Preface
This handbook is intended to help people joining our organisation quickly to gain an understanding of who we are, what we’re trying to achieve, and how we go about it.

It’s not a rigid document that can never be changed. In a field as fast-moving and constantly transforming as data technology, that would be a little crazy. Rather it is intended to serve as a guide at a given point in time, and we expect it to evolve as we do. Evaluation and continuous improvement are core principles of our products and our business and we plan to apply them to this booklet too.
This is Akvo
Akvo is a non-profit foundation headquartered in the Netherlands with staff in Australia, Burkina Faso, Finland, Germany, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Nepal, Spain, Sweden, the UK and the USA.

We build open source, interoperable internet and mobile software which is used to make international development cooperation and aid activity more effective and transparent. We provide the software as a service, backed by a partner-support and training team.
Akvo’s vision, mission, strategy and core values
Vision

We see a future in which country governance and international development cooperation are open, transparent and collaborative. We believe this will lead to a better and more equitable society, and that this will occur faster and more sustainably.

Mission

Akvo’s mission is to support our vision by building a highly effective, open, online platform and a trusted partner network. Our platform allows country governance and development activities to be collaborated around, reported on and monitored, via interoperable platforms.

Strategy

We will achieve this mission by balancing the construction of software tools with the assembly of a network of partners and communication about our progress, to create a strong combination of people, organisations and tools to get the job done.

We provide our software as a service, backed by a partner-support and training team. We operate on a “not-for-profit, not-for-loss” basis in order that our products, services and organisation are sustainable for the long-term.

We use open source methods and tools wherever practical and possible. We only build what is not already available and we openly share all the tools, content and (non-personal) data that we generate.

Core values

Akvo’s core values are quite simple; treat everyone as you would like to be treated yourself and collaborate to make things work better. We are people, working together to achieve something bigger than what we can achieve individually. We want to create a better world, for both the people in it and our natural environment. We aim to preserve what is good and improve what can be improved upon by our intervention.
Akvo is all about people
Akvo is all about people

Akvo is a collection of people doing good work. The organisations that make up Akvo formally and the network of partner organisations that we are building are there to achieve our mission and support our strategy and our people, not the other way around.

The right people are key

We strongly believe that it is core to success to have the right people as part of our team – that means the right mix of talent, experience, passion, team chemistry and potential for individual growth. We recruit people to initially fill a particular role in Akvo, but we expect and support them to eventually find and/or create their own place in the organisation. This is a two-way street; Akvo strives to give people a productive and fulfilling working environment, and we expect people to put energy and effort into our organisation and our mission.

We have to be good to do good

We are good people. We believe it is not enough to “don’t be evil” – we believe we have to “be good” and we have to actively “do good”. Not only are we good from the point of view of the opposite of evil; we also need to be good at what we do. We have a responsibility to continuously evaluate and improve how we work, so that we can do the right things in the right ways at the right times and help others to do the same.

Akvo is international and non-discriminatory

The teams at Akvo are fundamentally international. We have teams spread across the world working across cultures and organisations. We don’t discriminate against anyone for any reason. We treat everyone working with us – contractors, employees or partners – equitably.
Akvo is open
Akvo is open

Akvo maintains an open and transparent working environment both internally and externally.

In general we release everything we produce under open source, open content and open data licenses. We also support and encourage our partners to become more open and transparent and we strive to work only with organisations that are willing to release their data under open licenses. (There are exceptions; for example when the data potentially violates the privacy of individuals or households. This type of data should be published in aggregate form.) We want to work with organisations that are serious about transparency; we’re not in the business of window-dressing for failing institutions.

We try to openly share the journey of our own work via various platforms and channels including our blog, Twitter and GitHub. We rely on and support every member of staff to participate in this communications process.

To learn more about how Akvo is open, read: http://akvo.org/blog/open-data-content-and-software-at-akvo/
Akvo’s foundations
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Akvo develops and operates its products under a unified brand but comprises of a number of distinct organisational entities. These organisations are non-profit foundations, as we believe that we best reach our goals structured this way.

Akvo is non-profit, but also not-for-loss

Akvo’s organisations are structured as non-profit organisations. Sometimes, for technical and/or legal reasons in particular locations, we have set up corporate entities that are limited liability companies, but they are always wholly owned, or nearly so, by the non-profit parts of our organisations.

Akvo is also not-for-loss. We have functional business models that support our organisations, so that we can pay our bills and our staff and become self-sustaining.

Entrepreneurial

An entrepreneurial approach is key to success. We have to be entrepreneurial in order to innovate and to avoid becoming stuck in old-fashioned ways of doing things that are no longer effective. Our role is to help implement positive change.

Participatory team environment

Our work environment demands personal responsibility and strong ownership of the tasks at hand and encourages everyone’s full participation. We are a very diverse organisation and people work in many different locations and time zones. Some people travel a lot, some work part time, some work from home and colleagues are trusted to do their work without clock-watching or micro-management. In a fast-moving, distributed organisation with highly motivated individuals, we need people to know they can take responsibility for tasks and problems and get things done. We believe that this is best
Akvo meeting, Swedish style

Akvo meeting, Dutch style

Akvo meeting, US style

Akvo meeting, Laos style
done in a flat and open organisation and we therefore keep hierarchical structures to a minimum. At Akvo we strive to keep bureaucracy to a minimum.

No outsourcing of core functions

Wherever possible, we keep competency in our core functions and relations to our network within our in-house team. We believe that in order to provide really effective, cutting-edge services we need a very high degree of in-house competency. We do outsource some non-core functions or functions which are not differentiators.

That said, we also have some important functions that sit within our extended team. We carefully select who we work with on this basis, regularly evaluate our joint work and publicly show who belongs to our extended team (and who is in-house) on the Meet our team page of our website: http://akvo.org/about-us/team/.

Trusted partner network

Partners using Akvo’s tools should be trustworthy and willing to be open about how they work.

In the case of Akvo RSR, we work with a partner structure of support and field partners. We have formal rules and agreements in place with support partners, which cover their interaction with field partners. We strive, on a personal level, to know and trust our support partners. They, in their turn, connect to their field partners frequently, and often hold the contractual relationship with the field partners.

Partners, not customers

We need strong, positive relationships with the users of our systems. Treating every organisation as a partner changes the interaction in a very positive way. We look at them and they look at us differently when we consider each other as partners and not in a supplier-customer relationship.
We hope you’ll enjoy working with us