Bringing community wisdom into decisions about science and technology

Science and technology have tremendous power to make our lives better. But new developments can also be unfair and harmful. Decisions made previously by humans are now often made by sophisticated machines for example, but those machines do not necessarily do a better job. Even when technologies do have clear benefits they are often difficult to access.

The benefits and harms of new technologies and science are not distributed equally. People in historically excluded groups across race, gender, ability, sexual orientation, and income level are more likely to be affected by decisions about science and technology, and less likely to benefit.

The public often has important knowledge about how to make certain that science and technology will benefit their community and be fair. The University of Michigan's **Science, Technology, and Public Policy (STPP) program** respects and values this expertise and is dedicated to integrating these voices into public and policy conversations about science and technology.

Examples of technology and science affecting communities

Science and technology are everywhere but often not in plain view. They shape transportation, communication, public safety, social services and much more. The following are a few examples:

COMPUTERIZED DECISION-MAKING SYSTEMS
To determine eligibility for insurance, bail, loans, food assistance, and housing; to decide who should be hired for a particular job, which parents are most likely to abuse their children, etc.

ENVIRONMENTAL SENSORS
Used by governments, scientists, and communities to measure pollution, indoor air quality, and water quality.

SURVEILLANCE TECHNOLOGY
To collect data on individuals and their activities, often to achieve public safety. Examples include automated license plate readers, facial recognition software, and ankle monitors.

VACCINES AND WIRELESS BROADBAND
Although these technologies are generally thought of as being beneficial, they are often difficult to access.

What we offer

STPP listens to and learns from communities. Then, we provide you with tools to engage in technical and policy advocacy:

- Create communication resources including flyers, policy briefs, and letters to elected officials to explain your concerns in the language policy makers understand.

- Assess how science and technology is currently affecting or may affect your community in the future.

- Identify policy solutions to current or anticipated science and technology challenges.

- Connect your community with organizations who have successfully dealt with similar issues.

- Evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, and biases of technologies you want to use, as well as best practices for engaging with them.

- When appropriate, arrange for conversations with technical experts at U–M to learn about their research and develop research partnerships.

Work with us

We are looking for community partners in Michigan and beyond who have concerns related to (1) a current or anticipated science or technology issue or (2) an issue that could be addressed by science and technology. We want to support you in engaging in technical and policy discussions.

Contact us!

If you are interested in working with us, please contact **Kristin Burgard.**

✉ burgardk@umich.edu

📞 734-764-2451

What is STPP?

Founded in 2006, the STPP Program is a research, educational, and public policy engagement center committed to fostering technology, science, and related policies that are equitable and just. We believe that policymakers, researchers, civil society groups, and members of marginalized communities must work together to achieve this goal. The STPP Program seeks to facilitate these relationships at the local, state, and national levels. We have unique expertise: our faculty, staff, and students have the skills to help communities anticipate the social, equity, environmental, and health implications of emerging science and technology, and bring their needs to technical and policy decision makers.