

Local government practitioners' network for predictive analytics and algorithmic use with data

To be known as APAN – Advanced & Predictive Analytics Network in Local Government

Terms of Reference

Vn 1 4th March 2021

1. Background

The use of predictive analytics in local authorities remains at an early stage. Comparatively, its use is not currently widespread, but the benefits and potential for greater flexibilities, better outcomes and efficiencies with the inclusion of algorithms in data practice and analysis being shown in other sectors – credit-scoring, marketing, telecoms, energy demand, travel and logistics planning, social-networking and retail – is a compelling consideration for inclusion in local government. These advanced practices are also a source of significant risk and ethical dangers if not managed carefully and given due impact analysis and review. For these reasons, there is a necessity for shared learning and collective oversight as councils begin to consider their new data practices.

The systemic challenges across the sector, including availability of necessary skills, insufficient independent or peer scrutiny, lack of clarity over the ethics of using public data for public services, transparency, and concerns over safety and the risks of existing disadvantages being reinforced need careful consideration.

As part of the local government sector-led improvement programme, there is an opportunity to form a network of data practitioners to consider, share with and learn from others using predictive analytics and algorithms in data analysis. This document sets out the ideas of a framework to create and promote engagement with a practitioners' network within local government.

The Local Government Association (LGA), in partnership with the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation (CDEI), will help to facilitate, guide and promote good practice in the use of predictive analytics and algorithms with the contributions and oversight of a more widespread membership within the network.

2. Objectives

The practitioners' network has the following objectives:

1. To bring together key representatives from every local authority who are involved in the use of data within their organisation. Special attention to the use of algorithms in internal processes and its role in decision-making will be essential.
2. To create, promote and moderate an online knowledge group community of practice for a selected membership of local government data practitioners to

encourage virtual discussion, questions, answers, sharing, and commenting on organisations' plans, practices and results.

3. To deliver workshops task forces and discussion groups as regional events or virtual teleconferencing that consider topical subject areas and knowledge sharing/reporting.
4. To promote the existence of the network to local government and encourage officers working in the areas of local data analysis to join.
5. To undertake a stock-take of operational practices within councils and create an online content knowledge base of this material for transparency, easier sharing and connecting like-minded organisations to help each other.
6. To review the status of predictive analytics in local government, identify the strengths and weak points and help to prioritise areas where improvements and remedies might be best achieved via a national approach.
7. To collect case studies of good practice and make these available for widespread use and understanding.
8. To identify other areas of support for local authorities conducting predictive analytics and algorithms which might be provided centrally and explore their feasibility.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

Operation of the network will, for the most part, be casual and informal with its main objective to encourage like-minded individuals to come together to share ideas and issues and to encourage widespread joint working and learning.

Key roles to facilitate operations will include:

- A programme manager provided by the LGA to oversee the development of work plans, document strategy and promotion of the group
- Advisers drawn from supporting partner organisations, such as the CDEI, to work closely with the programme manager to ensure proposed work areas and strategy supports government priorities and makes best use of the national expertise available
- Administration team at the LGA to manage membership record keeping, promotions and central Knowledge Hub moderation
- A steering group will be formed of up to ten local authority representatives drawn from the membership with good cross-sector experience and knowledge. This group will meet formally twice per year and more frequently by virtual means on case by case subject areas to advise the LGA on delivery of the objectives
- A chair and deputy chair will be agreed by majority vote of the steering group to oversee meetings and guide steering group subject areas

4. Membership

The network will be free to join and will be funded from sector-led improvement grant to the LGA from central government each year.

Membership will consist of specialists in the field of local government data analytics. Members will be local government officers. Elected members will not be excluded if they have an interest to join but we will primarily focus on the implementation

aspects with officers in the first instance. The project team will regularly consult the views and direction from elected members via regular reports to the appropriate LGA Boards.

Data experts from other fields will be invited to join but there will not be free, unchecked access from anyone who claims to be working or interested in the data analytics field. We aim to create a safe space where local government practitioners can discuss and work together (at least initially) without worries of widespread external distractions.

Members will be self-selecting, but they will be required to apply to join and will be authorised access by moderators in the LGA and CDEI.

5. Modes of Working

The network will operate primarily by electronic means using online communications, an online community of practice knowledge group, video conferencing and regular consultation to the membership through discussion forums, email and online polls.

A central hub where resources are made available and online discussion between members and invited experts will operate here – [APAN – Advanced & Predictive Analytics Network in local government](#).

A steering group will be formed to guide and agree the strategy and priorities for the network. This will be formed by application from the membership within the first year of operation if the network shows signs of member support. The steering group will try to represent all types of local authority and all regions of the country. It will work to include a good cross section of equality and diversity characteristics. It will elect a chair and deputy who will preside over two meetings per year to agree work priorities. Intervening communications with the steering group and the wider membership will take place as necessary throughout the year.

Physical meetings of the network will be held if it is possible and where necessary. Where possible, the use of video teleconferencing channels will be used. Face to face meetings are encouraged when post COVID-19 recovery is established, and they will be located to minimise the travel costs and time of participating members.

The work will be facilitated by teams drawn from the LGA and CDEI.

6. Review of Terms of Reference

Adjustments may have to be made to these Terms of Reference in the light of experience and by agreement between the Chair, representatives from LGA and CDEI and (if appropriate) the wider network membership. In early drafts, the whole membership will be consulted

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