

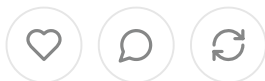
Neely Ethics and Tech Update

Issue 8



NATHANAEL FAST

SEP 14, 2025



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NEELY CENTER FOR
ETHICAL LEADERSHIP
AND
DECISION MAKING



In our last newsletter, we discussed the Neely Center's approach to advancing a [purpose-driven AI paradigm](#) for the design, use, and governance of AI. Today, I want to highlight another core element of our work: understanding and addressing AI-powered technologies that have an outsized effect on [human psychology](#). Psychology is foundational for individual and societal health, and our view is that the critical shapers of human psychology—phones, social media platforms, AI chatbots, and emerging technologies like extended reality (XR)—ought to be designed with human flourishing as the primary consideration, not as an afterthought.

Perhaps the most critical area to consider in the space of purpose-driven design is that of the [effects of AI on our youth](#). This is especially true in light of [harms that young people](#) have experienced and [alarming policies that fail miserably to protect young people's health](#). AI-powered technologies fundamentally alter young people's psychology, including how they think, learn, form relationships, and view themselves. We're working with our many partners to ensure these tools are designed and used purposefully to support human wellbeing. This requires both understanding the psychology behind technology adoption and developing concrete design principles that can guide our tech toward positive outcomes.

One reason we focus on [design instead of content moderation](#) is that, in working across educational, policy, and industry contexts, we've seen how [small changes in how](#)



[technologies are built can have profound effects on user experiences and outcomes](#). By helping institutions understand what users explicitly value and designing systems that prioritize long-term wellbeing over short-term engagement, we can create digital environments that serve users rather than exploit their psychological vulnerabilities.

In the past year, we've seen this approach inform legislation in multiple states, guide international regulatory frameworks from Indonesia to Canada, and shape how schools across the nation think about phone policies. Our [design code](#) has been presented to congressional staffers, federal agencies, and technology companies, while our research on AI companions and phone-free schools has influenced policy discussions nationwide.

As AI chatbots and other emerging technologies become more prevalent, the need for psychology-informed design becomes even more urgent, as [we recently discussed in a webinar with MIT's Advancing Humans With AI group](#). This newsletter showcases our recent work across these domains—from advising governments on child protection policies to training the next generation of ethical technologists through our XR Fellows program.

Stay tuned for updates on how we're continuing to make technology design more democratic, evidence-based, and aligned with human flourishing. And, as always, if you'd like to connect with us on this work, don't hesitate to reach out!

Sincerely,

Nate Fast, Director

Recent Events and Projects

Celebrating the 2025 Neely Ethics & Technology Fellows

On June 13, the Neely Center hosted the culminating event of the 2025 Neely Ethics and Technology Fellows Program. Now in its second year, the program welcomed a new cohort of exceptional USC students who spent the semester exploring the ethical implications of emerging technologies—this year, we focused on Extended Reality (XR) for a second year.



Fellows took the stage to share their Personal Impact Projects, presenting thoughtful and practical approaches to applying XR ethically and meaningfully, alongside thought leaders from academia and industry. Their work addressed a diverse range of timely topics, including memory support for Alzheimer’s patients, innovative storytelling through XR, educational access in rural India, and strategies for bringing XR to the mainstream. As one guest reflected: “The Neely Fellows presented creative and impactful ways of using XR! I work with various industries, and it’s important to stay informed on how technology can be leveraged to achieve business goals. The information presented was both useful and insightful. I’m very glad I attended!”

In addition to the Fellows’ presentations, industry leaders such as [Avi Bar-Zeev](#) (President, XR Guild), [Linda Ciavarelli](#) (HouseCall VR), and [Morten Bay](#) (USC Center for the Digital Future) shared their expertise and inspired thoughtful discussion on the future of immersive technology.



