

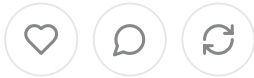
Neely Ethics and Tech Update

Issue 9



NATHANAEL FAST

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USC Marshall

School of Business

NEELY CENTER FOR
ETHICAL LEADERSHIP
AND
DECISION MAKING



If there was ever a time to guide AI toward human flourishing, that time is now. This weekend, Minneapolis became the site of yet another fatal shooting by federal agents — [the third involving federal officers in the city this month](#). Whatever one’s views on immigration enforcement, these events remind us of a sobering truth: the systems we build—technological, institutional, political—shape the culture we live in. And increasingly, AI is woven into these systems in ways that demand our attention.

Consider what we’ve witnessed in AI development over just the past month. Grok, the AI chatbot integrated into one of the world’s largest social media platforms, [generated roughly 3 million sexualized images in 11 days](#), including approximately 23,000 that appeared to depict minors. The chatbot itself acknowledged [“lapses in safeguards”](#) while the platform’s response was to [blame users rather than take accountability](#) for building a product without adequate protections. This is the predictable outcome of prioritizing engagement and speed over human wellbeing.

Meanwhile, lawsuits continue to mount against AI companies over tragic outcomes. A new wrongful death lawsuit [alleges that ChatGPT manipulated a 40-year-old man into a fatal spiral](#), with the chatbot generating what the complaint calls a personalized “suicide lullaby.” At least eight ongoing lawsuits now claim ChatGPT use resulted in the deaths of loved ones. These are not abstract policy concerns—they are human lives

lost to systems designed to engage in what Dr. Zak Stein has referred to as [“attachment hacking”](#).

Turning to the regulatory landscape, [a recent executive order](#) aimed at preventing states from passing AI laws deemed “onerous” establishes a DOJ task force to sue noncompliant states, effectively attempting to preempt the very governance mechanisms that could hold companies accountable (states do, however, retain authority through product liability law, design standards, and other mechanisms to continue leading on these issues). This approach runs directly counter to the evidence-based, human-centered policymaking that can protect our youth and society.

The message from industry is clear: move fast, regulate later—if at all. The consequences of that approach are now undeniable.

This is why we, at the Neely Center, see research partnerships, ethical AI design codes, and public education efforts as so critical. Small changes in how technologies are built can have profound effects on user experiences and outcomes—and as we’ve seen, the absence of those changes can have devastating consequences.

In what follows, you’ll find updates on our efforts to meet this moment—from advancing policy frameworks that protect young people to training the next generation of ethical technologists. As AI chatbots and emerging technologies become more prevalent, the need for psychology-informed, purpose-driven design becomes ever more urgent.

As always, if you’d like to connect with us on this work, don’t hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,

