

XR PRIMER 2.0: A STARTER GUIDE FOR DEVELOPERS

AN INDUSTRY-WIDE COLLABORATION FOR BETTER XR



XR ASSOCIATION

www.xra.org

GUIDANCE FOR CULTURE, CONDUCT, AND CONTENT IN XR ENVIRONMENTS

WHILE XRA MEMBER COMPANIES HAVE COLLECTIVELY SHARED BEST PRACTICES on the design and usability of XR technology, user comfort and safety are also inextricably linked to the policies and practices developers may implement with respect to culture, conduct, and content in extended reality environments. We appreciate that differences may exist between developers creating content within defined platforms, such as closed gaming or training environments, and those seeking to create platforms that encourage user-generated content. Against this backdrop, the enclosed guidance reflects our experience over the years in two- and three-dimensional environments. We are mindful that communities and intended audiences vary and that XR remains in its early stages; consequently, this section of the developers' guide offers broad recommendations for creating respectful, safe, and inclusive XR environments.

CULTURE GUIDANCE

The XR industry is committed to creating engaging virtual experiences that facilitate positive connections between users. Inclusivity and welcomeness need not come at the expense of diversity and variance of community culture, however. While not all spaces need to appeal to all users, all spaces should have clear expectations that users can rely upon to guide their behavior. Developers should consider implementing mechanisms for communicating with users, such as systems for rewarding good behavior and remediating harmful or otherwise undesirable behavior. These reinforcement channels can help foster platform-specific social norms.

FOSTERING SOCIAL NORMS

To cultivate a welcoming and inclusive community culture, developers should consider using reward and remediation mechanisms. These policies establish foundational social norms that foster healthy communities and empower peers to course correct each other before it becomes necessary for developers to take enforcement actions against violations of community norms.



Encourage positive behavior.

This can include rewarding altruism, empathy, and compassion; celebrating positive collective behavior; pointing users to resources and communities that increase connectivity; and creating activities that encourage investment in outcomes for other participants.



Discourage and penalize negative or harmful behavior.

This can include intervening to ease social tension or deescalate tense situations; curbing unruly behavior; and, in extreme cases, restricting user privileges. Developers should be mindful to provide guidance more than enforcement, taking care to communicate the harmful impact of a user's behavior as appropriate. Use these moments as opportunities to educate users and refer them back to clear community guidelines to help them course correct.

PROMOTING TRANSPARENCY AND INCLUSION

As developers consider cultural norms, take every opportunity to promote honesty and transparency, and accommodate respectful dissent and disagreement in ways that lead to growth and inclusion.



Communicate intent and promote tolerance.

Be clear about the overall intent and purpose of any given experience and be open to input when the realized creation deviates from the stated intent.

Moderate thoughtfully and transparently.

Be open and transparent about how moderation decisions are made, who makes those decisions, and by what process.

Set the example.

Consider building options, characters, communications channels, and other features to promote and model inclusivity and tolerance in your experience. Create meaningful choices for diverse users, and facilitate engagement options to allow users to easily meet new players or remove themselves from uncomfortable situations.

CONDUCT GUIDANCE

XR offers a compelling combination of virtual presence with synchronous social interactions. To create compelling experiences while avoiding what may be perceived as harmful or distressing situations, content creators should give users the tools to create experiences for themselves that are safe, respectful, and fun. We as an industry can help achieve this goal by implementing clear and protective product policies, building tools for community safety, and engineering and optimizing smart product tools for the full lifecycle.

CREATING CONDUCT POLICIES TO ADDRESS ABUSE

Clearly communicating conduct policies to users is one of the most straightforward ways to keep unsafe, abusive, and harassing conduct out of XR experiences. Conduct policies offer developers an opportunity to set the tone for the type of community they wish to build and show users that they take safety and inclusion seriously. Bear in mind that popular XR distribution platforms also set minimum requirements to which developers' conduct policies must adhere.

CONDUCT POLICY TIPS



Directly discuss conduct in your user policy, in addition to content.

It is helpful to define clearly what you mean by conduct. For example, "Conduct is how you behave in [app name]."



Write your policy in clear, simple terms so that all users, including younger users, can understand it.

Policies are meant to be readable, not full of legalese.



Give your policy teeth.

Tell your users what could happen if they violate the policy. This can include warnings, temporary suspensions, or even account disables. Policies need to be enforceable and incentivize better behavior.



Tailor conduct policies to your product and community.

Beyond the "traditional" abuse types typically addressed in conduct policies, consider abuse types that may be uniquely relevant to your specific application and be sure to highlight those. Policies should not be cookie cutter; they should align with the target community, context, and desired cultural vibe.



Incorporate dynamic and contextual notifications of possible violations.