[Gilda Brasch](#), a Marshall graduate student in entrepreneurship and documentary director, is exploring the preservation of human wisdom through cutting-edge XR technologies including 4D volumetric capture, VR, AR, and LIDAR for living subjects, and deepfake reconstruction based on historic documentation for deceased figures. Her research establishes a new frontier in storytelling, bridging ancient traditions with tomorrow's innovations. In partnership with Indigenous communities in Arizona, her investigations validated the profound need for preserving irreplaceable perspectives before they're lost forever, particularly significant as these communities base their spirituality and livelihoods on preserving ancestral knowledge. Building on this foundation, Gilda aims to expand her work to globally notable historical figures, thought leaders in the arts and sciences, and cherished family members. Through her startup, she is developing interactive experiences for families, museums, and educational institutions, so future generations can engage with great wisdom keepers. The project's intention is to provide a timeless point of access to those who inspire us.





XR Innovation with Auda

Neely Fellow [Walmir Luz](#) brings his personal story to XR innovation with his Auda concept, named after his grandmother who lived with Alzheimer's for 14 years. During that time, Walmir witnessed her increasing trouble with memory, recognizing family members, and feeling lost and unsafe. Walmir sees opportunity in everyday smart glasses as a device that reconnects those with advancing memory loss to their families and friends. He is currently working with a neurologist and psychologist to develop an adequate augmented reality interface for memory-impaired patients that will help and even empower them and their families. He [presented his work](#) at the Neely Fellows Program Wrap-Up on June 13, 2025.





Reimagining Rural Education with XR

Neely Fellow [Guljaha Shaik](#) explores the potential of XR to bridge deep educational divides in her home region of India. Drawing from personal observation and

community insight, Guljaha's project examines how immersive technologies could extend access to quality learning in rural areas while also navigating the social and infrastructural challenges that come with it. She [shared her project](#) during the 2025 Neely Fellows Wrap-Up held on June 13.



Trust at the Center of XR Adoption

As part of her Personal Impact Project, Neely Fellow [Ishita Singh](#) looked closely at how XR adoption is shaped by user trust and perception. Through a thoughtful analysis of design, bias, and integrity, Ishita raised important questions about how immersive technologies affect the way we engage with digital environments and how trust must be built into these systems from the start. She [presented her ideas](#) at the culminating event for the 2025 Neely Fellows cohort.



Reimagining

XR Adoption

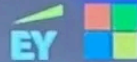
Through The Lens of

Trust



Ishita Singh

Fellow at Neely Ethics & Technology Center
Marshall FT MBA'26 Candidate



June 2025



Taking XR Mainstream

Neely Fellow [Marine Galstyan](#) explored the strategic levers needed to bring XR technologies into the mainstream. Her presentation addressed both industry and user adoption, mapping a thoughtful path from innovation to widespread implementation. Marine emphasized how cross-sector collaboration, intentional design, and widespread workplace adoption can help XR transition from emerging technology to an everyday tool. [Her presentation](#) was part of the 2025 Neely Fellows Wrap-Up event.



AI Tutors For Kids: Helpful Tools or Hidden Risks?

As AI chatbots become integrated into children's educational experiences, ensuring their safe and responsible use is more critical than ever. A recent Forbes article revealed serious risks posed by AI study-aid chatbots, including instances in which chatbots provided young users with dangerous information on topics such as how to make drugs at home and harmful dieting practices. Our Managing Director, [Ravi Iyer](#), who was featured in the article, explained: "Chatbots are programmed to act like humans, and to give their human questioners the answers they want... But sometimes, the bots' incentive to satisfy their users can lead to perverse outcomes, because people can manipulate chatbots in ways they can't manipulate other humans." He added that companies considering integrating AI chatbots into their products should be aware of the intrinsic risks of these products. You can read the full story [here](#).

AI-Human Interactions and Their Implications for Wellbeing

On May 1, 2025, the Neely Center, in collaboration with [Harvard's Human Flourishing Program](#) hosted a webinar exploring how interactions between humans and AI technologies impact our overall wellbeing. This event built upon the success of our inaugural virtual session in this series, held in December 2024. With the rapid integration of AI into everyday life, understanding its implications for mental health, social connection, and ethical design has never been more timely. Featured speakers included [Cathy Mengying Fang](#) from MIT Media Lab, who presented her latest research findings, followed by insights from [Ronald Ivey](#) and our Managing Director, [Ravi Iyer](#), who discussed the Neely Center's efforts to create a design code for AI powered social chatbots.

Should Schools Ban Cell phones to Improve Learning?

