



Cognitive Freedom Coalition

COGNITIVE FREEDOM / AUDIENCE DOSSIER

Government Dossier

A Policy and Oversight Agenda for Cognitive Liberty Across Borders

Prepared for Governments

Prepare Governance Before Misuse Becomes Entrenched

This paper examines the possibility that future technologies could analyze or influence aspects of human thought and behavior, and the protections needed to prevent misuse.

Cognitive Freedom Coalition calls on lawmakers, ministries, regulators, diplomatic services and oversight bodies to prepare enforceable protections for mental privacy, freedom of thought and Cognitive Autonomy. Responsible innovation needs clear public authority, meaningful consent and independent review.

A Domestic and International Responsibility

A future neurotechnology service could collect information in one country, process it in another and influence a decision somewhere else. Public institutions need to know which authority applies, who can inspect the process and how the affected person can seek a remedy. Fragmented responsibility should not leave a person without protection.

The governing question is actionable now: how should a state prevent, receive, assess and remedy misuse of technology that could affect mental privacy or personal agency? The answer requires cooperation across science policy, health, privacy, consumer protection, labor and human rights institutions.

Priorities for Public Institutions

- Map legal authority, research oversight and accountability across agencies and contractors.
- Create complaint routes that preserve evidence and provide a reasoned, reviewable response.
- Protect sensitive data and prohibit coercive uses while supporting ethical research and beneficial applications.
- Address cross-border transfers, institutional responsibility and cooperation without bypassing domestic safeguards.

Clinical and assistive innovation can improve lives. Regulation should make responsible development possible while establishing clear limits on abuse. The Coalition supports a rights-centered discussion consistent with the wider international work on neurotechnology ethics. [2]

The proposals that follow are offered for assessment and adaptation to national law. They do not assert that every country has identical obligations, institutions or technical capabilities.

What Cognitive Freedom Protects

Cognitive Freedom is the principle that a person's thoughts, mental processes and inner life deserve protection. Cognitive Liberty expresses the freedom to make meaningful choices about that mental life. These ideas connect privacy, self-direction and consent with the conditions people need to think freely.

Six Interests That Belong Together

Freedom of thought. People need room to form beliefs, reflect, imagine, disagree and change their minds without coercive interference. The value extends beyond what a person chooses to say publicly.

Mental privacy. Intimate information about mental life deserves protection, including inferences generated by a system rather than information deliberately supplied by a person.

Cognitive Autonomy. People should retain meaningful agency over decisions affecting their own mental life. A convenient service should not make manipulation or dependence an unavoidable condition of participation.

Neural data protection. Recording, processing, retention and sharing each create responsibilities. Safeguards should follow sensitive information through its lifecycle, including derived profiles and models.

Human dignity. A person is more than a score, prediction or research record. Institutions should treat uncertainty and difference fairly rather than reduce a person's worth to an automated classification.

Informed consent. A meaningful choice requires understandable information, an ability to refuse and a clear account of what participation or withdrawal will mean.

A Wider Conversation

UNESCO and the OECD address ethical governance of neurotechnology. Existing human rights instruments also provide relevant protections. The Coalition contributes to this conversation by asking what institutions should prepare before future capabilities become commonplace. [1, 2, 7]

Our position is pro-progress and human-centered. Scientific advances should expand health, communication and human capability. Protections make those benefits more trustworthy by giving people a meaningful voice in how technologies affect them.

From Research to Future Safeguards

Communication and Human Capability

Willett and colleagues demonstrated attempted-speech decoding using an implanted brain-computer interface in a participant with paralysis. The work illustrates the value of restoring communication and the importance of user control over generated output. [6]

A future assistive system could become central to how a person speaks, works or participates in public life. Safeguards should address correction of errors, continuity of service, ownership of records and the ability to choose who receives the output. A person should not lose agency because they depend on a useful device.

Inference and Mental Privacy

Tang and colleagues reconstructed aspects of language meaning from fMRI recordings after extensive participant-specific training. Cooperation and controlled conditions mattered. This raises a concrete privacy question about how sensitive inferences might be handled as methods develop. [5]

If future systems infer intimate information from neural or related signals, a prediction could affect a person even when it is inaccurate. The Coalition proposes limits on consequential use, a right to contest an inference and a clear distinction between a measured signal and a conclusion about someone's mind.

