



RightsWise

Investing with a
Digital Rights Lens.

Stakeholder Impact Canvas

Why a digital rights lens?

Technology affects nearly every aspect of our lives. Yet, trust in tech is falling. This decline is driven in large part by the power and impunity of Big Tech companies, whose market dominance makes it difficult to hold them accountable for the ways they cause harm to people and society.

Another contributor to the decline in trust gets far less airtime — **the role of early and growth-stage startups whose products and business models can and do cause real, lasting harm to people and communities.** Unlike Big Tech, startups that cause harms to people and society (whether intentionally or not), are more likely to feel a business impact as a result of those harms — either by losing user trust and growing more slowly, getting pulled into crisis communications, spending precious time and money on legal proceedings, or preparing for congressional questioning.

By bringing a digital rights lens to product and business model decisions, smart founders and their investors can invest in an ounce of prevention that saves significant time and money down the line. What's more, RightsWise tools like this Stakeholder Impact Canvas build on guidance from the UN Guiding Principles for Business & Human Rights to fit the needs and context of early-stage startups across sectors. All of which means, taking a digital rights lens in investing and company building is a great first step towards implementing established global norms on human rights due diligence.

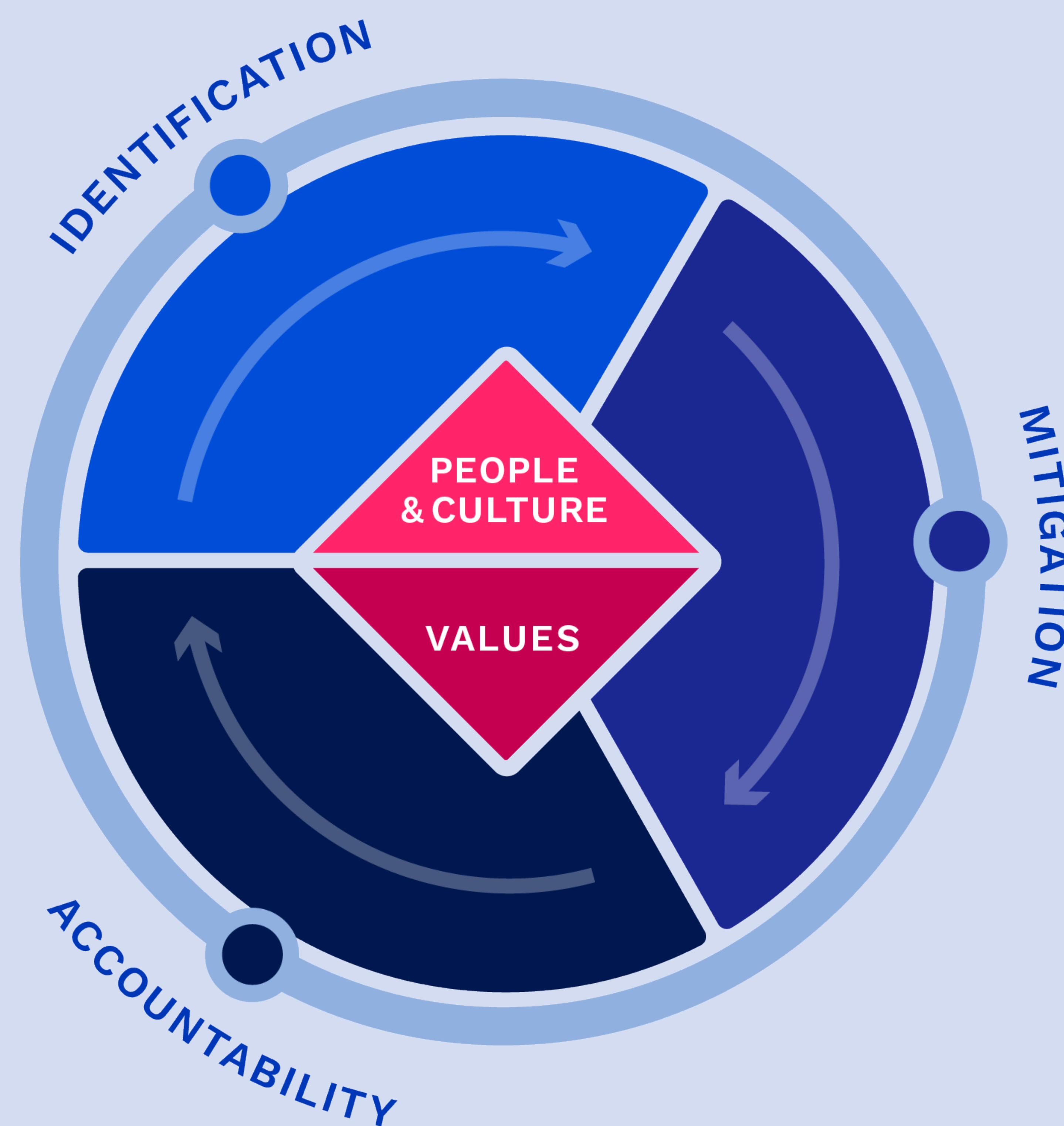
Why start with stakeholders?

A core principle of bringing a digital rights lens to startup investing and company building is understanding that digital rights are about people and communities. Specifically, digital rights refer to the ways in which technology affects how people access and exercise their human rights.

To explore those impacts, and take action to avoid harmful ones, it's critical to first identify who a company's broad set of stakeholders are. A stakeholder impact canvas is a quick, easy way for startups and their investors to intentionally peer around corners to identify, anticipate and avoid negative impacts to people before they happen. In doing so, they protect the startup from costly distractions, and help build trust in the brand. For power users, a Stakeholder Impact Canvas can also be used to identify unique opportunities for rights-affirming value creation.

