CC Signals

Creative Commons is currently developing CC Signals to encourage reciprocity, support sharing and reuse, and help sustain a thriving commons in the age of AI.

About CC Signals

CC Signals is a framework of legal tools and guiding norms designed to encourage reciprocity in the AI ecosystem and help sustain a thriving commons of knowledge and culture. The CC Signals legal tool is a standardized contract that stewards can use when providing bulk access to their collections. It was designed with stewards of large, openly licensed collections in mind but the contract can be used regardless of whether the underlying content is in copyright, openly licensed, or in the public domain. The contract establishes legally enforceable conditions of reciprocity for AI developers who agree to its terms. The public alpha version, planned for early 2027, will initially focus on SourceConnection, with additional conditions for reciprocity under consideration for future versions.

Purpose

CC is dedicated to ensuring a thriving creative commons of knowledge and culture. Right now, the commons is at risk: a rise in infrastructure costs and a trend of defensive enclosure threaten to shrink the commons as people and organizations face growing challenges to sharing openly. Through CC Signals, we are exploring how legal tools and guiding norms can establish requirement and encourage reciprocity, support people and institutions that contribute to the commons, and help sustain the infrastructure that makes sharing possible

Elements of CC Signals

Who it is for: The alpha version of the CC Signals legal tool is designed for stewards that have invested substantial care, time, and resources into creating and/or gathering, curating, and stewarding their collections and who are providing a service by providing bulk access to them.

How it works: Stewards use the CC Signals legal tool when offering bulk access to their data. AI developers agree to the terms of the CC Signals legal tool before getting access to an API, a dataset on a repository, or some other interface for bulk access. The legal tool may either be used as a standalone contract or its elements can be inserted within terms of service on interfaces designed for bulk access. The tool does not replace or modify existing CC licenses applied to the collections or their contents.

What it does: The public alpha version of CC Signals, planned for early 2027, will focus on SourceConnection, a concept that builds on attribution as a form of reciprocity by maintaining connections between AI systems and the collections they use. SourceConnection requirements include transparency about which collections are used for AI training and references to sources during AI inference, when systems draw on particular information to answer questions. Future iterations of CC Signals may introduce ShareBack requirements that stewards could choose to include, such as requirements for sharing back access metrics, modified datasets, or financial contributions.

Needs Assessment

CC completed the first phase of a needs assessment with stewards of large openly licensed collections to better understand the challenges they face with AI-related access and reuse. This phase informed the development of the CC Signals legal tool alpha version. Research is ongoing with potential CC Signals adopters and the CC community.

Alpha Testing

CC is inviting organizations to participate in the public alpha testing of CC Signals. Testing will help identify implementation workflows, gather feedback, inform future improvements to the legal tool, and identify needs that may require other approaches. If your organization is interested in participating, please email info@creativecommons.org.