



DAIR

# DAIR RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY | V1.0

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## Purpose of this Document

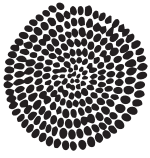
DAIR's research is intended to benefit communities which are typically not served by AI and create pathways to refuse, interrogate, and reshape AI technologies together. We strive for research which is comprehensive -- incorporating ways of knowing which consider lived experience and methods which move beyond a falsely objective analysis, and take people into account by refusing to trust quick technical solutions. We believe that advancement in science and technology should be based on community needs, not on market demands, marketing hype, or technical possibilities. This also includes deciding not to build potentially harmful systems, even where technically and economically feasible.

To foster these pathways, we are especially interested in working with groups broadly excluded from AI design and development. We center three communities in our work: 1) refugees unsettled due to historical and contemporary crises of racial capitalism and imperialism; 2) worker groups involved in AI data production; and 3) gig, contract, or otherwise precariously-employed workers who are increasingly becoming managed and surveilled by data-driven technologies. These three groups often overlap, as we see in the cases of Syrian refugees in Europe, Ethiopian refugees in Kenya, and Venezuelan refugees in

Colombia, whose critical data labeling work is often done under precarious, hyper-surveilled conditions. We believe that research should support organizing efforts within these groups and communication between communities.

We are beginning with a focus on refugees, data laborers, and gig workers because we come from and/or have a history researching alongside people from these communities. Our aim is to collaborate with members of these communities to produce knowledge and technology that focuses on the "margins." In this document, we refer to them as community collaborators (as opposed to informants, subjects, or participants) to emphasize our intention to build lasting coalitions and reject asymmetrical and extractive research practices.

The intention of this document is two-fold: First and foremost, it should serve as a mechanism of accountability. By publishing our research philosophy publicly, we want to provide a set of principles by which our communities can hold us accountable and ensure that our work accords to aspirations which we have set out for ourselves. Secondly, we hope that this work can provide guidelines for other researchers, advocates, and scholars working in the nexus of technology and society.



# 1. COMMUNITY: Reducing the distance between researchers and community collaborators

Our research centers lived experiences from communities which are not typically represented in AI research. We strongly believe in a bottom-up approach, supporting and prioritizing research and researchers that emerge from the communities that we center in our work and their specific needs. Our approach comprises three key aspects. First, by fostering a distributed team, we reduce the distance between researcher and community collaborators—both geographically and in terms of our researchers’ contextual knowledge of and commitment to specific community needs. Second, we refuse to treat any individual as a tokenized stand-in for any community. Instead, we understand community as a network of shared trust, accountability, similar beliefs, bounds of solidarity, and shared resources. Finally, we realize that there is a long history of researchers co-opting research and knowledge authored by specific communities towards their own end. We work against that impulse by interrogating our positionality—understood as the social and political contexts that shape our individual outlook on the world—and knowing that this is an ongoing task. We aim to be continually reflexive about the negotiations that take place for the research to happen and the power differentials between researcher and community collaborators.

## Resources

### → Self-reflexive questions:

- Who are we in relation to the community collaborators?
- Who do we have access to and who can we access?
- In what ways are we part of the participating community? Who considers us insiders/outside, and in what ways?
- How do we decide who to support, listen to, trust for information?
- Can our relationship with the collaborators be weaponized against them?
- How may we be in community in one way (e.g. nationality) but not in community in other important ways (e.g. class, social status)? Does that launder or obscure power relations?

### → Learn more:

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## 2. TRUST AND TIME: Forging meaningful relationships with communities

We aim to be intentional about conducting research that emerges from specific community needs. Identifying specific community needs requires the forging of deep, lasting relationships that take long to be fostered and nurtured. We are committed to investing in people and do not parachute researchers in merely to extract data. We believe in the power of time and dedication to conduct transformative research. We also want our researchers to have the time and space to work with community collaborators, establish rapport, and conduct projects at a pace that gives benefit to the participating communities while preserving our researcher's health. This is markedly different from the time horizon of academic publishing, funder reports, and other deadlines that often affect research goals.