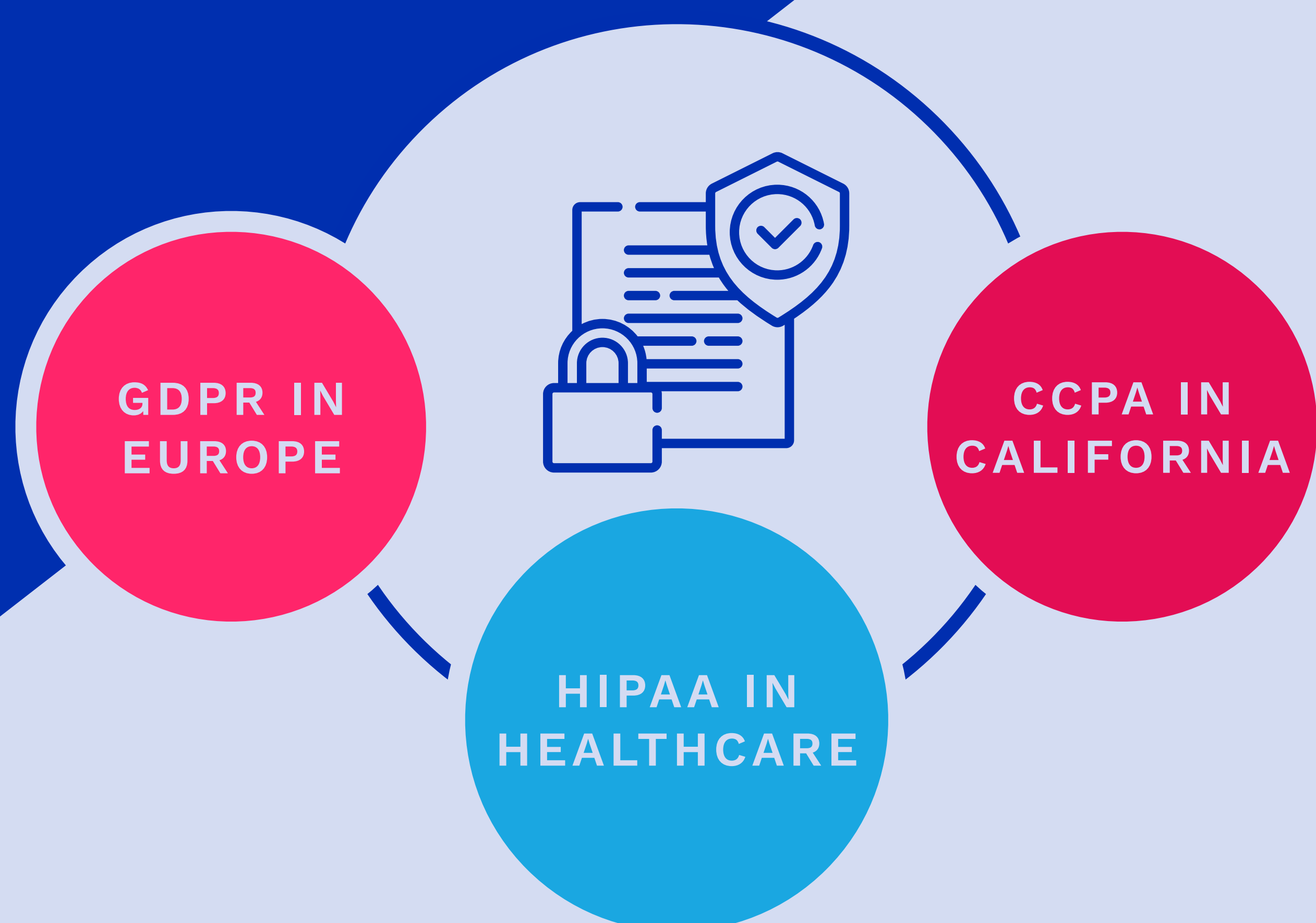
The RightsWise framework

The RightsWise framework helps bring a digital rights lens to early-stage investing and company formation by highlighting five areas of startup capacity to manage digital rights impacts.



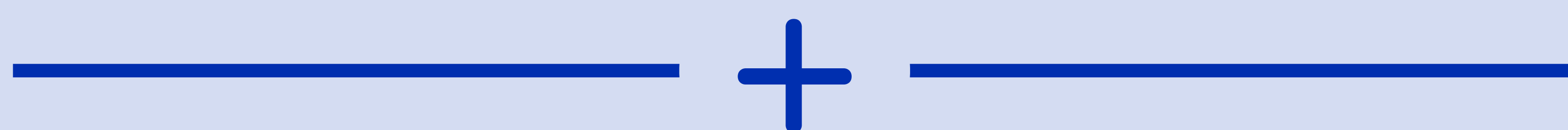
VALUES	At the core, startups must believe in their responsibility for the company's impact on people and their rights (values) .
PEOPLE & CULTURE	They must also believe in the imperative of building a diverse team and inclusive culture where healthy conflict can help raise potential harms early before they happen (people & culture) .
IDENTIFICATION	Startups must iteratively build their capacity to identify , then mitigate and avoid harms, and finally, take steps to hold themselves accountable to these commitments. All of which means, taking a digital rights lens in investing and company building is a great first step towards implementing established global norms on human rights due diligence.
MITIGATION	
ACCOUNTABILITY	

First, some definitions.
Digital Rights is the
combination of:



Data Rights

Data rights are rights which allow people to control how data about them is collected, used, corrected, and erased.



Right to
Health



Right to Freedom
of Expression



Right to
Privacy



Right to
a Fair Trial



Right to
Work



Right to
Education

Human Rights × Tech

Data-driven technology mediates how people access and exercise their human rights. So, digital rights also include the full breadth of human rights as impacted by technology.

Stakeholder Impact Canvas

WHAT IS THIS TOOL?

The Stakeholder Impact Canvas is a tool that helps early-stage startups identify their stakeholders and explore how their product, business model, and operations may impact stakeholders in different ways.