As support grows nationwide for restricting cell phone use in schools, educators, policymakers, and parents are increasingly recognizing how devices in classrooms can disrupt learning and social-emotional development. A recent [article by WGN](#) highlights this important conversation, spotlighting Illinois' consideration of statewide policies limiting cell phone access during school hours. Our Managing Director, [Ravi Iyer](#), featured in the article, discussed evolving findings related to "bell to bell" bans. "The full day restriction is what gives teachers the ability to no longer be



the phone police, so they can work on teaching and the phones are away the entire day and everyone gets a break.” You can watch the news reporting [here](#).

Issues That Matter: The Great Phone Debate

Recently, Little Rock Public Radio hosted a panel discussion titled “[The Great Phone Debate](#),” in partnership with the Central Arkansas Library System and the League of Women Voters of Pulaski County. The forum explored the growing debate around cell phone use in schools, particularly in light of a new Arkansas state law mandating a no-phone policy in public school classrooms. Our Managing Director, [Ravi Iyer](#), was a featured panelist. He was joined by [Dr. Julie Williams](#), Deputy Superintendent of Fayetteville Public Schools, and [Stephanie Vestal](#), Director of Strategy and External Affairs at the Little Rock School District.

While panelists agreed that phone use in schools should be restricted, much of the discussion focused on how far those restrictions should go, namely, whether phones should be banned only during class time or throughout the entire school day (“bell to bell”). Concerns about parental access during emergencies prompted a broader conversation about the need for reliable school-based communication systems to keep students reachable without relying on personal devices. There was general agreement that full-day bans reduce distractions more effectively and are better received by both students and staff after a short adjustment period. Ravi discussed evidence concerning the benefits of a distraction-free learning environment, emphasizing the importance not just of limiting phone use, but of removing phones from students’ proximity altogether. As he put it:

“Teachers don’t want to be the phone police. They want to teach, and we should let teachers teach and not be trying to get kids to stop using their phone.”

Dr. Williams shared compelling evidence from Fayetteville Public Schools, where the number of major disciplinary incidents dropped from 53 to just 12 in a single year following implementation of a no-phone policy. She noted that 40% of the previous year’s high-level egregious incidents had involved phones being used to coordinate meetups, make threats, or engage in cyberbullying. According to Dr. Williams, the change led to a “complete difference in student behaviors.”



The panel also touched on the broader social and mental health effects of phone use, the role of technology in post-COVID education, the influence of AI chatbots on kids, and the need for ethical guidance around AI use in schools.

You're invited to listen to the [full program](#), or watch the discussion on [YouTube](#). The conversation was also [covered by the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette](#) [subscription required].

2025 Psychology of Technology Dissertation Award Winners

The [Psychology of Technology Institute](#) recently announced the winners of the [2025 Psychology of Technology Dissertation Award](#). This [prestigious recognition](#), given annually since 2019, honors exceptional doctoral research advancing our understanding of the intricate relationship between human psychology and technology. Congratulations to [Benjamin Lira Luttgies](#) (University of Pennsylvania), [Dan-Mircea Mirea](#) (Princeton University), and [Luisa Fassi](#) (University of Cambridge) for their impactful work on AI-assisted cognition, digital mental health, and adolescent social media use. Honorable mentions were awarded to [Claire E. Robertson](#) (New York University), [Thomas Scheurer](#) (University of Lucerne), and [Michael Geers](#) (Max Planck Institute for Human Development). Their innovative research addresses critical questions about how technology shapes cognition, decision-making, and well-being, providing valuable insights for both scholars and practitioners.

Brussels to the Bay: Protecting Minors Under the DSA

On July 22, 2025, the European Union Office in San Francisco, in collaboration with Ireland's Digital Services Coordinator, convened a forum titled "[Brussels to the Bay: Protecting Minors Under the DSA](#)" focused on protecting minors online and implementing the Digital Services Act (DSA) to safeguard young users in today's evolving digital landscape across Europe. [Ravi Iyer](#), Managing Director of the Neely Center, spoke on the panel, bringing insights from behavioral science, tech-by-design, and policy engagement. Other speakers included Gerard de Graaf, Senior EU Envoy to the U.S. for Digital and Head of the San Francisco Office; [Niamh Hodnett](#), Online Safety Commissioner at Coimisiún na Meán; [Robbie Torney](#), Senior Director of AI Programs at Common Sense Media; and [Giulia Geneletti](#), Policy Officer at the



European Commission/EU Office in San Francisco. A video from the previous event in this series is available [here](#).