### Resources

#### → Self-reflexive questions:

- How are we engaging with the collaborating community, and for how long?
- Are the time and mode of engagement enough for us to establish meaningful relationships with the collaborators?
- How are we making sure they can shape the research process, have access to the findings, and can make use of them?
- With limited resources/time, what takes precedence: the research questions or the community needs? How do we move beyond such binarisms?
- Are we still engaging with the community collaborators after the findings are published? How?

#### → Learn more:

[Bockarie, Moses John. 2019. "We Need to End 'Parachute' Research Which Sidelines the Work of African Scientists." \*Quartz\*. Retrieved November 18, 2022.](#)

[Brereton, Margot, Paul Roe, Ronald Schroeter, and Anita Lee Hong. 2014. "Beyond Ethnography: Engagement and Reciprocity as Foundations for Design Research out Here." Pp. 1183–86 in \*Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, CHI '14\*. New York, NY, USA: Association for Computing Machinery.](#)

[Dabiri, Emma. 2019. \*Don't Touch My Hair\*. Penguin UK.](#)

[Mahadeo, Rahsaan. 2022. "Whose Time Is It?: How Black Youth Build New Temporalities by Funking the Clock." \*The Sociological Review Magazine\*, March 8.](#)

[Nagar, Richa. 2006. \*Playing with Fire: Feminist Thought and Activism Through Seven Lives in India\*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.](#)

[Samuels, Ellen. 2017. "Six Ways of Looking at Crip Time." \*Disability Studies Quarterly\* 37\(3\).](#)

[Simpson, Audra. 2007. "On Ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, 'Voice' and Colonial Citizenship." \*Junctures\* \(9\):67–80.](#)



### 3. KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION: Co-constructing knowledge with our communities.

Knowledge production is always situated. Research which attempts third-party objectivity or a “view from nowhere” that keeps researchers “at a safe” distance from the communities they study is not possible in work on sociotechnical systems. We acknowledge that there are different ways of knowing, and the way that makes sense to the researcher does not always make sense to community collaborators. Our aim is co-constructing knowledge together with the collaborating communities and fostering collective sensemaking. We see ourselves as facilitators, not as “discoverers” of findings. We aim to facilitate spaces for dialogue, ask questions, and prompt conversations that help communities interrogate, discuss, design, and/or refuse AI technologies. We believe in the power of shared knowledge for community organizing, fighting injustice, fostering solidarity, and creating better futures.

#### Resources

##### → Self-reflexive questions:

- How is our research helping fight injustice?
- How does our research prompt critical conversations and support community organizing?
- What privileges do we hold in relation to the community collaborators?
- How is this research important to them?

##### → Learn more:

[Cané, Romina Belén, Ana Küyen Graziano, and Berenice Muñoz. 2021. “Desde el barrio: experiencias de educación popular e investigación participativa en Bahía Blanca- Argentina.” \*Revista nuestrAmérica\* 9\(17\).](#)

[Cochran, Patricia A. L., Catherine A. Marshall, Carmen Garcia-Downing, Elizabeth Kendall, Doris Cook, Laurie McCubbin, and Reva Mariah S. Gover. 2008. “Indigenous Ways of Knowing: Implications for Participatory Research and Community.” \*American Journal of Public Health\* 98\(1\):22–27.](#)

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[Goffe, Tao Leigh. 2020. “Unmapping the Caribbean: Toward a Digital Praxis of Archipelagic Sounding.” \*Archipelagos\* \(5\).](#)

[Haraway, Donna. 1988. “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective.” \*Feminist Studies\* 14\(3\):575–99.](#)

[Harding, Sandra. 1991. \*Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?: Thinking from Women’s Lives\*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.](#)

[Michi, Norma. 2010. \*Movimientos campesinos y educación: el Movimiento de los Trabajadores Rurales Sin Tierra y el Movimiento Campesino de Santiago del Estero-VC\*. Buenos Aires: Editorial El Colectivo.](#)

[Millennials Are Killing Capitalism. 2020. "Wildcat The Totality' - Fred Moten And Stefano Harney Revisit The Undercommons In A Time Of Pandemic And Rebellion \(Part 1\)." Retrieved November 18, 2022.](#)

[Muñoz-García, Ana Luisa, Andrea Lira, and Elisa Loncon. 2022. "Knowledges From the South: Reflections on Writing Academically." \*Educational Studies\* 0\(0\):1–16.](#)