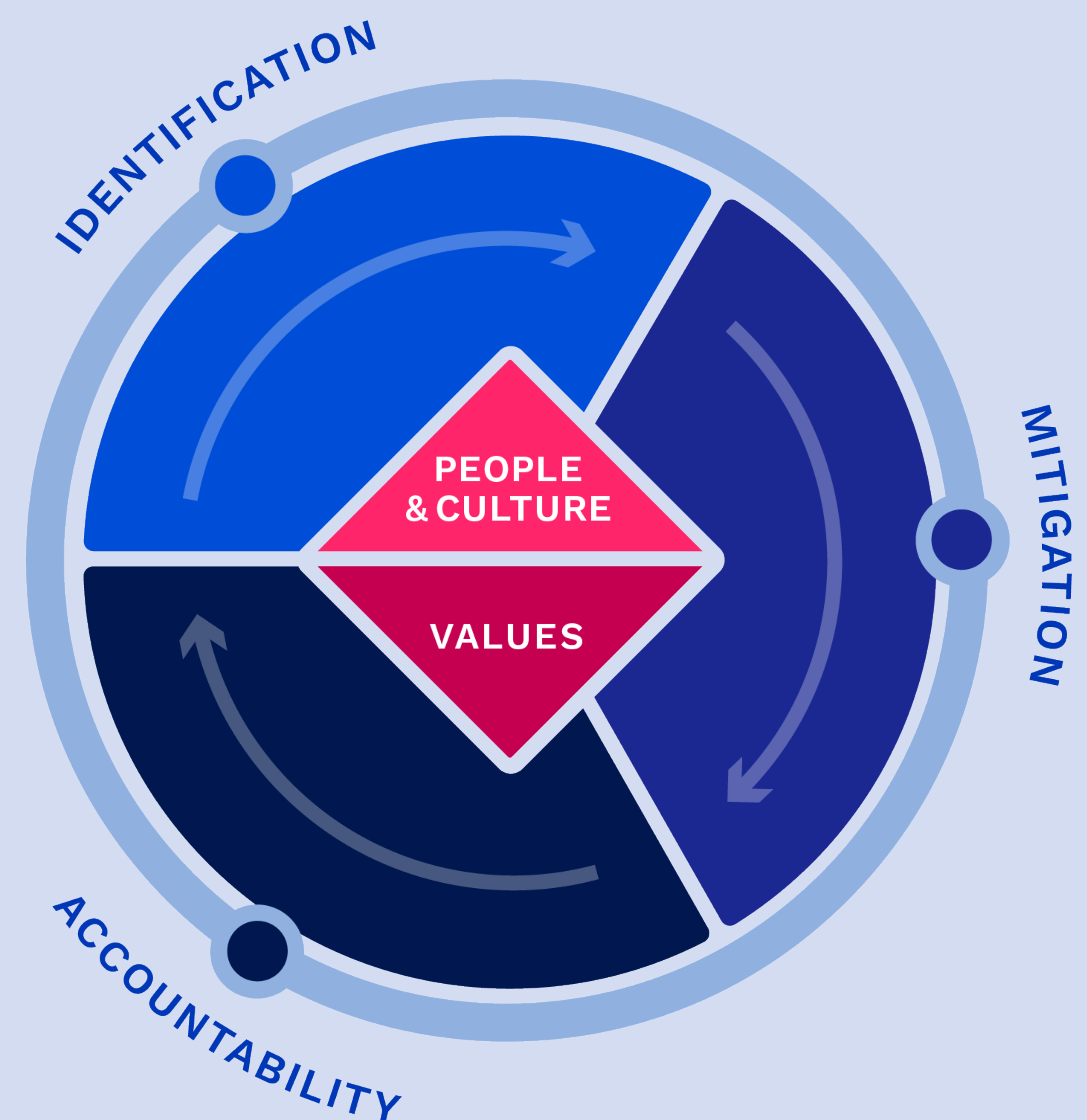
In the RightsWise framework, it can be used to help companies **identify** real or potential digital rights impacts to people and establish a clear **values** commitment around how they will respect people and their rights.

WHEN SHOULD IT BE USED?

A stakeholder impact map can be used as early as idea stage and well into growth stages. To get the most out of this tool, revisit your stakeholder impact canvas annually in line with strategy and budget decisions. At a minimum, consider updating your canvas at key moments in the company's lifecycle (e.g., business model pivot, new product development, new market entry, new customer segment). Doing so can help identify and avoid potential digital rights harms and the distracting fallout that comes with them before they happen.

WHO IS THIS FOR?

This tool can be used to facilitate stakeholder impact mapping for early-stage startups and their investors or advisors, in all sectors.



Stakeholder Impact Canvas : how should I prepare?

FORMAT

There are many ways to use this tool. In an ideal scenario, startups will set aside 1.5-2 hours to work through these steps in a workshop format. See a sample 2 hour schedule below.

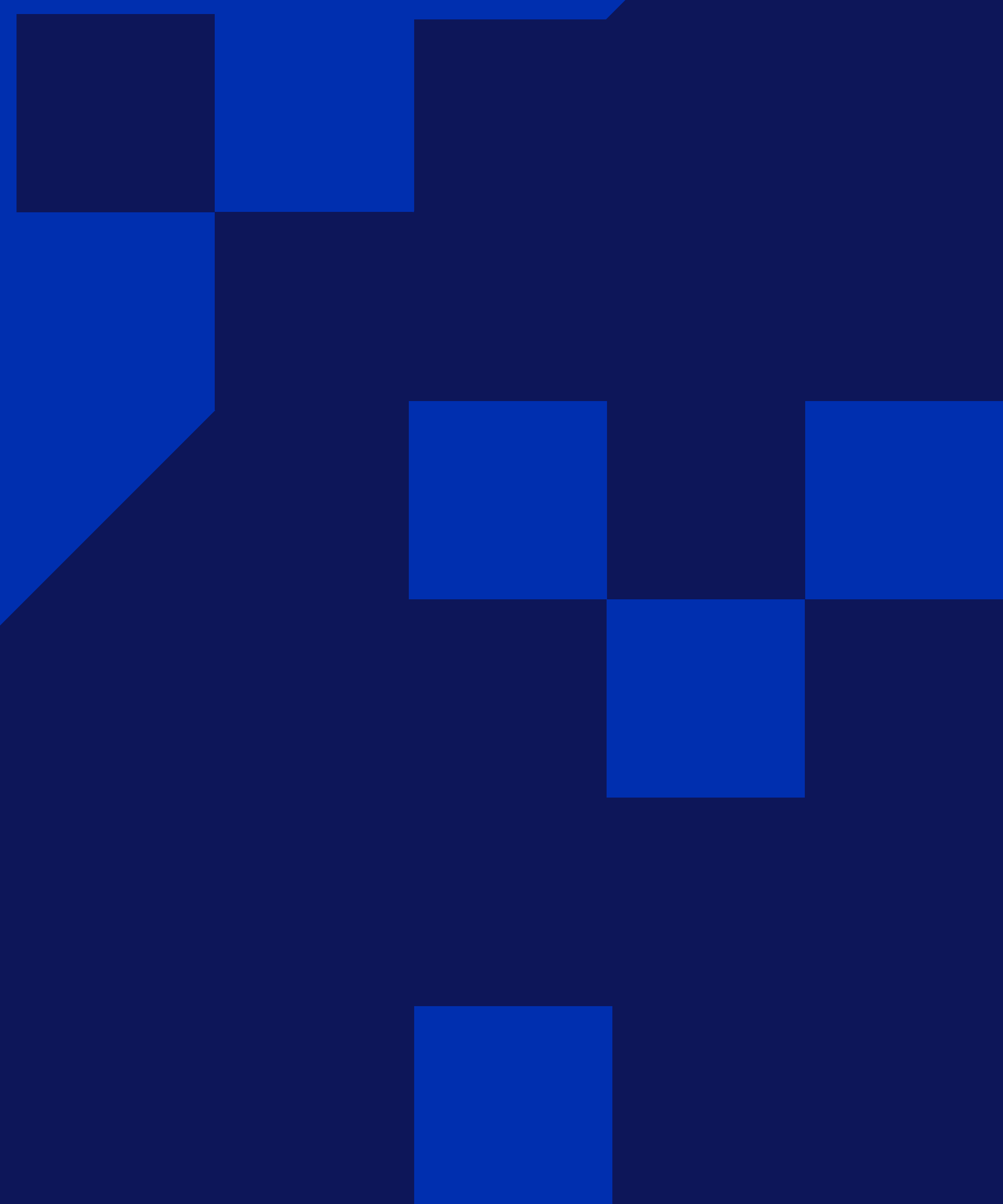
5 min	Objectives, ground in next 18 month strategy
15 min	Brainstorm stakeholders
30 min	Discuss, consolidate stakeholders, identify those at higher risk
15 min	Brainstorm impacts
30 min	Discuss, consolidate impacts
15 min	Prioritize impacts
10 min	Capture next steps & open items

WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE

This depends on your stage. For startups with 10 or fewer employees, it's possible to complete the canvas with the full team. For larger startups, it's critical to identify leaders from across functions, including: senior leadership, product & engineering, operations (including, if distinct, HR, strategy, legal, and finance). As you assemble the team to work on your canvas, be mindful of blindspots the group may have, and consider how you might fill them by inviting or consulting with additional people or groups.

STEP 1:

Identify your stakeholders



Step 1: Identify who you impact

Brainstorm a list of any and all people or groups that are or might be impacted (positively and negatively) by your company. See the questions below to expand your thinking. Where possible, be specific about subgroups within a broader stakeholder category. Be mindful of intersectional identities. Pay particular attention to groups of people with less power or agency over the impacts the company may have on them.

EXPAND YOUR THINKING BEYOND CUSTOMERS

PRODUCT USE CASES

- Beyond core users, who else interacts with or relies on the product or its outcomes?
- If your product or service is used for a purpose other than what you intend, does that add new stakeholders to consider?

VALUE PROP & REVENUE MODEL

- Who pays for the product? Who uses it? How are those groups different?
- Who gets value from the product or service — directly or indirectly?
- Who is excluded from the value of the product or service?

VALUE PROP & REVENUE MODEL

- Who do you source, treat, and use data from? Whose data?
- Who are your suppliers and what do they do?
- Who are your customers' customers?

CONSIDER HOW STAKEHOLDERS WITH DIFFERENT IDENTITIES MIGHT HAVE DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES

A product or business model can affect people with different identities in distinct ways. Pay close attention to how racial minorities, religious minorities, children in different age groups, women, refugees or migrants, non-binary people, differently-abled people, and Indigenous people may experience your company, products, or services. When identifying stakeholders, be as specific as possible, being mindful of intersectional identities and multiple group affiliations.

STEP 2:

Explore actual or possible impacts on stakeholders

Step 2: Explore how you impact people

It can be tempting to think about how decisions affect the business, but the point of stakeholder impact canvas is to identify real or potential impacts to PEOPLE, as a result of the different ways technology affects people and communities' ability to fully realize their rights in society.

HOW MIGHT THE STARTUP'S PRODUCT OR BUSINESS MODEL CHANGE HOW PEOPLE ACCESS AND EXERCISE THEIR RIGHTS AS A HUMAN?



Right to Health



Right to Education



Right to Freedom of Expression



Right to Privacy



Right to a Fair Trial

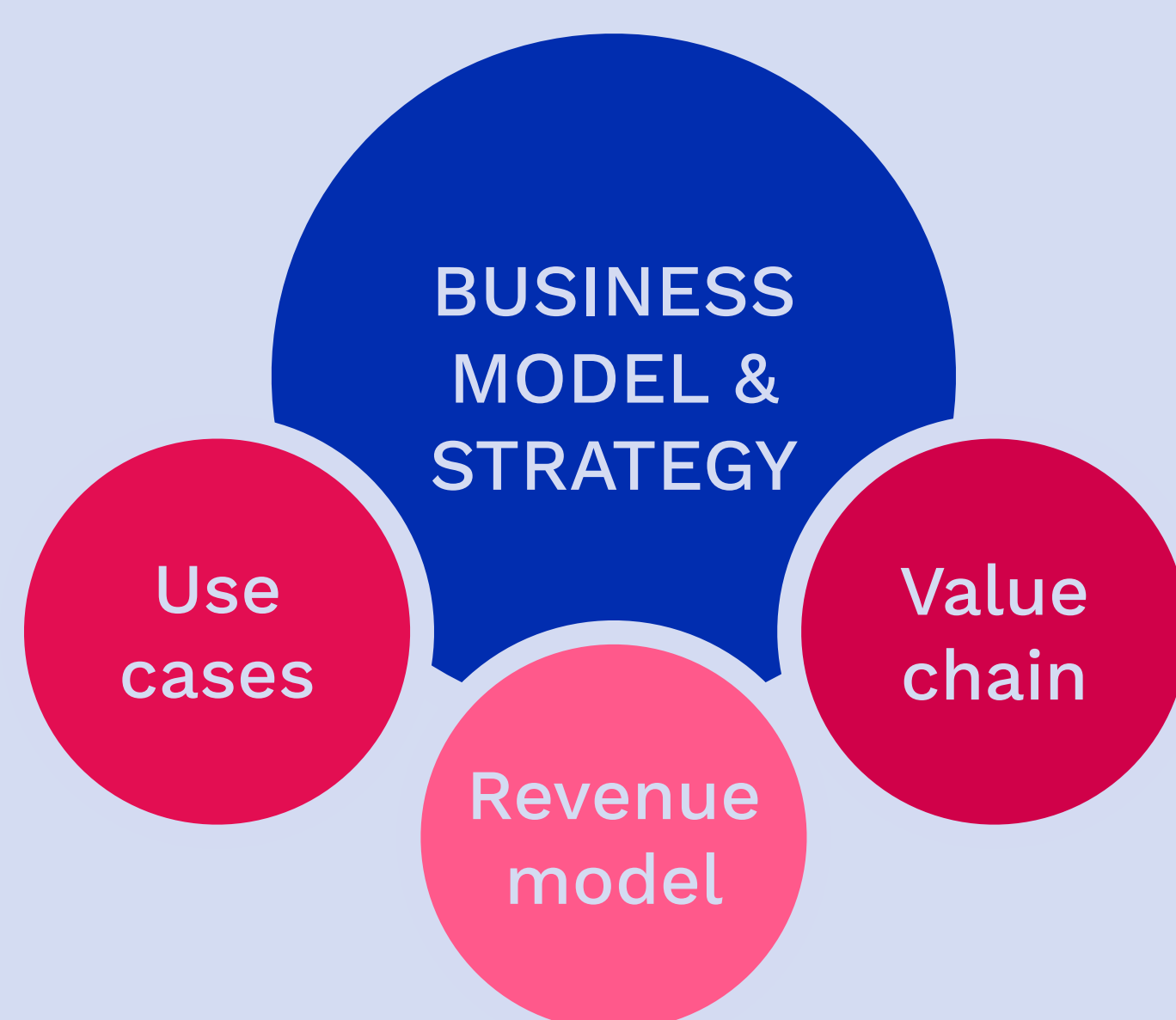


Right to be free from Slavery



Right to Assembly and Association

Consider these guiding questions as you brainstorm all potential or real impacts on each stakeholder group. Consider both positive, rights-affirming impacts as well as the ways you might unintentionally cause harm to people.