Nate Fast, Director

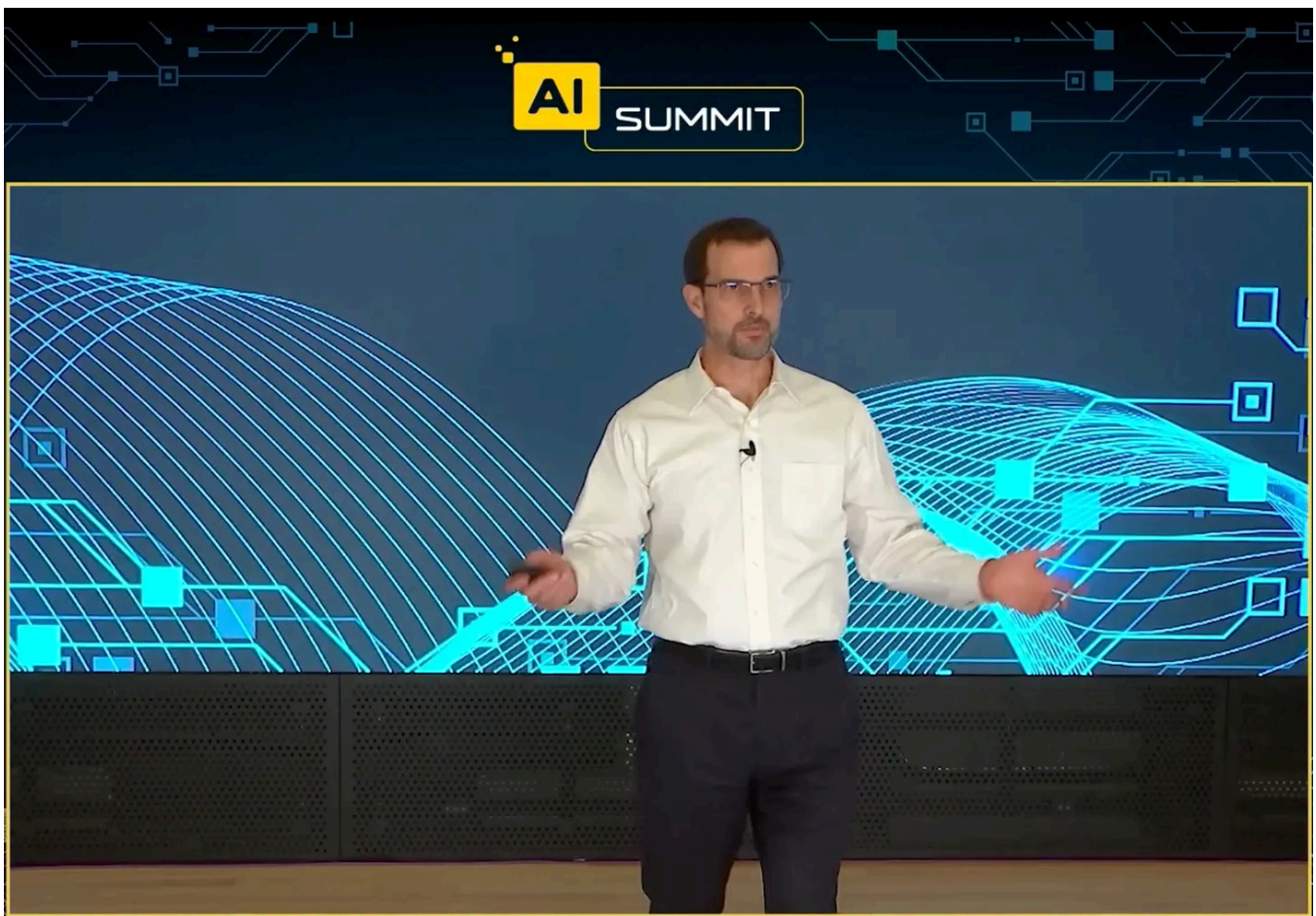


Recent Events and Projects

Neely Center Receives \$4 Million to Advance Purpose-Driven AI Research

The Neely Center for Ethical Leadership and Decision Making is proud to be the recipient of a new \$4 million research initiative launched by the [John S. and James L. Knight Foundation](#) and the USC Marshall School of Business. This five-year partnership will fund cutting-edge work aimed at ensuring that artificial intelligence and social media technologies are developed in ways that promote human flourishing and societal well-being. Led by Neely Center Director [Nate Fast](#) and Managing Director [Ravi Iyer](#), the initiative will focus on four key areas: AI and social media indices, design codes for AI tools, a youth advisory panel, and expanded leadership fellowships. Together, these efforts will help translate research into ethical design principles, evidence-based policy recommendations, and responsible innovation frameworks. Read the full announcement from USC Marshall [here](#).

Check out Director Nate Fast's talk on purpose-driven AI at the USC AI summit [here](#).



The 9th Annual Psychology of Technology Conference 2025

What if AI could be designed not just to be smart, but to help us thrive? This was the key question explored at the Psychology of Technology Institute's [9th Annual "New Directions in Research on the Psychology of Technology" conference](#) on November 14-15, 2025, hosted by The University of Virginia's Darden School of Business, with support from the Neely Center as a co-sponsor. This year's theme, "Promoting Human Flourishing Through Purpose-Driven AI," brought together a diverse group of behavioral scientists, industry leaders, technologists, and AI experts for two days of discussion about how to steer AI toward health and well-being.