Asia-Pacific Expo

Held in Kathmandu in June 2025 and organized by [Dignity in Difference](#) with support from the USC Marshall School Neely Center, the Asia-Pacific Expo convened over 180 participants from across South Asia and beyond to explore how technology can be intentionally designed to strengthen civic trust and reduce digital polarization. This hybrid event was hosted in collaboration with by the [Council on Technology and Social Cohesion](#), which the Neely Center co-chairs, and featured expert panels, live demos, and interdisciplinary dialogue focused on building healthier digital ecosystems. Discussions ranged from AI tools for peacebuilding to deliberative technology policy, catalyzing future collaborations, including a proposed pilot in Nepal involving cross-party political engagement. This [event report](#) captures the key insights, tools, and next steps emerging from the convening.



The Kids Aren't Alright Online

The Neely Center has been a consistent voice in advocating for design-focused improvements to our online spaces. Public Knowledge, a leading DC-based think tank advancing technology policy in the public interest, recently released a report titled “The Kids Aren’t Alright Online: How to Build a Safer, Better Internet for Everyone.”

The Neely Center contributed to the Policy Konklave that informed this work, which strongly reflects a design-centered approach. As the report states: “The most effective path forward lies not in restricting children's access to technology platforms or specific pieces of content, but in requiring technology companies to design those services with children's wellbeing as a primary consideration. This approach – often referred to as “safety by design” – shifts responsibility from individual users and their families to the corporations that profit from the use of their online platforms. Rather than asking children to navigate exploitative systems or parents to police every online interaction, we should demand that companies build platforms that are safe for everyone by default.” Read the full report [here](#).





THE KIDS AREN'T ALRIGHT ONLINE: HOW TO BUILD A SAFER, BETTER INTERNET FOR EVERYONE



Design and Measurement-Based Plans for Abating Technology Harms

Neely Center Managing Director [Ravi Iyer](#), contributed to a paper titled “[Social Media Harm Abatement: Mechanisms for Transparent Public Health Assessment](#)” published in the Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences (August 2025). Coauthored with leading partners and experts, the paper proposes a framework that shifts from reactive content moderation to proactive design changes and measurable outcomes to reduce harms such as misinformation, polarization, and mental health challenges. Drawing



on behavioral science, the authors outline specific design principles and metrics to help platforms foster healthier digital environments. Read the full paper [here](#).

Designing AI to Help Children Flourish

In collaboration with Ron Ivey and his team at Harvard, the Neely Center has coauthored a new paper titled “[Designing AI to Help Children Flourish](#)” in the Global Solutions Journal (Issue 11). The article highlights risks associated with AI companions for youth and advocates for design principles that promote well-being. In the paper, Neely Center Director [Nate Fast](#) and Managing Director [Ravi Iyer](#), together with coauthors [Ron Ivey](#) and [Jonathan Teubner](#) emphasize ethical AI development to mitigate harms such as over-dependence and privacy risks. This paper grew out of a webinar series on AI-human interactions organized by the authors, which convened leading subject-matter experts to exchange insights on emerging challenges and opportunities. As part of this work, the Neely Center has also presented AI companion design principles to numerous major AI companies, more than a dozen civil society groups, and several global regulators with efforts already informing policymakers. Access the paper [here](#).

Designing AI to Help Children Flourish

A Global Task Force to Ensure Chatbots Support Youth Well-being

Ronald M. Ivey, Research Fellow, Human Flourishing Program, Institute for Quantitative Social Science, Harvard University | Fellow, Global Solutions Initiative

Jonathan D. Teubner, Research Faculty, Human Flourishing Program, Institute for Quantitative Social Science, Harvard University

Nathanael J. Fast, Professor at University of Southern California Marshall School of Business and Director of the Neely Center for Ethical Leadership and Decision Making

Ravi Iyer, Managing Director, Neely Center for Ethical Leadership and Decision Making, University of Southern California, Marshall School of Business

Policy Brief

Keywords:

artificial intelligence, innovation, human flourishing, mental health, child well-being

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Artificial Intelligence (AI) innovation promises many benefits, but its rapid development and adoption raises concerns about the well-being of children.

