tiers, and data-safeguard and performance-audit metrics.
- **Strategy Approval:** Approve Common Space's organisational strategy, as recommended by the Governance & Nominations Committee. (The approval cadence e.g. annual is not yet specified)
- **Performance Monitoring:** Evaluate the performance of the Executive Director and senior leadership, ensuring adherence to values-based governance.
- **Performance & Impact Oversight:** Periodically assess the overall performance and impact of Common Space — including how effectively its policies, access tiers, and safeguards are functioning in practice — drawing on feedback and evidence reported by Executive Management and relevant committees.
- **Compliance Oversight:** Ensure compliance with applicable licensing frameworks while maintaining operational independence from national political agendas.

Committees/Working Groups

May include, but are not limited to:

- **Audit & Risk Committee:** Oversees financial integrity, risk management, and safeguards against harmful use of imagery.
- **Ethics & Human Rights Committee:** Ensures alignment with human dignity, do-no-harm principles, and international human rights and humanitarian norms. Investigates breaches of use by members, including unauthorised use of data and misrepresentation of end users.

- **Governance & Nominations Committee:** Oversees Board composition, multistakeholder representation, and governance practices.
- **Technical & Data Stewardship Committee:** Ensures FAIR data practices, interoperability, and responsible stewardship of space and data.
- **Outreach & Capacity-Building Committee:** Outreach missions for capacity building, training, and ground-based evaluation of outcomes; this includes training for professionals on accessing and using Common Space's Earth observation data, and internship or fellowship opportunities, with particular attention to scientists from the Global South.
- **Community Working Group/Committee:** Ensures a platform through which community members can engage with and understand the mission, and a space for their questions, suggestions, inquiries, and whistleblowing to be handled within Common Space, in coordination with the Ethics & Human Rights Committee where reports concern possible misuse.
- **Tasking Committee:** Oversees satellite tasking requests and publishes a public tasking queue and decision log — recording which prioritisation requests were received, which advanced, and the rationale for each — including the rationale for any conflict-zone holdback decisions. Publishing this rationale is intended to build trust and reduce disputes over what was prioritised and why.

5. Executive Management

CEO / Executive Director and Senior Management

- Responsible for implementing Board-approved strategies, ensuring operational independence, building a team and global stakeholder network, and upholding ethical principles firmly anchored in international human rights and humanitarian law.
- Must ensure that all operations — including tasking, data access, analysis and outcomes, and partnerships — reflect the organisation's commitment to "civil and humanitarian use," and desist from any

Common Space actions contributing to violence, human rights abuses, harm to civilians, armed conflict, or political violence and repression of civil society members.

- Maintain effective communication with the Board and governance bodies to support informed, community-aligned decision-making.
- Guide and oversee the development of applications, case studies, and ground implementation in various communities that deploy Common Space data and its methods.
- Ensures collection and reporting of feedback and evidence regarding Common Space's performance and impact, including the ethical quality of outcomes (e.g., value conflicts encountered and how they were addressed).
- Represent Common Space: the CEO and senior management collectively act as the organisation's principal intermediaries with external stakeholders, ensuring the organisation's vision, values, and strategy are effectively communicated and embodied, with specific stakeholder relationships distributed among senior leaders as appropriate.

6. Stakeholder rights and participation

Global Community Participation

Common Space recognises that affected communities, humanitarian actors, civil society, academia, and technical experts must have meaningful roles in shaping our mission. As stated in the Principles, *"the mission is governed through inclusive, global, multistakeholder structures that distribute and balance decision-making power."* This list is aligned with, and should be read alongside, the recognised stakeholder list outlined in the Governance Principle #10 (humanitarians, researchers, journalists, civil society, Indigenous organisations, and private-sector partners).

7. Partner engagement

Stakeholders may participate through:

- Working groups
- Governance committees
- Technical advisory and audit committees
- Case study co-development
- Community review mechanisms for performance evaluation
- Community-triggered review mechanisms for sensitive tasking or misuse concerns
- Publication of related peer-reviewed physical and social science research and applications development, plus presentation, dissemination, and discussion at scientific and public conferences
- Federated distribution through aligned open-data platforms and catalogs (e.g., OpenAerialMap, Humanitarian Data Exchange, the AWS Registry of Open Data, and other STAC catalogs), so that Common Space imagery can be accessed via tools and workflows the user community already trusts

8. Ethical Conduct

- All CS personnel, partners, and users must adhere to ethical use policies grounded in human rights and humanitarian principles.
- Imagery must never be used to support repression, discrimination, unjustified uses of mass surveillance, exploitation or exclusion of marginalized groups, profiteering, or the facilitation of offensive military operations and conflict-related actions that may lead to violence and human suffering.
- Ethical safeguards include user vetting, tiered access, and the ability to suspend or revoke access when harm is identified or likely to occur, based on available information.
- All personnel are expected to act with impartiality and inclusivity, ensuring that interactions with colleagues, clients, and community members are conducted without discrimination or bias — including on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, or other protected characteristics — and reflect a fundamental commitment to Common Space's principle on 'Equity, Access, Collective Benefit and Capacity.'

Note that this section has a companion policy document that outlines the Complaints Process and Policy.

9. Risk Management

Common Space maintains a robust risk management framework that includes:

- Identification and mitigation of risks related to harmful use, disrespect for human rights, geopolitical pressure, data misuse, and operational vulnerabilities.
- Rapid response protocols for misuse, including community-triggered reviews, co-ordinated between the Community Working Group and the Ethics & Human Rights Committee.
- A dedicated Data Use & Misuse Response Policy, to be developed, setting out the repercussions for data use agreement violations and the process for addressing the resulting harms to affected communities.
- Continuity-of-access as a top-tier governance commitment: documented succession or escrow planning for the data archive in the event of organisational disruption.
- A commitment to non-retroactive restriction of already-released, openly-licensed imagery: scenes released under an open license will not later be withdrawn or relicensed in a way that places downstream derivative datasets at retroactive legal risk, so that investment in derivative work remains rational.
- Stewardship of orbital space and environmental sustainability.

10. Compliance

Common Space is committed to:

- Complying with international human rights and humanitarian law, licensing frameworks, and space law, while seeking to ensure governance independence from national political agendas.
- Adhering to international humanitarian and human rights norms, legal instruments, and data protection standards.

- Complying with any national laws and regulations when operating or applying Common Space products locally in that nation.
- A procurement policy, to be developed, that sets out how software, hardware, and services will be procured — including risk assessments and mitigation strategies for suppliers connected to the militarisation of space, to the extent this can be identified and managed within supply chains — in support of the humanitarian mission and Common Space's commitment to radical transparency.
- Regular audits of compliance with ethical use, access controls, transparency commitments, and financial practices.
- Complying with the legal requirements of the jurisdiction in which Common Space is registered (currently in the state of Colorado in the United States) and the licensing frameworks and space-law instruments that apply.

11. Reporting and disclosure

Common Space will engage in:

- Public documentation of governance processes, tasking criteria, access decisions, data holdings, application cases, and policies.
- Reporting, at least annually, on mission impact, safeguards, and community engagement.
- Transparent disclosure of data logs, financials, partnerships, and risk management activities.

12. Policy review

- This policy shall be reviewed annually or as needed to reflect evolving best practices, humanitarian norms, and community expectations.
- Updates must be publicly documented to maintain transparency.