Jordan Loewen-Colón
Ayodele Odubela
Jeanette Jordan

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Establishing Evaluation Criteria to Build Trust in AI Tools

As part of their policy training, the Fellows of the Summer 2024 Science and Technology Policy Fellowship culminated their program by working on a real-world government challenge. One team, Jordan Loewen-Colón, Ayodele Odubela, and Jeanette Jordan, proposed ideas to help the State of Utah's Office of Artificial Intelligence Policy (OAIP) ensure that its operations balance artificial intelligence (AI) innovation and regulation. Each team homed in on a specific policy problem, conducted research, and developed tailored solutions. The following is an overview of one team's solution that was adopted by the OAIP: establishing and publicizing standardized evaluation criteria for its AI Learning Lab program. Since this recommendation was first made in 2024, the OAIP has begun adopting aspects of the PIONR Framework and created a web page listing companies in regulatory mitigation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The State of Utah's Office of Artificial Intelligence Policy (OAIP) **should publish clear evaluation criteria for regulatory mitigation and create a public catalog of the current initiatives in its AI Learning Lab program.** The OAIP is the United States' first office of AI policy, positioning Utah as a leader in AI innovation and regulation. A cornerstone of the Office's leading work is its AI Learning Lab — a regulatory sandbox for Utah-based AI companies and industry stakeholders to study AI solutions. However, the Learning Lab's work remains opaque to members of the public, affecting trust, limiting engagement, and risking the exclusion of diverse stakeholders. Sharing (1) the OAIP's evaluation framework for Learning Lab partner AI initiatives and (2) a running list of those partners would ensure that the Learning Lab's work is aligned with the OAIP's values of increasing trust in AI activities and balancing innovation and compliance. This proactive approach would not only engage Utah citizens and help foster AI partnerships in the state but also set an example of responsible AI governance for other state and local offices.

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BACKGROUND

By establishing the first state-level agency to work on AI, Utah leaped to the forefront of collaborative AI regulation in the United States. Alongside Utah's 2024 AI development laws prioritizing transparency, accountability, and consumer protection, the OAIP aims to play a crucial role in maintaining public trust in AI.

Building public trust in AI requires citizens to see that AI technology benefits themselves and society.[1] Right now, the public is seeing the opposite. According to a 2022 study, only 15% of the top-cited machine learning research papers connected their projects to societal needs, and merely 1% considered their potentially negative societal impacts. This lack of society-oriented innovation contributes to AI's role in misinformation, security breaches, unmitigated bias, and oversurveillance. For example, AI tools have been shown to collect children's biometric data without parental consent, and biased surveillance systems have been used abroad for religious persecution. To cultivate public trust, especially among Utah's families and religious minorities, it is crucial for the OAIP to publicize its methods for proactively curbing AI's potential harms.

Increased transparency is also necessary to attract key stakeholders to the OAIP. Interviews with Utahns and entrepreneurs of AI startups demonstrate widespread uncertainty regarding the OAIP's work. In interviews conducted in July 2024, two Utah residents, Karen Zelnick Rivera and Tiana Hood, said that they did not know the OAIP's function. Meanwhile, in interviews with entrepreneurs in September and October 2024, Moody Abdul, CEO of Klarify, and Matt Dirks, managing partner at Neralake, expressed confusion about the application process and the criteria used by the Office's AI Learning Lab. Abdul and Dirks added that this ambiguity made it difficult for them to justify pursuing partnerships or investments with the OAIP. Without a more transparent framework, these uncertainties risk slowing Utah's AI innovation and discouraging potential investment.

"2024 Edelman Trust Barometer," Edelman Trust Institute, accessed on March 20, 2025, www.edelman.com/sites/g/files/aatuss191/files/2024-03/2024%20Edelman%20Trust%20Barometer%20Key%20Insights%20Around%20AI.pdf, 22.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To advance the OAIP's goals of promoting innovation, commerce, and public safety, we recommend that the Office adopt 2 key initiatives.