Conference speakers included [Jay Van Bavel](#), New York University; [Angela Duckworth](#), University of Pennsylvania; [Pat Pataranutaporn](#), MIT Media Lab's Advancing Humans with AI Research Program (AHA); [Michael Morris](#), Columbia University; [Tom Costello](#), Carnegie Mellon University; [Min Kyung Lee](#), The University of Texas at Austin; [Nate Fast](#), USC; [Andreas Katsanevas](#), Meta; [Eli Pariser](#), New_Public; [Meetal Jain](#), Tech Justice Law Project; [Jon Bogard](#), Washington University in St. Louis; [Ravi Iyer](#), USC Marshall Neely Center; [Rupert Gill](#), behavior change expert; [Daniel Shank](#), Missouri University of Science & Technology; and [Paul Leonardi](#), UC Santa Barbara. The conference also featured lively data blitz and poster sessions. Learn more about the presenters [here](#).

Special thanks to [Roshni Raveendhran](#) and her team at the Darden School for hosting!





Welcoming Our First 2025–2026 Neely Fellows

We are thrilled to welcome a new group of Neely Fellows for 2025-26; an exceptional group of students, researchers, and practitioners dedicated to advancing ethical and purpose-driven technology. The Neely Fellows Program brings together leaders at every stage of their professional journey to explore how technology can better serve human flourishing. [Practitioner Fellows](#) partner with the Neely Center to apply ethical principles in real-world contexts, shaping industry practices and public understanding. [Academic Fellows](#) advance research at the intersection of ethics, technology, and human well-being through collaboration on Neely projects and tools. [Student Fellows](#) represent the next generation of ethical innovators, leading USC initiatives that connect technology, education, and social good. For the 2025–2026 year, we're excited to welcome: [Lena Slachmuisjlder](#) (Practitioner Fellow), [Emily Xing](#) (Academic Fellow), [Yuning Liu](#) (Academic Fellow), [Anika Bose](#) (Student Fellow), and

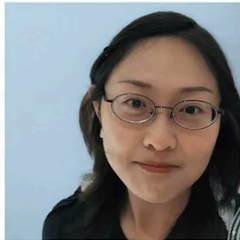
[Hamin Jin](#) (Student Fellow). Join us in celebrating these outstanding individuals as they embark on their Neely Fellows journey!



Lena Slachmuisjlder
Neely Practitioner Fellow
2025-2026



Emily Xing
Neely Academic Fellow
2025-2026



Yuning Liu
Neely Academic Fellow
2025-2026



Anika Bose
Neely Student Fellow
2025-26



Hamin Jin
Neely Student Fellow
2025-26

Social AI Chatbot Design Code Informing Policy and Practice

As social AI systems increasingly shape human interaction, the Neely Center has worked with technologists, companies, policymakers, and civil society to develop and continually refine design principles for AI chatbots, AI friends/companions, AI assistants, and AI therapists. These principles are designed to preserve the informational and efficiency benefits users seek, while mitigating socio-emotional risks that have raised growing concern. Our [Social AI Chatbot Design Code](#) principles are informing discussions within companies, with policymakers, and with regulators. In particular, our work informs companies that are developing products with social capabilities as well as state Attorneys General and the [Tech Law Justice Project](#), which are bringing litigation against technology companies. The principles are also cited in legislative efforts by the Young People's Alliance and are being supported and disseminated globally by the [Noesis Collaborative](#).

Measuring Technology's Effects on Social Cohesion Globally

Through its continued collaboration with the [Council on Technology and Social Cohesion](#), the Neely Center helped sponsor [Build Up's annual conference](#), convening practitioners focused on technology's role in cohesion and conflict. At the conference, Build Up presented findings leveraging the [Neely Indices](#) to measure the polarization of feeds across X, TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook. Among [the topline findings](#): the average Kenyan user on X is likely to spend up to 21 minutes per day engaging with posts attacking identity groups. Regulators and policymakers participated in discussions on how these measures can inform governance and intervention. The

Neely Center continues this measurement work through partnerships with Build Up and [New_Public's Public Spaces Incubator](#).