USE CASES

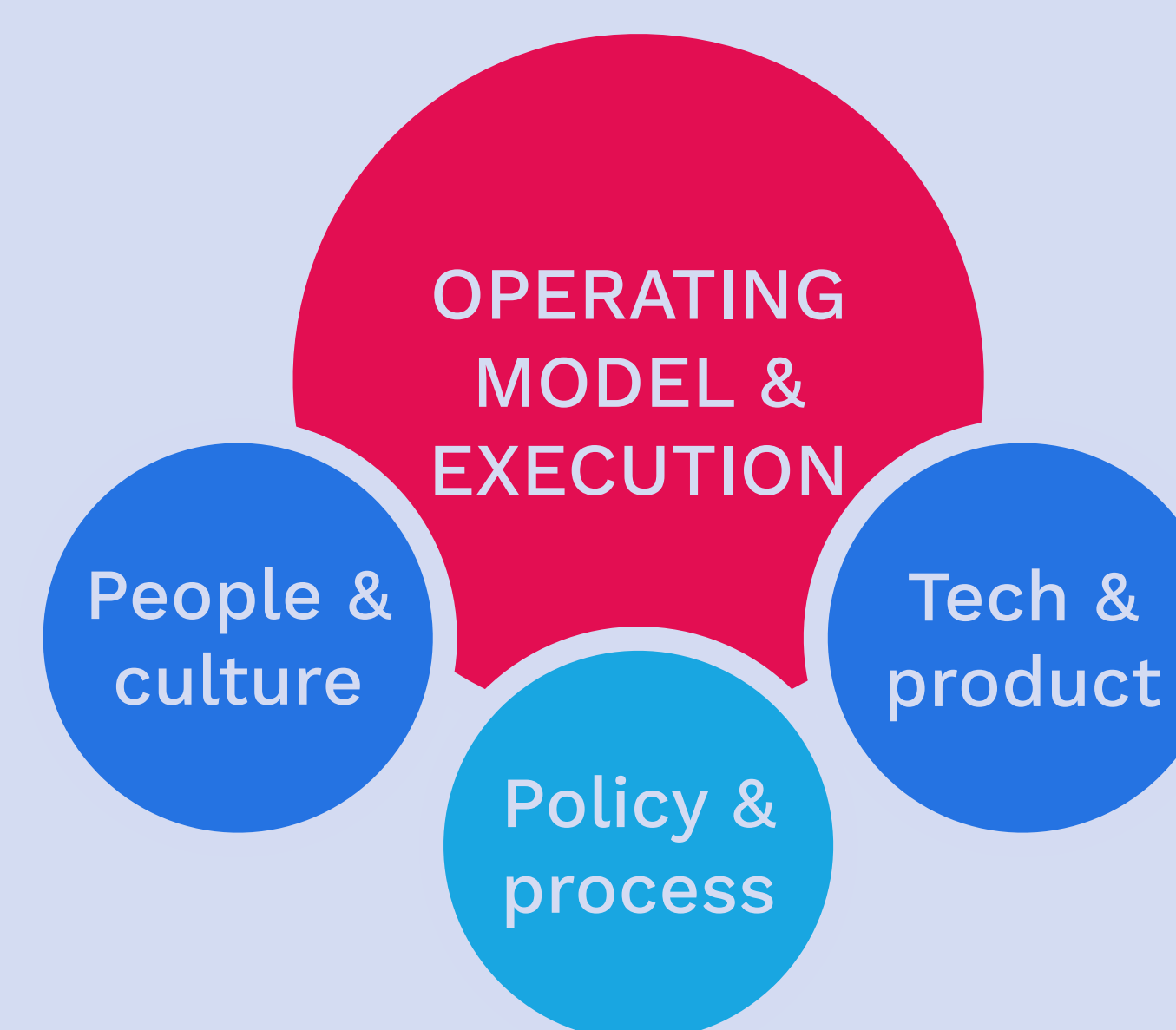
How might this group be affected by different intended use cases? What about unintended use cases?

REVENUE MODEL

How might the incentives of your revenue model cause harms to different stakeholder groups?

VALUE CHAIN

How do decisions about 3rd-party vendors/ suppliers impact this group?



PEOPLE & CULTURE

- How do performance metrics incentivize impacts that harm or benefit different stakeholder groups?
- How might gaps in team or capabilities create impact risk?

POLICY & PROCESS

- How do our policies or processes (e.g., for product review) consider different stakeholder groups? Are all relevant stakeholders considered for key processes?
- How would we respond if we learn we may be causing harm?
- How might our stakeholders tell us if we are causing harm?

TECHNOLOGY & PRODUCT

- How might product-related decisions impact this stakeholder?
- How do choices about other tech infrastructure impact different stakeholder groups?

Capture impacts consistently

If we [do XYZ], it could affect [SPECIFIC STAKEHOLDER] by [ELABORATE ON THE RISK TO PEOPLE].

USE CASES

If sellers use our site to buy or sell illegal or unlicensed weapons, it could increase violence in our users' communities.

REVENUE MODEL INCENTIVES

If we sell to universities as customers but those most affected by our product are students, we may make decisions that benefit customers while harming students and their right to an equitable education.

VALUE CHAIN

If we collect data from data brokers who cannot verify that users provided consent for our intended use of the data, it could harm our customers' right to privacy.

PEOPLE & CULTURE

If we build a team that does not reflect the diversity of society and our stakeholders, we might fail to identify ways in which our product doesn't meet the needs of all stakeholders, across different identities.

POLICY & PROCESS

If our product design requirements fail to consider users of different abilities, we could launch a product or feature that is inaccessible to all of our customers.

TECHNOLOGY & PRODUCT

If we rely on historic data to drive our underwriting decisions, without regard for past social injustices in the housing sector, it could perpetuate biased lending practices for low-income and homeowners of color.