AI chatbots, powered by large language models (LLMs), are rapidly growing in popularity, with platforms such as ChatGPT and Character.AI attracting hundreds of millions of users. While they offer benefits, such as productivity and mental health support, they also pose risks, including social isolation, exposure to child abuse, and suicide.

Youth mental health is declining globally, and suicide is now one of the three leading causes of death among adolescents aged between ten and nineteen (Carvatho, n.d.). The global cost of mental health conditions is projected to exceed US\$6 trillion by 2030.

To promote human flourishing, G20 nations should create a global task force on AI and child well-being to lead the development and adoption of smart standards for AI chatbots and youth well-being. AI companies should prove the benefits for youth before widespread deployment.

INTRODUCTION: A NEW ERA OF AI AND HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

G20 nations recognize the need for AI innovation to enhance the productivity of their workers, protect the security of their citizens, and enhance the competitiveness of their markets (Department for Science, Innovation & Technology, 2024).

One innovation, AI chatbots, has surged in usage. Grand View Research valued market growth at US\$190 million in 2016 and over US\$3 billion by 2023, with a 23.3% annual growth rate projected through 2030 (Grand View Research, n.d.). OpenAI's ChatGPT saw 100 million users in six months during 2022 and now, in 2025, it exceeds 400 million weekly active users (“OpenAI's Weekly Active Users Surpass 400 Million,” 2025).

As AI models improve, chatbots are becoming more integrated into our social life. By early 2025, over 100 AI companion chatbots were on the market (eSafety Commissioner Australian Government, 2025). These include Character.AI with 28 million active users and Replika with over 30 million users (Patel, 2024). Character.AI users spend approximately two hours daily on it and, on average, they talk to their companion 298 times per month (Ivey, 2024). As of 2023, Snapchat recorded over 150 million users engaging with their ‘My AI’ companion, exchanging over ten billion messages (Hutchison, 2023).

AI chatbots could offer tangible benefits, such as providing accessible mental health support, enhancing communication skills, and helping language learners, and neurodivergent individuals practice social interactions (AbuSahyon et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2024; Fitzpatrick et al., 2017). However, overreliance on chatbots may lead to

increased social isolation, reduced empathy, and unhealthy emotional attachments, which could undermine social cohesion, eroding both national security and economic prosperity (Folk et al., 2024; Freitas et al., 2024; Han & Yang, 2018; Marriott & Pitardi, 2024; Roose, 2024; Tran & Davis, 2024; Turkle, 2018).

Some of the most troubling risks are for youth. A recent report demonstrated that over 50% of US teens are using chatbots, while only 37% of the parents of these teens were aware of the chatbot use (Caldwell et al., 2024). Replika claims it does not allow users under eighteen years of age. Character.AI sets its age requirement at thirteen years in the US and sixteen years in Europe. Many of the AI companion companies actively target youth. According to their own statistics, Snapchat, the provider of My AI, reaches 75% of 13–34 year olds in over

»To promote human flourishing, G20 nations should create a global task force on AI and child well-being to lead the development and adoption of smart standards for AI chatbots and youth well-being.«