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[Whose Knowledge? 2018. "Part 2: Transformative Practices for Building Community Knowledge." \*Whose Knowledge?\* Retrieved November 18, 2022.](#)



## 4. REDISTRIBUTION: Redirecting resources to fund community-led research.

Participation in research is a form of labor and knowledge transfer, and it should be paid accordingly. Community collaborators ought to be compensated and recognized for their time and contribution in the same way researchers are. Moreover, the geographical location of collaborators should not be an excuse for researchers to perpetuate differential treatment and financial inequities. We want to contribute to the broader goal of resource redistribution to communities, and especially, on-the-ground researchers and activists. This implies prioritizing their access to and use of our research findings, contacts, and platforms. But also, we want to make sure that the financial resources that we have at our disposal are redirected to support research and activist initiatives in contexts and places where resources are much needed. We are committed to redistribution in the sense of providing under-resourced researchers and activists with funds for work that they are often already doing. Fundamentally, this is a question of epistemic justice: We believe that this form of redistribution can contribute to the advancement of science by supporting ways of knowing that are often silenced from mainstream research and public discourse through lack of funding.

### Resources

#### → Self-reflexive questions:

- How are we compensating community collaborators? What do they get out of our research?
- Are they getting the same funds, acknowledgement, opportunities, respect that we get from research?
- How does this project uplift local activists, researchers, and journalists who have been working on the ground for longer?
- How can we funnel financial resources to scholar-activists already doing the work?

#### → Learn more:

[Tkaronto CIRCLE Lab. "Collaborative Indigenous Research." \*Collaborative Indigenous Research\*. Retrieved November 18, 2022.](#)

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[Chenou, Jean-Marie, and Carolina Cepeda-Másmela. 2019. "#NiUnaMenos: Data Activism From the Global South." \*Television & New Media\* 20\(4\):396–411.](#)

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[Ricaurte, Paola. 2019. "Data Epistemologies, The Coloniality of Power, and Resistance." \*Television & New Media\* 20\(4\):350–65.](#)



## 5. ACCOUNTABILITY: Keeping ourselves and our research true to our communities.

Doing community-based research means balancing our commitments between research networks and participating communities. Often, the priorities, time horizons, and expectations of both groups do not align, which forces researchers to be confronted with which to put first. We choose to prioritize community needs and experiences as well as lasting relationships over deadlines and publications. We take time and space to conduct research that is meaningful to us and to the communities that we work with. This also involves presenting our findings in ways that are broadly legible beyond academic circles. More importantly, we aim to hold ourselves accountable to these communities to make sure that our research findings constitute a positive contribution to them and their needs. One way of doing this is having our research go through community review processes in which researchers, tech and gig workers, activists, and community organizers are involved in the process from the beginning. They are involved in the ideation, the problem formulation, the design, the execution, and the publication of research findings.

### Resources

#### → Self-reflexive questions:

- Who is the primary recipient of our research contributions?
- Are we working for our research questions or for the community?
- How can we foster dialogue between our research questions and the community's needs and experiences?
- How does this project benefit underserved communities and community members?
- Are the research outputs broadly accessible?
- How do we hold ourselves accountable to the community?

#### → Learn more:

[Birhane, Abeba, William Isaac, Vinodkumar Prabhakaran, Mark Díaz, Madeleine Clare Elish, Jason Gabriel, and Shakir Mohamed. 2022. "Power to the People? Opportunities and Challenges for Participatory AI." Pp. 1–8 in \*Equity and Access in Algorithms, Mechanisms, and Optimization\*. Arlington VA, USA: ACM.](#)

[Kim, Mimi E. 2011. "Moving Beyond Critique: Creative Interventions and Reconstructions of Community Accountability." \*Social Justice\* 37\(4 \(122\)\):14–35.](#)

[Le Dantec, Christopher A., and Sarah Fox. 2015. "Strangers at the Gate: Gaining Access, Building Rapport, and Co-Constructing Community-Based Research." Pp. 1348–58 in \*Proceedings of the 18th ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work & Social Computing, CSCW '15\*. New York, NY, USA: Association for Computing Machinery.](#)