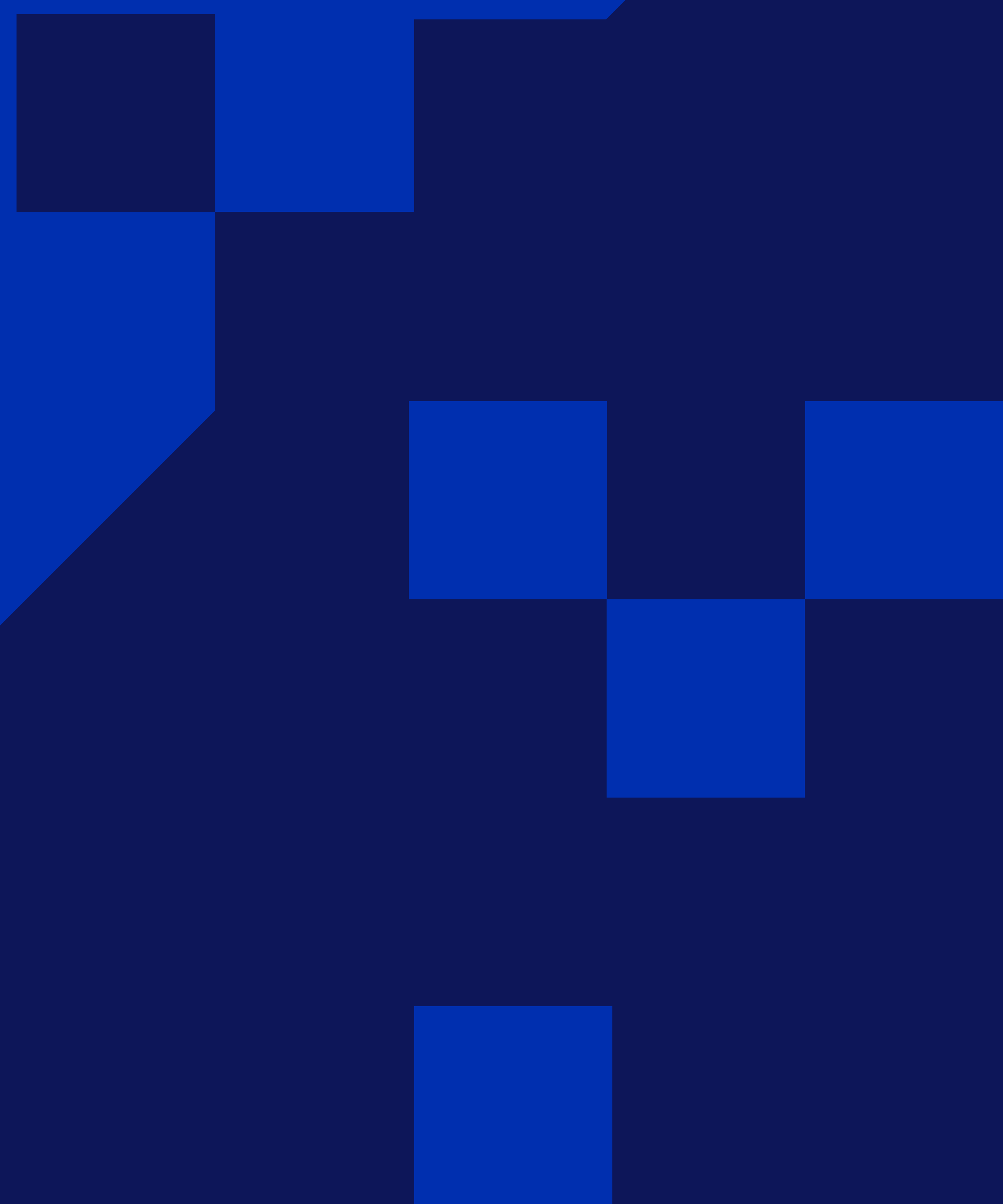
Beware of blindspots.

What types of harms or benefits is your team less likely to anticipate, given who you are and the lived experience you bring (or don't bring)?

Who should you consult to validate your thinking or develop a deeper understanding of impacts on different stakeholders?

STEP 3:

Prioritize impacts



Step 3: Prioritize managing salient impacts

Once you've identified all possible impacts to people and communities, it can be overwhelming to figure out what to do next. The human rights community suggests focusing on managing your most SALIENT impacts first and foremost. As you work to prioritize the stakeholder impacts to manage most proactively, keep in mind the following:

FOCUS ON IMPACTS TO PEOPLE, NOT THE BUSINESS.

MANAGE THE MOST SEVERE IMPACTS FIRST (I.E., THOSE THAT ARE GRAVE, WIDESPREAD, OR IRREVERSIBLE)...

...AND THOSE MOST LIKELY TO OCCUR (FORWARD LOOKING, BUT DON'T OVERLOOK PAST IMPACTS)

AVOID OR MITIGATE THE IMPACTS OF HARMS FIRST, THEN CREATE VALUE FOR STAKEHOLDERS.