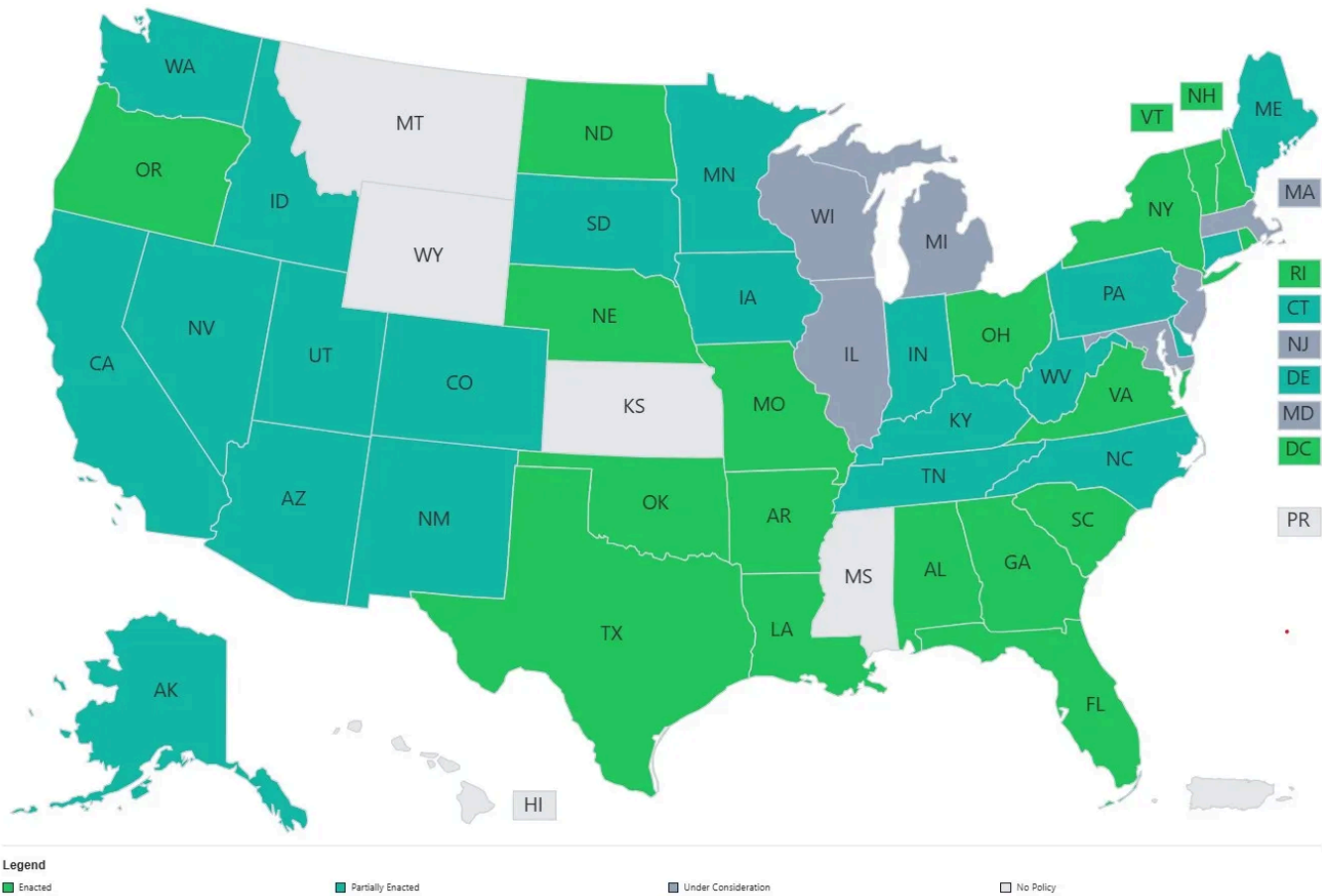


Neely Center Recommendations Shaping Phone-Free Schools Legislation Nationwide

The Neely Center's recommendations, outlined in Jonathan Haidt's After Babel post "[How to \(and How Not to\) Mandate Phone-Free Schools](#)," are influencing legislation across the nation. According to the Anxious Generation's [policy state map](#), 12 states have implemented or proposed policies to combat classroom distractions and improve student mental health. As part of this initiative, [Ravi Iyer](#), Managing Director of the Neely Center, has joined other experts to share research on phone-free schools in various settings, including the “Bell to Bell, No Cell Act” discussion in Arkansas. Arkansas Money and Politics (AMP) recently featured the event in “[Unwiring the Anxious Generation: Bell to Bell, No Cell Act Set to Improve Student Mental Health](#).” In that piece, Ravi emphasized:

“There’s nothing more important than our kids’ mental health, our kids’ ability to pay attention, our kids’ ability to form social relationships, and so this is 100 percent a critical issue. It is not a red state issue or a blue state issue or a purple state issue. Every state is wrestling with these issues. Every state is seeing teachers complain about the distractions. Every state where they are actually going phone free earnestly is reporting positive effects.”