As a content creator, it is important to encourage users to read and understand established policies. Given this, when technically possible, it is best to create systems that monitor user behavior and content and dynamically inform users, in-situ, when they are running up against stated policies. Ideally, these monitoring and intervention systems rely on a transparent combination of automation and human oversight.

CONDUCT GUIDANCE

BUILDING AND OPTIMIZING YOUR PRODUCT FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY

Another precaution against harmful conduct is ensuring that the tools you build will help users experience a safe VR community. You can do this by avoiding certain features that may be ripe for abuse and by building in safety features and safeguards to prevent harmful conduct.

Anticipate features vulnerable to abuse.

Consider whether features you're building might lead to poor conduct. For example, these two features common to VR apps can be vulnerable to abuse:

Immersive and 3D Content

XR offers new opportunities for user-generated content, some types of which (immersive media, 3D objects, worlds, etc.) may require modified or novel safety solutions. While this can foster creativity and add a powerful digital overlay to our surroundings, AR also creates opportunities for innocuous content to be anchored to sensitive real-world locations with abusive intent (e.g., placing emojis on a memorial). Consider how to address these additional challenges, and how to adjust your policies to reflect them.

Synchronous Behaviors

By replicating and enhancing real-world sensations, XR adds physicality to an avatar's experience, especially when avatars are built for social interactions and synchronous behaviors in shared virtual spaces. While harassment and safety risks in VR can be similar to those expressed in 2D social spaces, VR users may experience abusive behavior in a more bodily or visceral fashion. When building product tools, we should aim to create strong protection and reporting mechanisms, not diminish them, for a safer, more positive experience for everyone.

Empower users through traditional safety tools.

VR applications also need commonplace safety tools like any other online social experience. Empower your users to control their experience with tools like blocking or muting when they encounter conduct or behaviors that make them feel unsafe and provide users with reporting tools and systems that are accessible and easy to use.

Mitigate user-generated content risks throughout its lifecycle.

There are a number of additional considerations when applications involve user-generated content that require safeguards and thoughtful planning.

Add Preventive Measures

Because user-generated content can be created and published in virtual spaces through a variety of ways, consider all tools available to prevent risk. This could include review processes or upload prevention filters for previously removed content.

Think Through Conduct Long-Term

It is important to understand the scale and scope of how users will experience abusive content. For example, think about how user-generated content will be experienced or shared by users in your application, and whether it will be experienced or used differently throughout its lifecycle as features are built or modified. Also consider how XRA user-generated content may pose unique abuse challenges and identify which tools can be leveraged to limit or prevent harm to others.

Be Prepared for a Variety of Scenarios

While remediation is preferred, consider takedown practices, policies, and systems prior to releasing tooling or experiences

that create opportunities for user-generated content to be created or distributed. If you are building an experience for mixed age groups, abide by rating or other systems that are already in effect.

Allocate resources for the long haul.

Abuse and harassment levels in any space can ebb and flow. Activating new users and releasing new products or content creation types can increase the amount and types of abuse or risks to user communities. Ensure you are allocating time and team resources to manage these risks before new releases or announcements to mitigate community harm before it can take root.

CONTENT GUIDANCE

XR communities are hungry for new and varying types of content.

As content creation for virtual reality, 360 video, and overlay forms of augmented reality continues to accelerate, we face the challenge of how content creators can grow online communities while committing to a common objective of advancing positive, diverse, equitable, and inclusive XR environments. Given that technology platforms cannot preemptively identify all emergent behavior and unintended consequences, it is of the utmost importance that developers encourage positive content, mitigate the propagation of harmful content, and address illegal content.

CREATING POSITIVE CONTENT

Content creators are encouraged to develop content for their online communities that, as relevant and appropriate, entertains, spurs imagination, educates, advances positive social outcomes, enhances productivity and ingenuity across various sectors of the economy, and adds to greater understanding of our real environment and humanity.

AVOIDING HARMFUL CONTENT

Many platforms already provide sound guidance on mitigating harmful content, including XR distribution channels, which specify minimum standards on harmful content and content moderation to which developers must adhere to gain access to the channel. We are mindful, however, that what constitutes harmful content may differ by community type and context. Developers should therefore take their intended users into consideration when articulating the boundaries for what constitutes appropriate content in their community, particularly where the XR environment in question allows for user-generated content.

ILLEGAL CONTENT

XR content is available globally. Consider geofencing content. Where content violates applicable national, state/provincial, or local laws, rules for removal or remediation should be articulated.

CONCLUSION

Whether XR technologies exist for consumer enjoyment or as tools for enterprise use, keeping our communities inclusive and healthy is a shared objective of the entire XR community.

Communication is vital for team building, productivity, gameplay, and more; and it will take all of us to not only create but also enhance best practices for content, conduct, and culture in our XR environment.