FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The American Geographical Society's EthicalGEO Initiative Launches Locus Charter in partnership with Benchmark Initiative.

Description: The American Geographical Society (AGS) announces EthicalGEO and Benchmark Initiative’s launch of the Locus Charter to promote responsible use of location data.

[London] – [March 24, 2021] — A coalition of location data practitioners has developed an ethics charter to promote responsible use of location technology. The Locus Charter, facilitated by The Benchmark Initiative and EthicalGEO, is a proposed set of common international principles that can guide responsible practice when using location data, including through safeguarding privacy, protecting the vulnerable, and addressing any harmful impacts of bias in data.

The Benchmark Initiative and EthicalGEO are inviting individuals, businesses, and government agencies from around the world to join The Locus Charter community and help to shape equitable and sustainable practice around the use of location data. Member organisations include the American Geographical Society and Britain's mapping agency, Ordnance Survey.

Location data is currently at the heart of the debate around digital privacy. Tech giants Apple and Facebook are in conflict over how much apps should be able to track users. Recent research shows personal information can be inferred from location data collected from smartphones, and that anonymisation can often be reversed to reveal people’s identities. The New York Times has unveiled a largely hidden trade in location data about individual people, collected from smartphones. As phones and other devices generate more detailed location data, these challenges grow.

The Locus Charter was developed in collaboration with location data and data ethics experts from across the globe and is supported by Omidyar Network, Omidyar Network, Henry Luce Foundation and Ordnance Survey. It will be launched at an online event on 24 March.

The Locus Charter aims to restore public trust in location technology, in order to enable its transformative power to, improve public health, enhance our response to the Covid-19 pandemic, fight climate change, protect the environment and more.

At present, there are no shared, international principles for responsible use of location data. The UK's Geospatial Commission has committed to publish guidelines for the ethical use of location data, and the World Wide Web Consortium is exploring this area too. But at the moment, many users of location data don’t know what questions to ask, to make sure they can avoid unintended harms. The Locus Charter sets out the key areas where attention can improve standards of practice, help to protect vulnerable groups, and safeguard individual privacy and the broader public interest.
Denise McKenzie, Programme Director of the Benchmark Initiative, said: “Low public trust in technology can have public health consequences, as we have seen with lower than expected uptake in track and trace apps that help in the fight against Covid-19. If we want location technology to fulfil its potential as an effective tool for public good, then it must enjoy a high degree of public confidence. The Locus Charter offers an opportunity to enhance ethical practice in the use of location data, improving public trust in this powerful technology.”

Ben Hawes, Engagement Director of The Benchmark Initiative, said: “Location data can help us do great things now, and it will be really important in addressing challenges including climate change. But using it creates risks as well as opportunities. At the moment there are no common international principles to support responsible use of location data. We hope that the Charter starts that collaboration. We hope organisations and geospatial professionals will use it, and work together to promote good practice globally”.

Lisa Allen, Head of Data and Analytical Services at Ordnance Survey, said: “The ethical use of data is fundamental. Using this common framework sets a standard across location data. It is essential for our customers to trust our industry in our use of data. Location data offers greater insights, better decisions, and smarter outcomes. By embedding this charter, it is a commitment to managing and analysing location data in an ethical way”.

Nadine Alameh, CEO of the Open Geospatial Consortium (OGC) said "The focus on the ethical and responsible use of location data in this charter cannot come at a better time. I see this initiative as balancing our collective hunger for using increasingly-accessible location information with the need to consider - carefully and from the get-go - the ethical implications of such hunger and usage. The Locus Charter balances the technical innovation work of the geospatial tech community and brings us all one step closer to well-rounded guidance on the use of location information in today's world."

The Locus Charter principles are:
1. Realise the benefits location data offer to society and economies
2. Understand the potential impacts of using location datasets
3. Do no harm when using location data
4. Protect the vulnerable
5. Recognise and address the impacts of bias in data
6. Respect people's dignity by avoiding unnecessary intrusion
7. Do not collect or use more data than necessary for a task
8. Actively protect privacy and seek consent
9. Prevent identification of individuals
10. Provide accountability about how data is used.

To read the charter in full and join the community, visit: https://ethicalgeo.org/locus-charter/

About Benchmark
The Benchmark Initiative was founded to open a dialogue between government, industry and academia around the ethics of the use of location data. Through dialogue the Benchmark Initiative explores issues of transparency, privacy, location tracing, unintended consequences, anonymity, and consent. Benchmark brings together the geospatial and data ethics sectors to learn from each other. Benchmark is hosted by Geovation, Ordnance Survey's location data start-up incubator.
About Omidyar Network
Omidyar Network is a philanthropic investment firm dedicated to harnessing the power of markets to create opportunity for people to improve their lives. Established in 2004 by eBay founder Pierre Omidyar and his wife Pam, the organization invests in and helps scale innovative organizations to catalyze economic and social change. Omidyar Network has committed more than $859 million to for-profit companies and nonprofit organizations that foster economic advancement and encourage individual participation across multiple initiatives, including Consumer Internet & Mobile, Education, Financial Inclusion, Governance & Citizen Engagement, and Property Rights.

About EthicalGEO
The American Geographical Society's EthicalGEO Initiative seeks to activate thinkers, innovators, entrepreneurs, policymakers, practitioners, students, and everyday citizens and bring them into a global dialogue that shines a light on their best ideas about the ethical challenges and opportunities posed by the many geospatial technologies and data sources that are reshaping our society.

About Geovation
Geovation, an initiative of Ordnance Survey (OS), aims to drive innovation in the geospatial industry and gain valuable insight into how geospatial data can further contribute to the UK economy and digital transformation. Since running our first innovation challenge in 2009, Geovation has collaborated with partners across the public and private sector to run accelerator programmes to help location data and proptech startups launch and grow. In total, Geovation has supported 125 startups and as a result created over 550 new jobs.

About Ordnance Survey
Ordnance Survey provides national mapping services for Great Britain and is the world’s most trusted geospatial partner. We help nations make smarter decisions for the prosperity and well-being of their citizens. Our managed services enable smarter solutions to the world’s most complex problems, including resource management, urbanisation and population growth. We empower businesses with data insight that drives efficiency and progress in a fast-moving world. Our commitment to geospatial innovation helps governments around the world see a better place.

For media enquiries, please contact:
Alex Stephenson, April Six on behalf of The Benchmark Initiative
Alex.stephenson@april-six.com
+44 7506022367

Katherine Cann, EthicalGEO
American Geographical Society
121 6th Avenue, #6
New York, NY 10013
info@ethicalgeo.org
+1 (917) 745-8354

###