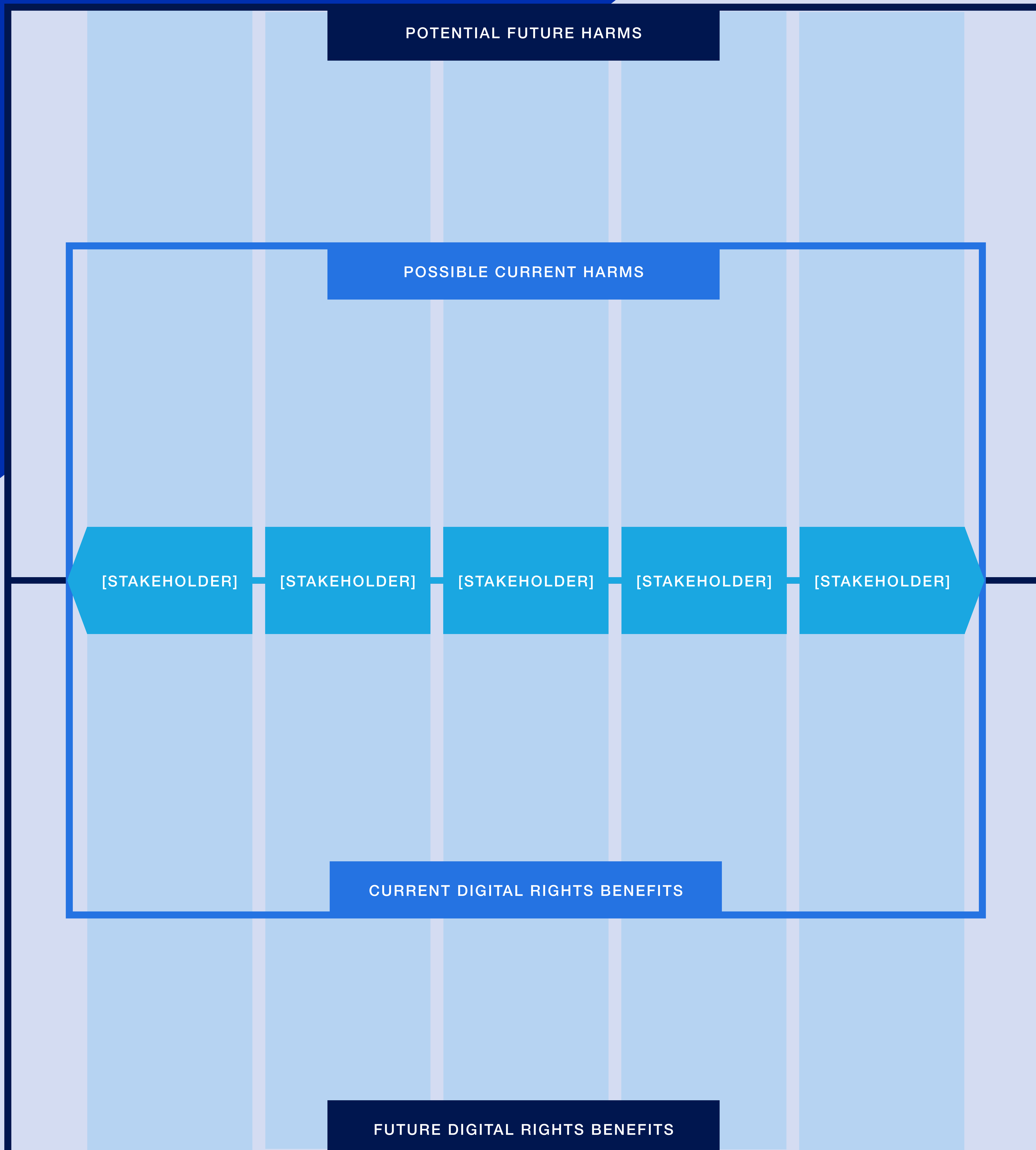
IDENTIFY “NEVER” EVENTS

In the medical field, a never event is a serious, preventable mistake that should never happen, like amputating the wrong arm. After using a digital rights lens to consider stakeholder impacts, your canvas may include impacts to people or groups that, if they occurred, would go against the very values and mission of the company.

If you identify any never events, consider the following questions as next steps:

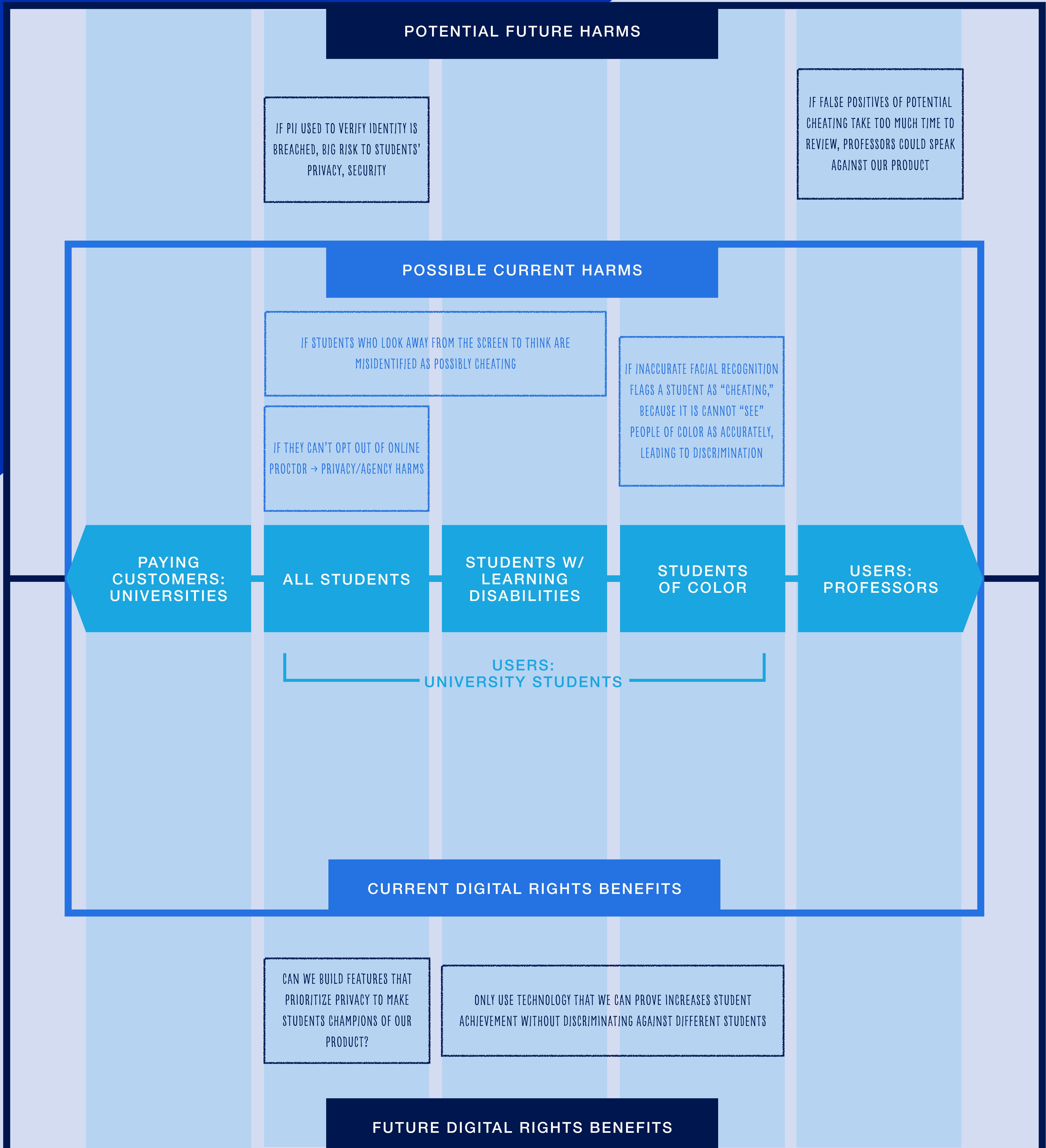
- How do you want to communicate these never events to your team?
- Are there new policies or processes you want to put in place (e.g., code or product review) to confirm you don't accidentally trigger a never event?
- If you do accidentally trigger a never event, do you have a plan for how you'll respond?