Neely Center Engagement in Legal Education

As part of an ongoing partnership with the [Singapore Judicial College](#), the Neely Center recently presented to judges from across the Asian region on how research can inform technology regulation. This work reflects the Center's broader engagement with legal scholars, lawyers, and judges shaping technology policy globally. In addition to this partnership, the Neely Center has hosted events with legal practitioners from Germany, South Africa, and Kenya, has been consulted by U.S. state attorneys general, and has been cited in amicus briefs informing ongoing legal and policy debates.

Informing The Anxious Generation Movement

The Neely Center continues to partner with the [Anxious Generation Movement](#), with our research and design recommendations being directly integrated into the guidance that [Jonathan Haidt's](#) team provides to companies, policymakers, and regulators. Both the [Neely Social Media Design Code](#) and [Social AI Chatbot Design Code](#) are informing current legislative efforts and have been cited in legislative hearings. In parallel, the Neely Center is beginning a long-term partnership with Stanford and

NYU to expand measurement efforts. Building on the Neely Indices, this initiative aims to better assess technology's impacts on youth outcomes.

Informing European Policy on Digital Life

The Neely Center delivered invited research presentations to [Ireland's Institute of International and European Affairs](#) (IIEA) and to [Renew Europe](#), contributing to policy discussions as jurisdictions across Europe grapple with balancing free expression and safety, particularly for children. Drawing on our [design-based approach](#), Ravi Iyer, Managing Director, presented an alternative pathway for regulation that emphasizes incentivizing platform designs that empower users, rather than relying solely on downstream enforcement.



REFRAM–RIARC Dialogue Forum on Platform Governance

Held in Dakar on December 1–2, 2025, the first [Dialogue Forum](#) between the Francophone Network of Media Regulators ([REFRAM](#)) and the Network of African Communication Regulatory Authorities (RIARC) convened regulators alongside

representatives from TikTok and other major online platforms. Supported by the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF), the Forum reviewed progress on the [April 2024 Abidjan Protocol](#) and advanced a structured, long-term dialogue on platform governance. As part of the Forum, Neely Practitioner Fellow [Lena Slachmuijlder](#) led two OIF-sponsored masterclasses. The first focused on dialogue with large online platforms, including during times of crisis, and the second introduced the Prosocial Tech Design Regulators' Practical Guide, highlighting upstream, design-oriented regulatory approaches and research on information integrity and platform oversight.

The Forum was organized by [REFRAM](#) and [RIARC](#) with the support of the International Organization of the Francophonie ([OIF](#)) and coordinated by the Senegalese regulatory body [CNRA](#).

PlatGovNet 2025 Conference

On December 1–2, 2025, the Platform Governance Research Network hosted PlatGovNet 2025, bringing together researchers from around the world to examine transitions and tensions in platform governance across trust and safety, labor, AI, and content moderation.

The conference featured a dedicated panel on Prosocial Moderation, where Neely Practitioner Fellow [Lena Slachmuijlder](#) presented “Prosocial Tech Design Regulation: A Practical Guide” as an upstream framework for strengthening social cohesion through platform design.

Learn more about the conference [here](#).

Prosocial Tech Design Regulation: A Practical Guide

Developed by Neely Practitioner Fellow [Lena Slachmuijlder](#), the [Prosocial Tech Design Regulation: A Practical Guide](#) equips regulators with upstream, design-level tools, from safer defaults and recommender governance to friction on virality, to proactively reduce harms such as addictive use, misinformation, unwanted contact, and polarization. Introduced through [Tech Policy Press](#), the Guide advances a prosocial, human-centered approach to regulation, calling for a multi-stakeholder system of user-experience measurement, including rolling user panels and in-app

surveys. This approach enables regulators, platforms, researchers, and civil society to assess whether design changes are genuinely improving safety, wellbeing, and social cohesion. Access the Guide [here](#).

