B-Tech Company Community of Practice: *Stakeholder Engagement Working Group*

2025 Mid-Year Review

Overview

In 2021, the B-Tech Project launched the tech company Community of Practice (CoP), convening representatives of a dozen large tech companies to discuss implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), including various aspects of Human Rights Due Diligence (HRDD), end-use and remedy. By 2024, the group had expanded to participants representing 18 companies, and in addition to monthly informal drop-in sessions, comprised two thematic working groups. Participants selected the groups they preferred to join, one focused on improving effective stakeholder engagement, and another on technology and regulation.

Background

The B-Tech Project CoP convened a multi-stakeholder working group in 2022 with representatives from business and civil society to discuss the issues around engaging stakeholders in tech companies' due diligence processes and produced this discussion paper on five best practices in effective stakeholder engagement for tech company human rights due diligence.

The new company-only Working Group on Stakeholder Engagement convened in 2024 to discuss the issues around engaging stakeholders effectively in tech companies' due diligence processes. B-Tech recognizes and has articulated that effective stakeholder engagement requires moving beyond compliance-driven consultation toward genuine partnership with affected communities and their representatives. This demands sustained investment in relationship-building, internal capacity development, and innovative engagement methods that can operate effectively despite persistent trust deficits and power imbalances. The integration of human rights considerations into work with more expansive global stakeholder communities, in addition to engineering and product development processes, represents a significant opportunity to make stakeholder engagement more meaningful and impactful, moving from reactive harm mitigation to proactive rights-respecting design.

The five standalone sessions – plus one across the entire CoP focusing on the rights of data enrichment workers – supported insights on best practices for engagement with government representatives, how to involve diverse peers from within their own companies, and collaborating with peers on digital responses to crises, among other topics. At the end of 2024, CoP participants could not convene as a plenary either live or asynchronously to work towards an update of the discussion paper; B-Tech accordingly drafted a summary of the year's WG sessions to capture the topics and format throughout the year.

2025 Stakeholder Engagement Working Group

In 2025 CoP participants indicated their desire to continue with the Stakeholder Engagement Working Group, despite a lack of time and/or capacity to curate or organize a thematic lead for each session. As such the B-Tech team continues to coordinate and manage these WG sessions, identifying relevant topics.

In 2025, the stakeholder engagement working group of the CoP representatives convened for the following sessions:

Session 1: February 2025 – Organizational session – participants discussed their priorities and objectives for the sessions and for the year-end output. Some sought to identify evolutions in effective stakeholder engagement as part of compliance with legislation while others sought to learn about how different types of businesses (including investors and investor relations teams) engage with external stakeholders. Most participants agreed that a goal of this WG would be to connect with additional groups from civil society to identify *shared* good practices in stakeholder engagement. The desired public output, developed collectively, would outline these observations and make recommendations for the tech sector, moving forward.

Session 2: April 2025 – Expert presentation by UNICEF featured its Digital Child Rights Impact Assessment (D-CRIA) and a brief guidance note on a child rights-based approach to application of UNGPs in digital environments. This guidance had been developed as a collaboration between UNICEF and B-Tech experts, complementing existing B-Tech foundational papers and drawing on a robust background of evidence and guidance and informed by input received following a consultation process. The note unpacks five headlines on the implementation of the UNGPs in relation to the digital environment from a child rights perspective. As such the session, using both the D-CRIA and the UNICEF/B-Tech note as an underpinning, focused on stakeholder engagement with regard to children's rights.

Session 3: September 2025 – Presentation from the executive director of UC Berkeley's Human Rights Center, Betsy Popken, on the NASEM Symposium on Engineering & Human Rights. This mirrored an earlier "Bring a Friend" session in which CoP participants were encouraged to invite peers in technical, CSR, and product management functions to review the relevance of human rights frameworks to their own work processes; for this session CoP participants also invited colleagues with roles in departments as varied as research and innovation, technical standards, and corporate social responsibility. Popken shared key elements of the NASEM presentation, including a comparison of human rights and engineering auditing functions – including red teaming, algorithmic audits, and human-centered design – and the value of Human Rights Assessments (HRAs) for engineers, including as a way to encourage diverse stakeholder engagement or participation in the algorithmic audit process.

An additional session in October will bring together members of the B-Tech CoP and a select group of Special Procedures mandate holders from the Human Rights Council for a dialogue to discuss both procedural issues, such as a more effective and productive communication between these two diverse constituencies, as well as thematic issues.

LOOKING FORWARD

Following the last WG session of 2025, participants and B-Tech will work together to synthesize the conversations and consultations over the 2024-25 period and develop a discussion paper intended to further the sector's understanding of, and approaches to, effective stakeholder engagement.

Initial insights from 2025 include an effort to engage stakeholders in long-term commitments rather than one-off consultations, as well as an emphasis on expectation management:

- Critical to set clear expectations about engagement scope and outcomes;
- Distinguish between information sharing and genuine consultation;
- Communicate what will and won't change based on stakeholder input;
- Acknowledge stakeholder contributions even when not implementing requested changes.

As B-Tech expands its ecosystem to include tech companies in the Global Majority, as well as investors and policymakers, the WG is recommending work towards an increased understanding among peers in non-human rights functions about the work of CoP companies, as well as improving outreach to external stakeholders like civil society representatives for a more constructive and inclusive engagement.

Contact

For additional information about the B-Tech company Community of Practice please write to OHCHR-b-techproject@un.org. For more information about the B-Tech Project, including past and upcoming activities, please visit the B-Tech project portal.