



The Responsible Investor's Checklist

Sector-Specific Investment Checklist: Backing Safer Technology Ecosystem.

Purpose

To help investors, venture capitalists, and accelerators identify, assess, and support technology startups that embed safety, ethics, and inclusion into their design, operations, and business models ultimately fostering trustworthy, resilient, and human-centered innovation.

Why It Matters

Technology is reshaping every part of society from how we learn and work to how we connect and participate in civic life. Yet the same innovations that drive progress can also magnify risks: misinformation, exploitation, exclusion, data misuse, and online harms.

Responsible investing offers a powerful way to shift this trajectory. Investors, venture capitalists, and accelerators hold immense influence over how technology evolves. Their decisions determine which products scale, which values guide innovation, and ultimately, which futures are built.

By directing capital toward startups that embed trust, safety, ethics, and inclusion into their core design, investors can help create technology ecosystems that uplift rather than endanger, and empower rather than exploit.

Responsible capital ensures that innovation does not come at the expense of human dignity or well-being. It rewards startups that prioritize user safety, ethical AI, transparent governance, and data responsibility, while mitigating the reputational, regulatory, and social risks that come from unsafe or unethical products.

In essence, technology is only as safe as the values it's built on and those values often begin with where the money goes. When investors and accelerators demand responsible design, strong safety culture, and ethical data practices, they create market pressure for innovation that protects people and builds long-term societal trust.

Responsible investment is not a constraint on growth, it is a catalyst for sustainable innovation, ensuring that the next generation of startups helps build a safer, more inclusive, and more trustworthy digital future.

SECTION 1: Foundational Alignment

1. Vision and Values

- Does the startup's mission explicitly recognize user well-being, safety, or ethical technology use?
- Does the founding team demonstrate awareness of social, ethical, or safety risks in their sector?
- Are principles such as Do No Harm, Safety by Design, Inclusive Innovation, and Accountability reflected in their core values?

2. Governance and Leadership

- Does the leadership team include a diversity of backgrounds and lived experiences relevant to safety, trust, or inclusion?
- Is there a board or advisory structure that includes expertise in ethics, policy, or online safety?
- Are there clear governance policies for ethical decision-making, responsible AI, or human rights due diligence?

SECTION 2: Product and Design Safety

3. Safety by Design

- Has the startup integrated Safety by Design principles (anticipate harm, mitigate risk, and empower users) early in product development?
- Are there internal checks for features that may expose users to harm (e.g., harassment, exploitation, disinformation)?
- Does the company have transparent user reporting or complaint mechanisms?

4. Inclusive and Accessible Design

- Does the product account for the needs of vulnerable or marginalized user groups (children, women, persons with disabilities, low-literacy users)?
- Are accessibility standards (e.g., WCAG) followed?
- Does the team conduct regular user research with diverse user groups to test for unintended consequences?

SECTION 3: Data Responsibility

5. Data Protection and Privacy

- Are data collection, storage, and sharing practices compliant with relevant privacy laws (e.g., GDPR, NDPR, POPIA)?
- Does the company have a privacy-by-design approach and transparent data use policies?
- Are children's data or sensitive personal information handled with heightened safeguards?

6. Ethical AI and Algorithmic Integrity

- Has the startup conducted bias and harm assessments for AI models or automated systems?
- Are there human oversight mechanisms for automated decision-making?
- Is the company transparent about how algorithms influence user experiences?

SECTION 4: Culture and Workforce Practices

7. Internal Safety Culture

- Does the startup provide staff with training on digital ethics, user safety, and safeguarding?
- Are there internal whistleblowing and incident reporting systems?
- Does the company prioritize the well-being of content moderators, safety teams, or frontline workers?

8. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

- Does the startup have DEI policies and track representation across gender, race, and ability?
- Does the startup avoid exploitative or exclusionary labor practices in its value chain?
- Are founders committed to equitable participation and decision-making?

SECTION 5: Risk, Compliance, and Impact

9. Risk Management

- Does the startup conduct regular safety risk assessments?
- Are there crisis response or incident management plans (e.g., for data breaches or online abuse incidents)?
- Are third-party integrations assessed for security and trust risks?

10. Social and Safety Impact

- Does the startup measure impact beyond profit including user trust, safety outcomes, or well-being metrics?
- Are impact results published transparently?

Does the company engage external experts (e.g., safety NGOs, academics, regulators) to improve its safeguards?

SECTION 6: Investor & Accelerator Due Diligence Practices

11. Pre-Investment Screening

- Are startups required to complete a Trust & Safety self-assessment as part of due diligence?
- Is there a red flag system for potential harm vectors (e.g., unverified age users, opaque algorithms, exploitative models)?
- Are founders questioned about long-term user safety and ethical foresight?

12. Post-Investment Support

- Does the fund provide Trust & Safety mentorship, resources, or access to safety experts?
- Is safety performance monitored during portfolio reviews?
- Are follow-on investments tied to demonstrable safety or inclusion milestones?

SECTION 7: Sector-Specific Considerations

Disclaimer:

The list of sector-specific safety and ethical considerations provided here is not exhaustive. It serves as a guiding framework to support responsible due diligence and investment decision-making. Each sector evolves rapidly, and investors are encouraged to conduct context-specific assessments, consult relevant experts, and adapt this checklist to emerging technologies, regulatory updates, and regional realities

Sector	Key Safety & Ethics Considerations
1. EdTech	Child safety online, Parental controls and consent, Data minimization, Content moderation, Safeguarding frameworks, Equity and access, Well-being and screen time
2. FinTech	Fraud and scam prevention, Protection of vulnerable users,

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anti-discrimination in credit scoring, Ethical AI use, Data security and confidentiality, Transparent fee structures, Digital well-being
3. HealthTech	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data privacy and confidentiality Informed consent Accuracy and integrity of health advice User safety in telehealth interactions Algorithmic accountability Inclusion of vulnerable populations Transparency in data use for research
4. Social Platforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moderation and reporting systems Protection from abuse, harassment, and exploitation Combatting misinformation Transparency in governance User empowerment tools Mental health and digital well-being Child and teen protection
5. Gig/JobTech	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worker protection Fair pay algorithms Grievance redressal mechanisms Psychological and physical safety Data transparency Inclusive access Social protection benefits
6. AI/ML Startups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bias and fairness audits Explainability and transparency Data provenance and quality Model misuse prevention Human oversight Accountability and documentation
7. Gaming/Entertainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Age-appropriate design Anti-addiction mechanisms In-game moderation and reporting Ethical monetization

	Parental controls Data and behavioral tracking
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SECTION 8: Scoring and Reporting Template

Category	Score (1–5)	Comments / Red Flags
Foundational Alignment		
Product & Design Safety		
Data Responsibility		
Culture & Workforce		
Risk & Impact		
Investor Practices		

Sector-Specific Factors		
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→ Overall Trust & Safety Readiness Score: ___ / 35

→ Investment Recommendation: Proceed Conditional Decline

Conclusion

Responsible investing is no longer just about ESG or financial sustainability. It's about actively building safer digital environments. By integrating trust and safety criteria into due diligence and post-investment practices, investors and accelerators can shape a technology ecosystem where innovation protects people as much as it empowers them.