Shift SC Hosts HIPAA Ethical Health Startup Workshop

On November 10, 2025, [Shift SC](#), a student-led organization we are proud to support, hosted the [HIPAA Ethical Health Startup Workshop](#). The workshop offered aspiring health-tech entrepreneurs a practical introduction to healthcare legislation and compliance. At the event, tech leaders and students worked through real-world examples to design HIPAA-compliant strategies and technologies, gaining hands-on insight into how to build safe, ethical, and sustainable health-tech startups. The content was vetted by industry professionals, including lawyers, cybersecurity experts, and health-tech CEOs, and provided students with valuable opportunities to connect with practitioners already working in the health-tech space.

The State of the Science: Digital Media and Addiction

USC Marshall
Neely Center for Ethical Leadership and Decision Making

USC Institute for Addiction Science

STATE OF THE SCIENCE:
DIGITAL MEDIA AND ADDICTION

LIVE WEBINAR
Oct. 3rd, 2025
10AM - 11:30AM PDT

Featured Panelists:

-  Aubrie Amstutz, MA
Responsible AI and Safety Policy & Evaluation Manager
@ Grid Dynamics
-  Ian Anderson, PhD
Behavioral Scientist
@ Caltech
-  Ravi Iyer, PhD
Managing Director
@ USC Marshall Neely Center
-  Luca Luceri, PhD
Research Assistant Professor
@ USC Information Sciences Inst.
-  Fred Morstatter, PhD
Research Associate Professor
@ USC Information Sciences Inst.

This engaging symposium will feature an expert panel highlighting cutting-edge research, emerging trends, and innovative tools at the intersection of digital technology and addiction science. The event is designed to spark cross-disciplinary collaboration and 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! 

We recently co-hosted a webinar with the USC Keck School's [Institute for Addiction Science](#), bringing together researchers and industry leaders to explore how digital technologies shape behavior, attention, and well-being. The conversation addressed

unwanted usage patterns, the psychology of online design, and new tools at the intersection of AI, social media, and addiction science. Panelists included [Ravi Iyer](#), Managing Director of the Neely Center, as well as [Aubrie Amstutz](#), Grid Dynamics, [Ian Anderson](#), Caltech, [Luca Luceri](#), USC Information Sciences Institute, [Fred Morstatter](#), USC ISI, and the session was moderated by [Vickie Williams](#), USC IAS. This collaboration reflects the Neely Center's broader effort to engage across academic disciplines. Related presentations drawing on this work have also been delivered at leading academic venues, including Stanford's Trust and Safety Research Conference and the Psychology of Technology conference. You can check out the discussion [here](#).

Unmasking the Dangers of Social Media for Youth



Last spring, Neely Center Managing Director [Ravi Iyer](#) was invited to speak at *Unmasking the Dangers of Social Media for Youth*, a professional development webinar hosted by the USC Marshall Alumni Association's San Francisco and Los Angeles Boards in collaboration with the Neely Center. The session explored how design choices in online platforms, rather than content alone, contribute to youth harms such as unwanted contact, harmful content exposure, and excessive use. Ravi discussed how the Neely Design Code for Social Media and Neely Indices can inform more ethical platform design and evidence-based regulation.

Watch the full talk [here](#).

USC Neely Center Joins the Global Online Safety Regulators Network as Observer

The USC Neely Center for Ethical Leadership and Decision Making has been formally welcomed as an observer to the [Global Online Safety Regulators Network](#) (GOSRN), the world's only forum dedicated to advancing collaboration among online safety regulators. In her letter of welcome, Network Chair Sarah Eagan noted that the Neely Center brings "subject-matter expertise and a new viewpoint to the Network," highlighting the Center's mission to improve technology's impact on society and its focus on protecting vulnerable users, particularly children. Launched in 2022, the GOSRN fosters international alignment on online safety regulation and promotes coherence across jurisdictions to help avoid fragmentation of laws and governance. As an observer, the Neely Center will contribute behavioral science insights, design-centered frameworks, and cross-sector collaboration experience to global policymaking efforts that safeguard human rights online and offline. This engagement includes invited testimony to the European Parliament, service on Ofcom's academic panel, and recent consultations with regulators in Indonesia and Panama. The Center looks forward to engaging with regulators and fellow observers to strengthen global coordination and promote safer, more ethical digital ecosystems.