First, the OAIP should adopt a standard framework for evaluating AI Learning Lab applicants that is tailored to Utah's specific needs and values. To this end, we have drafted a new Prosperity, Integrity and Innovation, Openness, Natural Resource Stewardship, and Respect for Culture and Values (PIONR) Framework, in adherence with the OAIP's core focus areas: fostering economic growth, ensuring ethical AI use, promoting transparency, and addressing the evolving regulatory landscape. Given the rapid pace and complexity of evolving AI technology, a codified framework like PIONR would help the OAIP objectively evaluate both the technical feasibility and the societal impact of AI solutions.

Second, the OAIP should create a public web page that lists active AI Learning Lab participants and the PIONR evaluation criteria. This increased transparency would help applicants align their projects with Utah's specific values, such as privacy and ethical use, and ensure that the public has easy access to trust-building information about the Office's work. The web page could be administered through existing Utah Department of Commerce resources, requiring minimal periodic updates.

By prioritizing transparency and accountability in its approach to AI development, the OAIP could attract innovative AI companies, encourage citizen engagement, and ultimately solidify its leadership in responsible data practices.

Recommendation 1:
Transparent Evaluation Framework for Learning Lab Participants

The OAIP either should make its current evaluation framework for AI Learning Lab participants public or should adopt the proposed PIONR Framework. The evidence-based PIONR Framework assesses the strengths of AI technologies across five categories: Prosperity, Integrity and Innovation, Openness, Natural Resource Stewardship, and Respect for Culture and Values. This standardized rubric would empower governments that lack technical AI expertise to confidently make objective evaluations.

State and local governments currently rely on vendor relationships, brand reputations, and peer recommendations when assessing AI tools. This subjective approach has proved difficult and unreliable, as this complex technology is rapidly evolving. While strategies such as committees, expert consultations, and stakeholder engagement can help inform evaluations, AI innovation is outpacing these time-consuming methods. For example, in 2014, an evaluation loophole led New York City to implement an AI chatbot that advised businesses to break the law. Without a standard evaluation framework, other governments have implemented AI technologies that inadvertently failed to reflect societal values or failed to meet ethical innovation standards. The PIONR Framework would allow the OAIP to sidestep these pitfalls and model efficient, holistic AI regulation.

We recommend initially adopting a broad set of guidelines, like PIONR, which provides a structured approach to assessing AI technologies across dimensions that mirror the OAIP's focus areas. The OAIP could then narrow down the PIONR guidelines to create more specific qualitative and quantitative metrics based on industry-specific needs and problems. This flexibility could include qualitative metrics, such as protecting family privacy and promoting public welfare, as well as quantitative metrics, like technical feasibility, scalability, and potential economic impact. For instance, under PIONR, a proposed AI solution to manage traffic congestion could be evaluated based on its potential to reduce commute times by a measurable percentage, its scalability across different regions, and its compliance with data privacy regulations. This adaptable dual approach would ensure a balanced assessment of both the innovative potential and the societal impact of AI proposals.

For a sample of what implementing PIONR would look like, please see this document that outlines a sample evaluation framework.

Recommendation 2:

Transparent Public Web Page Listing Active Learning Lab Participants and Evaluation Criteria

To increase transparency and offer guidance for future AI Learning Lab participants, the OAIP also should create a dedicated web page that both publicizes the PIONR Framework and identifies active AI Learning Lab participants. Allowing Utahns to see the evaluation criteria and the companies that the OAIP is evaluating would provide opportunities for citizens to explore and understand how AI solutions might impact them.

As mentioned earlier, a web page would be simple to create, update, and administer using existing resources, yet it would have a large impact in ensuring clarity and fostering engagement. After adopting codified evaluation metrics for admission to the AI Learning Lab, the OAIP could simply add a description of the framework to the web page. Ideally, the OAIP could model a format like Twilio's AI Nutrition Facts, which was spotlighted by the Joe Biden administration, and include any qualitative and quantitative metrics used to assess each proposal. The public evaluation framework would not only help prospective partners tailor their applications to the AI Learning Lab but also elucidate the OAIP's commitment to promoting public trust.

The proposed web page should also provide selected information about each AI Learning Lab participant, including (1) their project's goals, (2) the specific societal issues they aim to address, and (3) their project's expected outcomes. This initiative would inform the public about ongoing projects and help guide future partners in aligning their submissions with the state's values and expectations. Transparency in this process would also allow the OAIP to better track the progress of proposals and quantify their successes.

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