[Sloane, Mona, Emanuel Moss, Olaitan Awomolo, and Laura Forlano. 2020. "Participation Is Not a Design Fix for Machine Learning." arXiv.](#)

[Woodcock, Jamie. 2021. "Towards a Digital Workerism: Workers' Inquiry, Methods, and Technologies." \*NanoEthics\* 15\(1\):87–98.](#)





## 6. INTERROGATING POWER: Creating spaces for communities to question elites.

Understanding the values and logics behind AI, why people and communities “on the margins” are broadly excluded from its development, and how this affects all of us, requires interrogating power. Part of our work with community collaborators is to “study up,” that is, to expand the field of inquiry to study decision makers, tech elites, and other powerful players that have remained significantly unquestioned in AI research. With this approach, we intend to flip the script and create spaces where community collaborators can research and interrogate elites, instead of having elites studying “underserved populations,” as is typically done in academia. We are committed to fighting deceitful and dangerous AI hypes by producing knowledge that is useful and accessible to the people and communities broadly excluded from AI design and development. We believe this form of research can be a powerful tool for communities to organize, interrogate technology, and hold decision-makers accountable.

### Resources

#### → Self-reflexive questions:

- How can our research interrogate tech and research elites?
- Is our research helping community collaborators ask questions instead of being interrogated?
- How do we get access to ask questions to decision-members? What negotiations are involved in the process? What questions remain unanswered?
- Are collaborators and their communities put in danger in any way while studying up?

#### → Learn more:

[Barabas, Chelsea, Colin Doyle, JB Rubinovitz, and Karthik Dinakar. 2020. “Studying up: Reorienting the Study of Algorithmic Fairness around Issues of Power.” Pp. 167–76 in \*Proceedings of the 2020 Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency, FAT\\* ’20\*. Barcelona, Spain: Association for Computing Machinery.](#)

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[Forsythe, Diana E. 2001. \*Studying Those Who Study Us: An Anthropologist in the World of Artificial Intelligence\*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.](#)

[Miceli, Milagros, Julian Posada, and Tianling Yang. 2022. “Studying Up Machine Learning Data: Why Talk About Bias When We Mean Power?” \*Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction\* 6\(GROUP\):1–14.](#)

[Nader, Laura. 1972. “Up the Anthropologist: Perspectives Gained From Studying Up.” Pp. 284-311 in \*Reinventing Anthropology\*, edited by D Hymes. New York: Vintage.](#)

[Study Up. “Case Study: The Judicial Risk Assessment Tool” Retrieved November 18, 2022.](#)



## 7. IMAGINATION: Daring to imagine better tech and better futures.

We are intentional about fostering a research team that is multidisciplinary, diverse, and geographically distributed because we believe that the integration of different contributions, traditions, skills, epistemologies, communication styles, and ways of knowing can promote unexpected imaginaries. In the same way, we want to form a coalition with community collaborators to share experiences, learn from one another, and foster an imagination of what could be otherwise. Although much of our work is committed to act as a check on existing systems, we also want to dream beyond these systems and towards worlds which we would want to inhabit. We draw on multiple traditions of futurism and community engagement to go beyond critique. We dare to imagine better futures, even those that today seem impossible.

### Resources

#### → Self-reflexive questions:

- How is our research helping to question the status quo?
- What kind of imaginaries is our research encouraging?
- How are we fostering diverse ways of knowing and how are we communicating knowledge?
- Is our research contributing to mutual learning?
- What horizons is our research reaching towards?

#### → Learn more:

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[Benjamin, Ruha. 2016. "Ferguson in the Future." Retrieved November 18, 2022.](#)

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[brown, adrienne maree. 2017. \*Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds\*. Chico, CA: AK Press.](#)

[Freire, Paulo. 2000. \*Pedagogy of the Oppressed\*. 30th anniversary ed. New York: Continuum.](#)

[Imarisha, Walidah, and adrienne maree brown. 2015. \*Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements\*. Oakland, CA: AK Press.](#)

[Nelson, Alondra, ed. 2002. \*Afrofuturism\*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.](#)

[Okorafor, Nnedi. 2017. "Nnedi Okorafor: Sci-Fi Stories That Imagine a Future Africa | TED Talk." \*TED Conferences\*.](#)

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