Neely Design Code Informs Age-Appropriate Design Policies in Nebraska and Vermont

The Neely Center’s Design Code has informed Age-Appropriate Design Code policies in Nebraska and Vermont. In Vermont, S.69 (Act 63), “An act relating to an age-appropriate design code,” was introduced on February 13, 2025, and signed by the Governor on June 12, 2025. It establishes guidelines for online platforms to protect minors through humane design features. Similarly, Nebraska’s LB504, “Adopt the Age-Appropriate Online Design Code Act,” was introduced on January 21, 2025, and approved by the Governor on June 2, 2025, mandating age-appropriate features to safeguard children online. In both cases, policymakers and advocates leveraged our Design Code for practical implementation. Learn about [Vermont's bill](#) and [Nebraska's bill](#) here.

Neely Center Advises Indonesia on Online Child Protection

The Neely Center is collaborating with the Indonesian government as a formal advisor on new regulations to protect children online. Indonesia's Government Regulation No. 17 of 2025 (GR 17/2025), enacted on March 27, 2025, strengthens online safety for children under 18 by requiring electronic system operators (ESOs) to conduct risk assessments, implement age-appropriate design features, and safeguard consent and privacy. Drawing on global best practices, including the Neely Center's Design Code for Social Media, this regulation puts the best interests of children at the center of technology governance. As part of this effort, the Neely Center is advising Indonesian regulators on how to assess and measure risks across platforms to make these protections effective in practice. For detailed perspectives from practitioners on the ground, see commentary from [Hiswara Bunjamin & Tandjung \(HBT\)](#) and [Dentons HPRP](#).

Neely Center Collaborates with New_Public on Advising Public Media Across 6 Countries

The Neely Center was invited by New_Public to serve as an advisor in their efforts to strengthen public media across six countries. This initiative supports media organizations in reimagining digital platforms that foster civic trust and resilience rather than polarization. As part of this advisory role, Neely Center is contributing design-centered insights as well as measurement ideas, to help ensure public media ecosystems are designed effectively toward longer term priorities. Learn more about New_Public's program [here](#).



New_Public

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Reimagine social media

We are researchers, engineers, designers, and community leaders working together to explore creating digital public spaces where people can thrive and connect.

Neely Center Educates Singapore Justices on Online Harms

As part of continuing education for judges in Singapore's [Family Justice Courts](#), our Managing Director, [Ravi Iyer](#), was invited to deliver a presentation on the risks children and youth face online. The session explored the types of technologies young people are exposed to, the degree and nature of this exposure, and the impact on their health, safety, and development. It also examined the knock-on effects on families, communities, and society, including correlations with delinquency and juvenile crime. Neely Center leadership emphasized the critical role of public institutions and legal systems in managing these risks, while also offering practical guidance for parents, teachers, and caregivers on fostering healthier digital habits. By sharing expertise grounded in the Neely Design Code and behavioral science research, the Center is helping justice leaders in Singapore strengthen protections for vulnerable youth in a rapidly evolving digital environment.

Ravi Iyer Joins Council on Responsible Social Media and Alliance for Peacebuilding Board

Neely Center Managing Director [Ravi Iyer](#) has been appointed to two notable leadership roles advancing ethical technology and global cooperation. He was recently invited to join the [Council on Responsible Social Media \(CRSM\)](#), a cross-partisan coalition addressing the negative mental, civic, and public health impacts of social media in America. Convened by Issue One, CRSM works to protect and strengthen U.S. democracy by confronting the harms of online platforms and promoting constructive reforms. In addition, Ravi has been elected to the Board of Directors of the [Alliance for Peacebuilding \(AfP\)](#), a global network dedicated to reducing conflict and building sustainable peace. Across both roles, he brings behavioral science and design-centered expertise from the Neely Center's work, ensuring that our research and frameworks inform conversations at the intersection of technology, democracy, and peace.

Ravi Iyer Joins Panels Informing Canadian Technology Discussions

[Ravi Iyer](#), Managing Director of the Neely Center, recently participated in two panels informing Canadian policy on digital harms. The first, a Macdonald-Laurier Institute webinar titled "[Breaking the Feed: Does the Attention Economy Undermine Our](#)



[Democracy?](#)” (August 13, 2025), examined how the attention economy is undermining journalism, accelerating mental health crises, polarizing citizens, and enabling foreign influence operations, all while monetizing distraction and division. Other panelists included Andrew McDougall, former communications director for Prime Minister Stephen Harper, and [Katie Harbath](#), CEO of Anchor Change.

