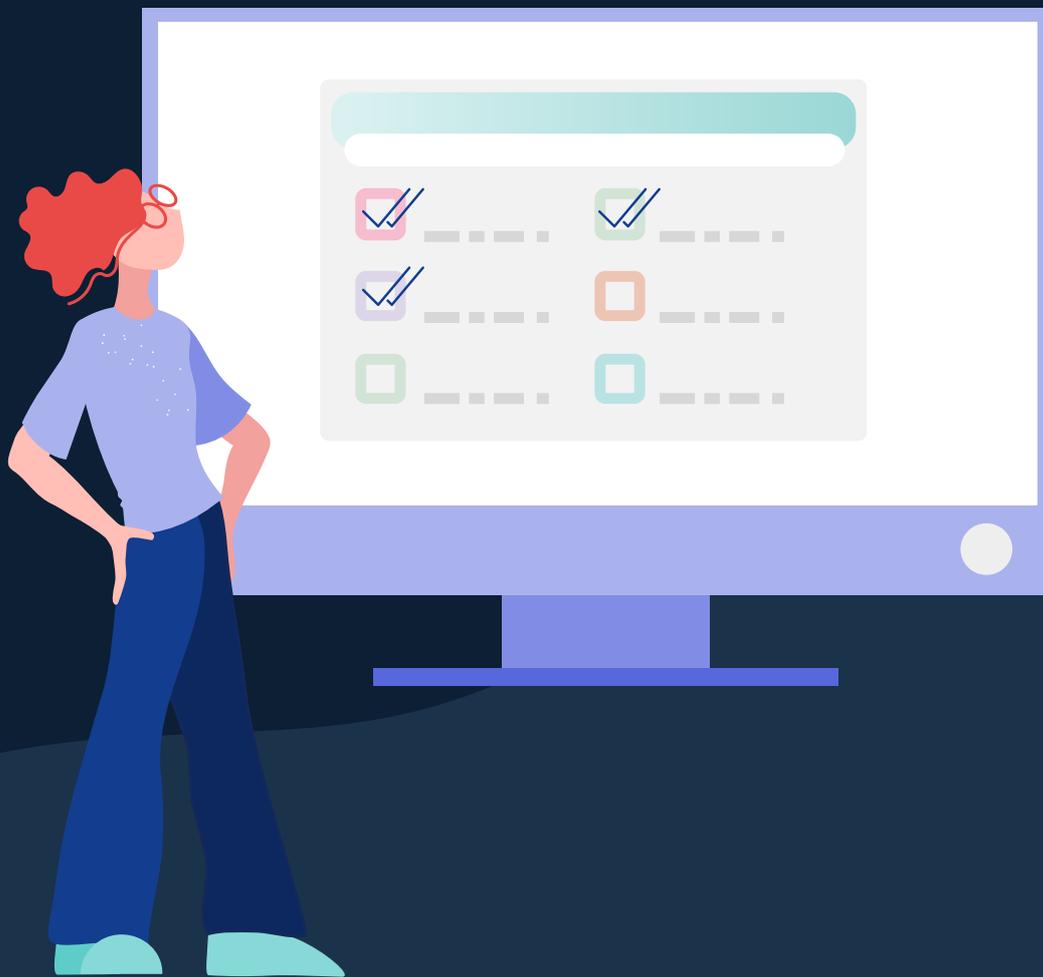


# Safety by Design

## Investment checklist





SbD

## Building safer technology ecosystems through responsible investing

In the early stages of a new online platform or product, the investment and venture capital community can play a key role in promoting user safety.



Safety measures should be considered from the very start of the design and development process, rather than being bolted on after users have already experienced online harm. Managing these risks up front can help to mitigate the significant reputational and financial costs that arise once online harm has occurred.

Investors and venture capitalists can help to ensure online platforms and services are safe for users by applying the Safety by Design principles and using the investment checklist when considering whether to invest in tech companies.

# Placing user safety at the forefront of online service design

Safety by Design (SbD) places the safety and rights of users at the centre of the design, development and use of online products and services. It aims to encourage and help industry to take an active and consistent approach to user safety.

## Safety by Design principles

At its heart are a set of SbD Principles, setting out achievable measures for industry to better protect people online. The three main principles are:

### Service provider responsibilities

The range of online harms occurring on platforms that enable social interaction are well-documented, so each service can be easily assessed for safety risks. Start-ups and tech companies can take preventative steps to avoid reputational damage or regulatory challenges. They can proactively ensure that known and anticipated harms have been evaluated in the design and provision of their services.

### User empowerment and autonomy

The burden for managing safety should never fall solely on the user, and in-built tools should offer rapid and suitable problem resolution. Start-ups and tech companies can prevent misuse and minimise toxicity by ensuring that users have safer online interactions, through simple and visible features. By taking an ethical and inclusive design approach, users can become more empowered and independent.

### Transparency and accountability

Start-ups and tech companies can provide assurances that they are operating according to their published safety aims, as well as educating and empowering users about steps they can take to address safety concerns.

Protecting people from online harms is a global concern, and eSafety believes that the investment and venture capital sector have an important role to play in the creation of safer technology.

# Investment checklist

There is a clear, ethical duty for technology companies to minimise online harms, protect the rights and dignity of users and prevent abuse and exploitation. Failing to address user safety can lead to devastating real-world harms and serious commercial implications.

The following checklist outlines key questions that investors can use to start conversations and to help assess and manage serious risks – to reputation, brand values and business performance – when investing in start-ups and tech companies.

## Key questions

- 1** | Do you refer to user safety in your company's mission statement, corporate values or principles?
- 2** | Is there a team or individual responsible for user safety?
- 3** | Do you have clear and visible terms of service and community guidance/acceptable use policy?
- 4** | Are official safety review procedures part of the product design process?
- 5** | Do you moderate behaviour on your service (either in-house, outsourced, community-driven or a hybrid approach)?
- 6** | Can you detect and flag illegal conduct and content to prevent harm before it occurs?
- 7** | If illegal activity occurs, do you have processes in place to notify law enforcement, support services and illegal content hotlines?
- 8** | Do you have systems in place for breaches of your terms of service or community standards?
- 9** | Do you provide users with tools and features that allow them to manage their own safety?
- 10** | Do you have visible and simple reporting systems and appeals processes for users to lodge complaints or concerns about their safety, which are actioned within dedicated timeframes?
- 11** | Do you take proactive steps to inform users about safety policies, features and advice on your service?
- 12** | Where does the company publicly share information relating to user safety?

Please note: further information on Safety by Design, including model clauses for due diligence arrangements and funding, are available on the Safety by Design website [esafety.gov.au/sbd](https://esafety.gov.au/sbd)  
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