

# Open Government Partnership New Zealand

## National Action Plan 2018-2021

### End of Term Report

#### Commitment 8: Review of government use of algorithms

##### **Lead agency:**

Government Chief Data Steward, Stats NZ  
Working with Government Chief Digital Officer, Department of Internal Affairs

##### **Objective:**

To increase the transparency and accountability of how government uses algorithms.

##### **Ambition:**

- To ensure New Zealanders are informed and have confidence in how the government uses algorithms – automatic decision-making processes used by computer programmes – to identify patterns in data.

**OGP values:** Transparency and Accountability



##### **What we achieved:**


Since 2018 we have made considerable progress in the area of algorithmic transparency. The key achievements have been the development and publication of the Algorithm Assessment Report, and the launching of the Algorithm Charter for Aotearoa New Zealand.

The Charter, now in place for one year, has 27 signatories from across government, with more agencies expressing interest in signing up. Building on what we have achieved, we are turning our focus to supporting the implementation of the Charter.

While the development of the Charter is a significant milestone, we are aware that this is an evolving space, and that the launching of the Charter is not the end of the journey. Therefore, we continue to monitor developments to ensure the Charter is fit for purpose.

##### **Summary**

| Milestones |   | Progress  |
|------------|---|---|
| 1          | Complete an initial review of existing operational algorithms and their use across a range of government agencies<br><i>Start/End dates: 1 June 2018 to 31 October 2018</i>                             |  |
| 2          | Consider next steps for all-of-government assurance related to the use of algorithms in collaboration with Civil Society representatives<br><i>Start/End dates: 31 October 2018 to 28 February 2019</i> |  |

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| 3 | Update this commitment (and its milestones) to reflect progress made in previous milestones<br><i>Start/End dates: 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2021</i> |  |
|---|---|---|

**Progress key:**



some delays



underway



completed

### ***What we achieved***

#### Milestone 1: Complete an initial review of existing operational algorithms and their use across a range of government agencies

This milestone has been achieved.

We reviewed the development and use of algorithms in 14 government agencies, with a particular focus on operational algorithms that result in, or inform, decisions that directly impact people or groups.

The review looked at how these agencies are using algorithms to support their work, how these have been developed, and the safeguards that are in place.

The Algorithm Assessment Report presenting the findings of the review was published in October 2018.

#### Milestone 2: Consider next steps for all-of-government assurance related to the use of algorithms in collaboration with Civil Society representatives

This milestone has been achieved.

Following the publication of the Algorithm Assessment Report we consulted across the public service on our response to the Report's recommendations. Working across the sector enabled the development of a response that could support the objectives of the wider Public Service as well as increase the transparency and accountability of government use of algorithms.

This resulted in the development of a draft Algorithm Charter that would enable government agencies to make a public commitment to the transparent and accountable use of algorithms and other advanced data analytics techniques. We consulted with New Zealanders and civil society on the draft Charter. The consultation period ran from 17 October to 31 December and was reported on by local and international media.

34 written submissions were received in relation to the charter and associated issues. This included submissions from individuals, civil society organisations, universities, businesses and NGOs.

#### Milestone 3: Update this commitment (and its milestones) to reflect progress made in previous milestones

This milestone has been achieved.

We have regularly reported on the activities undertaken to support milestones 1 and 2 and achieved the outcomes they sought to accomplish.

Having delivered on the core milestones (1 and 2), we are now thinking about how we can better provide support to help agencies implement the Algorithm Charter. We have also set up an independent review of the Charter's first year, which is due to be completed by the end of 2021. When completed, the review will provide us with useful information that will guide the support we provide. For more information on next steps, see 'Where to from here' below.

### ***How we included diverse voices and engaged diverse communities***

As discussed above, we ran a public consultation process on the draft Algorithm Charter. We also regularly engage with Transparency International as we progress work on the Charter, including the independent review.

#### ***Commitment links:***

- [Algorithm Assessment Report](#)
- [Algorithm Assessment Report - Submissions](#)
- [Responding to the Algorithm Assessment Report – Improving Government Algorithm Transparency and Accountability](#)
- [Draft Algorithm Charter](#)
- [Consultation and submissions summary: draft algorithm charter](#)
- [Algorithm Charter for Aotearoa New Zealand](#)

#### ***Impacts:***

An impact of the end-to-end process itself, that is assessing the algorithms used by government, Charter development and implementation by signatories, has been to raise awareness of algorithmic use across a wide group of government agencies. In effect, the process has prompted agencies to stop and think about the algorithms they use and the processes they have around them.

In terms of the Charter itself, there are currently 27 signatories from across government, encompassing more than half of New Zealand's government departments.

With the Charter in place for a year, signatories have been making steady progress in implementing the commitments, although this differs considerably between agencies depending on their data maturity and use of algorithms.

We expect that the review will provide more information on the extent to which the Charter has improved algorithmic transparency, as well as the successes and challenges agencies have faced in implementing the Charter.

#### ***What we learned:***

Agencies have different levels of data maturity, meaning they all require different types and levels of support to implement the Charter. We are taking this into account as we develop a longer-term implementation plan for the Charter. The review will also provide useful information on the support agencies require and will inform our ongoing work on implementation support.

#### ***Where to from here:***

We are now looking to build on what has been delivered, including:

- Conclusion of the independent review of the Charter, which is considering progress over the first year of implementation.
- Continue to work with government agencies on implementing the Algorithm Charter.

- Continue to share our experience with international networks, when requested.
- Continue work to enhance longer-term implementation support, including incorporation of findings from the review, when completed.
- Continue working with Transparency International, our key civil society partner in this piece of work, as we further our work on the Charter.