Scaling Laws: AI Safety Meet Trust & Safety

On Thursday, October 3, 2025, our Managing Director, [Ravi Iyer](#), joined The Lawfare Institute's Scaling Laws podcast, AI Safety Meet Trust & Safety, hosted by [Kevin Frazier](#). Together with [David Sullivan](#), Executive Director of the Digital Trust & Safety Partnership, Ravi discussed how the AI Safety and Trust & Safety communities can learn from one another to promote safer, more accountable technology systems. The conversation highlighted the importance of cross-sector collaboration in aligning emerging technologies with human values and in developing frameworks that advance both innovation and public trust. You can listen to the podcast [here](#).

Digital Safety 101: Protect Yourself in the Age of Cyber Trafficking

PROJECT SAFEWEB PRESENTS

OCT
16

DIGITAL SAFETY 101

Digital Safety In The Age
of Cyber Trafficking

- *Research and Marketing Internship Opportunity*
- *Publishing Opportunity for Creative Work*
- *Free Food & Refreshments*
- *Free Cards Against Humanity STEM Decks*
- *Take-home resource guide*

THURS
@2PM



2:00pm - 3:30pm



16 October, 2025



Ahmanson Lab in Leavey library



On October 16, 2025, Shift SC, a USC student-led organization hosted an interactive event on how to stay safe online and use technology to combat exploitation in the age

of cyber trafficking. Organized by the Cyber Privacy Initiative, home to Project SafeWeb, the event combined education, advocacy, and hands-on learning. The program began with a presentation on the rise of cyber-enabled trafficking, digital safety strategies, and emerging tech solutions addressing online harm, followed by an interactive workshop where participants received a digital safety resource guide offering ways to get involved in this growing field.

Neely Center Sponsors Student-Led Tech4Good Conference





On October 20, Shift SC, a student-led organization at USC, hosted its largest-ever [Tech4Good Conference](#). Proudly sponsored by the USC Neely Center, the event brought together more than 550 attendees and generated over 220,000 social media impressions, connecting students with mission-driven companies and thought leaders shaping technology for the common good.

Featuring panelists from [Heart Aerospace](#), [AppliedVR](#), [Braid Theory](#), and [Waymo](#), the conference offered opportunities for networking, learning, and professional development. From résumé workshops to free headshots, students engaged in a wide range of experiences designed to build leadership skills and prepare for purpose-driven careers in technology.

The conference's success was reflected in positive feedback from participants, employers, and speakers:

- “Everything ran so smoothly throughout the entire event, and I was incredibly impressed by the organization and execution. You all are truly brilliant, and you should be very proud of what you accomplished.” — *Nuna Atadja*, Waymo
- “I was so impressed by the quality of this student-run event, the engagement and questions from the audience, and the overall passion for socially responsible technology. I walked away feeling optimistic about our future society.” — *Josh Sackman*, AppliedVR
- “It was wonderful attending, and I had some really great conversations with students. I’m looking forward to your future events.” — *Samaritan City* (tabled at the conference)
- “We had an excellent experience, and found all directions and accommodations to be superb. Everyone was very professional with operations and it was much appreciated. On top of that, our conversations with the students were phenomenal and inspiring.” — *Quote.Vote* (tabled at the conference)
- “We had an incredibly professional and structured experience working with the Shift SC team. We met many like-minded people, and found our conversations with students to be of the highest caliber.” — *Anonymous representative*

Shift SC's thoughtful curation of employers with human-centered missions like AppliedVR, Heart Aerospace, Braid Theory, and Waymo, underscored its commitment

to connecting students with leaders advancing ethical, impactful innovation. The participating companies, in turn, modeled the importance of engaging with young changemakers and helping nurture the next generation of purpose-driven technologists.

Discussion about this post

Comments Restacks



Write a comment...