The Stakeholder Impact Canvas



The Stakeholder Impact Canvas

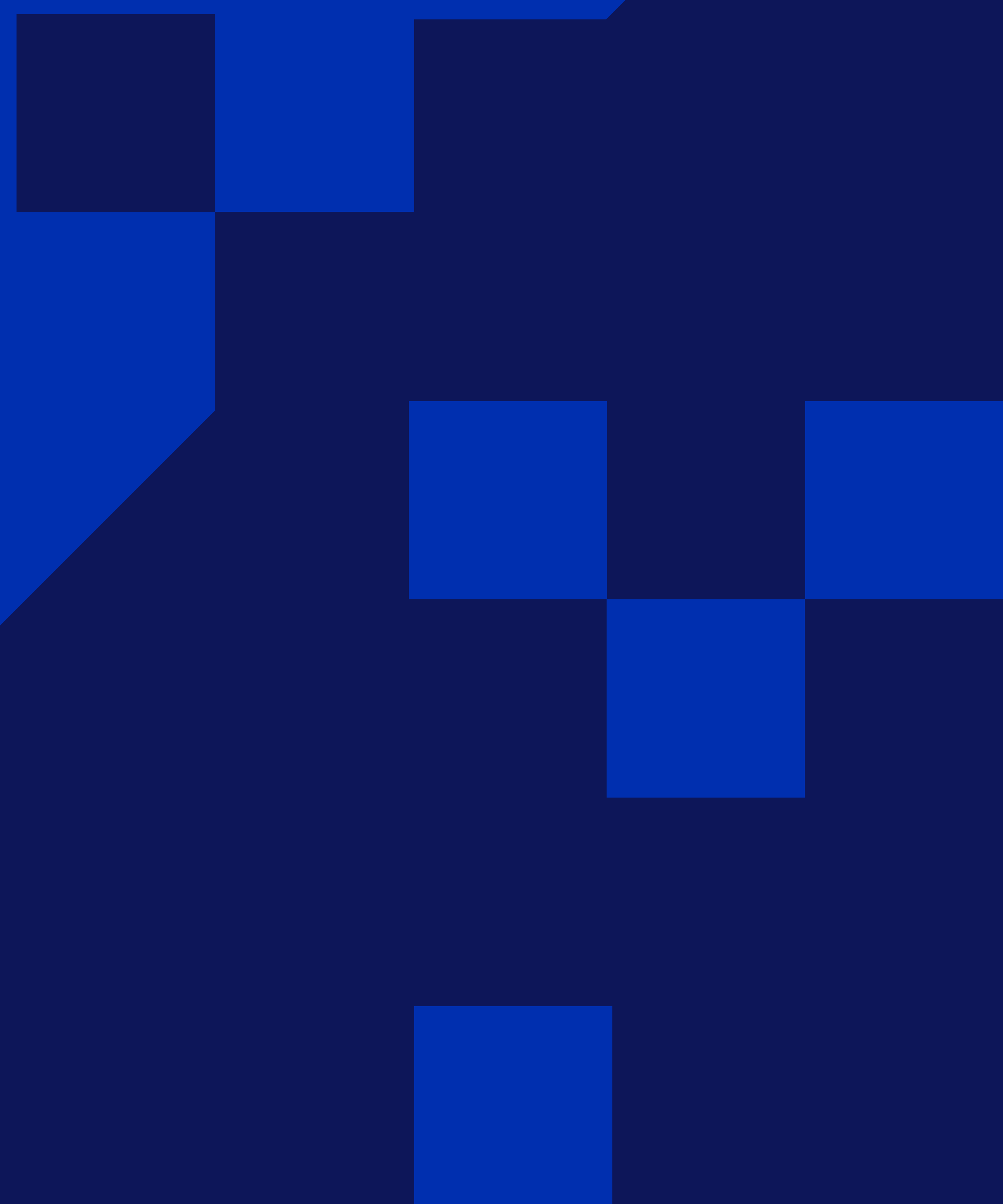
ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE:
ONLINE TEST
PROCTORING COMPANIES



NEVER EVENTS

WHAT'S NEXT

Getting the most out of your Stakeholder Impact Canvas



Stakeholder impact mapping is an ongoing practice, not a tick box exercise



Validate your assessment, with particular focus on stakeholders whose experiences are different from those of your team. Are the harms you identified real? Are the benefits truly perceived as benefits by those stakeholders?



Share the results of your Stakeholder Impact Canvas with your team, with a particular focus on any never events that they should be on the lookout for. Be sure to also communicate how team members should raise a concern if they think a specific decision might lead to one of those never event outcomes.



Now that you have a sense for the most important digital rights impacts to manage, the hard part is figuring out what steps to take to actively avoid triggering negative impacts and fostering positive impacts. Unfortunately, our knowledge of best practices to manage and mitigate digital rights impacts is still emergent, but we do know some things that work. First, identify a specific person on the team who will own and maintain your stakeholder impact canvas. If you identified specific easy actions to take to mitigate or avoid certain harms, take those first. Then, consider seeking additional guidance from experts in the field.

Make a plan: When to update and revisit your Stakeholder Impact Canvas

As a startup, it's hard to predict where your company will be even three months from now, let alone in the medium- to long-term. As your company grows, and sometimes pivots in response to market feedback, consider a cadence that makes sense to check back in with your canvas. At a minimum, it's best to revisit and update your Stakeholder Impact Canvas at least annually, or timed with any major strategy / business planning activities (e.g., preparing for a next raise).

This framework was developed by McKenzie Smith while a Principal at Luminate. With thanks and gratitude to [Ethical Resolve](#) and its committee leads Roya Pakzad, Carole Piovesan, Susan Etlinger, and Aaina Agarwal; [Pivot Point Studios](#); and Luminate colleagues Salmana Ahmed, Joseph Bateman, Alissa Black, Swee Leng Harris, Deepa Iyer, Barbara Mickits and Martin Tisné for their insights, research, and support in its development. RightsWise is a framework for start-ups and early stage investors to expand their thinking about how and who they impact within a digital and human rights lens. We hope this framework is used, tested, and improved upon over time. We are making this content available under Creative Commons license CC BY-SA 4.0. This means that you are welcome to download, share, use, remix and adapt this content (even commercially) provided that:

- You cite this work as follows: [Luminate](#), RightsWise: Stakeholder Impact Canvas 2022.
- If you create new content using our content, you make it available under the same license.
CC BY-SA 4.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>
- If you remix, transform, or build upon this work, please add the following disclaimer along with the attribution: “This is an adaptation of an original work by Luminate. Views and opinions expressed in the adaptation are the sole responsibility of the author or authors of the adaptation and are not endorsed by Luminate.”

If you have any questions about the content or what you can or can't do with the content, please contact: hello@luminategroup.com