At the second webinar, “[Imagining a ProSocial Tech Future](#)” (August 18, 2025), Ravi joined policymakers and experts to discuss embedding ethical design principles into national and global tech governance. He was joined by [Lisa Schirch](#) of the University of Notre Dame and [Peter Chapman](#) of the Knight-Georgetown Institute. Together, these conversations reflect growing recognition of the Neely Center’s role in shaping digital policy reform worldwide.

Is Phone-Free School Enough?

By enacting Senate Bill 185 last year, Indiana joined the growing list of states banning electronic devices in classrooms as part of a national trend toward “phone-free schools.” In a recent [Indianapolis Star](#) column, experts including Neely Center Managing Director [Ravi Iyer](#), were cited for their research and recommendations on reducing classroom distractions and supporting student mental health. Ravi discussed findings related to a bell-to-bell ban, emphasizing the value of stronger measures to help students focus and thrive. He noted: “Even if you ban it in classrooms, if they’re using it outside the classroom it still is a distraction for teaching because... you don’t want to be fighting this battle every period.”

He further underscored: “Kids relax about being off their phones (where) other kids are not on their phones. What you really want is for kids to relax and not feel like they’re missing out, not be thinking about what’s going on on social media.”

Upcoming Events and Opportunities

State of the Science: Digital Media and Addiction

The Neely Center is collaborating with the USC Keck School’s [Institute for Addiction Science](#), to host a live webinar on October 3, 2025 (10:00–11:30 AM PDT) titled “*State of*



the Science: Digital Media and Addiction.” This 90-minute event will feature an expert panel discussing cutting-edge research, emerging trends, and innovative tools at the intersection of digital technology and addiction science. Designed to spark cross-disciplinary collaboration, the webinar welcomes researchers, educators, students, industry leaders, and practitioners interested in bridging digital and behavioral health landscapes. Panelists include: [Aubrie Amstutz](#) (Grid Dynamics), [Ian Anderson](#) (Caltech), [Ravi Iyer](#) (Neely Center), [Luca Luceri](#) (USC Information Sciences Institute), and [Fred Morstatter](#) (USC Information Sciences Institute). You can register and submit questions [here](#).



STATE OF THE SCIENCE:
**DIGITAL MEDIA
AND ADDICTION**

LIVE WEBINAR

Oct. 3rd, 2025

10AM - 11:30AM PDT

**DESIGNED TO SPARK CROSS-
DISCIPLINARY COLLABORATION**

Join us for this engaging symposium featuring an expert panel highlighting cutting-edge research, emerging trends, and innovative tools at the intersection of digital technology and addiction science. This event invites researchers, educators, students, industry leaders, and practitioners to explore new possibilities that bridge digital and behavioral health landscapes.

Moderated by:



Adam Leventhal, PhD
University Professor and Executive
Director @ USC Institute for
Addiction Science

REGISTER NOW:

VISIT: bit.ly/ias-neely-2025

OR CLICK HERE TO RSVP

Featured Panelists:



Aubrie Amstutz, MA
Responsible AI and Safety
Policy and Evaluation Manager
@ Grid Dynamics



Ian Anderson, PhD
Behavioral Scientist @ Caltech



Ravi Iyer, PhD
Managing Director @ USC
Marshall School Neely Center



Luca Luceri, PhD
Research Assistant Professor @
USC Information Sciences
Institute



Fred Morstatter, PhD
Research Associate Professor
@ USC Information Sciences
Institute

The Prosocial Design Network ([PDN](#)), in collaboration with Roblox, is hosting a special convening on October 17, 2025, titled "Fostering Connection in Social Gaming." This one-day event will bring researchers and industry practitioners together to explore how social gaming platforms can proactively nurture positive interactions, connections, and community. If your research involves fostering connections, community building, or prosocial design in digital spaces—and you're keen to see your research translated into real-world impact—this convening is an exceptional opportunity. PDN and Roblox aim to bridge the gap between research and practice. Travel support is available, as are grants to support research projects generated from the convening. More details and the form to express interest can be found [here](#).

Discussion about this post

Comments

Restacks



Write a comment...