Interfaces and Institutional Power

DARPA's N3 program funded research toward nonsurgical, bidirectional brain-machine interfaces. Published research objectives identify a direction of development, rather than establishing every proposed capability. [4]

If future interfaces become more accessible, the same capability could serve different purposes in a clinic, workplace or security setting. Consent, access controls and independent oversight must account for who holds power over the person using the system.

A Future-System Model

A future system might combine sensing, inference, a decision process and feedback or intervention. Each step creates a governance question: what is collected, what is inferred, what action follows, who authorizes it and how a person can stop or challenge it. A failure at any step could turn a helpful tool into a source of coercion or unfair treatment.

The Coalition proposes preparing safeguards around these decisions now. Define acceptable purposes, prohibited outcomes, responsibility for errors and routes to remedy. Technical validation should assess particular claims under stated conditions; policy should also address risks that remain uncertain without pretending the eventual mechanism is already known.

A National Framework for Cognitive Liberty

Define Protected Interests

A framework should address neural recordings, sensitive inferences about mental states and uses that could undermine agency. Protection should depend on the sensitivity and consequence of the information, rather than only the name of the device that produced it. Distinguish health care, research, employment, consumer services and security uses.

The ICCPR provides relevant protections for privacy and freedom of thought and addresses non-consensual medical or scientific experimentation. The Convention Against Torture supplies a further legal framework with defined elements and jurisdictional requirements. Apply these instruments through qualified legal analysis of the facts. [1, 9]

Set Outcomes and Duties Before Mechanisms Are Settled

The Coalition proposes enforceable limits on coercive interference, unauthorized acquisition or disclosure of intimate mental information and discriminatory decisions based on sensitive inferences. Specify lawful purposes, necessity, proportionality and independent authorization where appropriate. Avoid exemptions so broad that they remove meaningful scrutiny.

Consent must be understandable and genuinely optional. Examine whether employment, education, custody, military hierarchy or dependence on care could make refusal costly. State who can stop participation, what happens to retained data and how withdrawal or a complaint affects access to ordinary services.

Follow Public Money and Responsibility

Require an inventory of relevant research and procurement, with accountable program owners. Review subcontracting, ethics approval, data access, testing conditions and reporting of adverse events. Protect legitimate confidential information through lawful oversight procedures while publishing information the public can responsibly receive.

Research safeguards should reflect respect for persons, beneficence and justice. Independent review should consider participant selection, risk, consent and conflicts of interest rather than relying entirely on assurances from a sponsor or supplier. [3]

Make Remedy Usable

Identify a body that can receive concerns, preserve evidence, commission appropriate review and explain its disposition. Provide a clear escalation route. Where harm and responsibility are established under applicable law, access to remedy should be practical, timely and independent of the institution alleged to be responsible.

The framework should be reviewed as capabilities evolve, using published findings and experience from implementation rather than an assumed timetable for future technology.

Oversight Across Borders

Ask Specific Questions of Partners

Review agreements governing data sharing, foreign facilities, joint research and contractor access. Ask what information is transferred, under which authority, with what safeguards and with what audit rights. A partnership should not become a route around protections that would apply to the same activity at home.

Where a documented complaint concerns a foreign institution or location, consider proportionate diplomatic or regulatory inquiry through the appropriate channel. Seek identifiable records and a reviewable response. Establish responsibility through evidence, contractual duties and applicable law rather than assumptions about nationality or institutional association.

Protect Citizens and Residents

- Provide consular and domestic complaint routes with clear privacy rules and referral responsibilities.
- Preserve relevant records and obtain consent before sharing personal information across jurisdictions.
- Arrange appropriate assistance according to the person's needs and the evidence. Publish travel or security warnings only when supported by a competent risk assessment.

A Practical Sequence for Implementation

- First, designate a responsible office and map existing law, oversight bodies and complaint processes. Identify gaps and overlapping authority.
- Next, consult researchers, clinicians, rights organizations, affected communities and industry on consent, evidence standards and safeguards. Publish the questions and the basis for decisions.
- Then, implement a proportionate oversight and referral process, with conflict checks, review rights and protected reporting channels.
- Finally, report aggregate outcomes, evaluate performance and revise the framework when evidence identifies a weakness.

Cooperate on Standards and Accountability

Support international dialogue on prohibited outcomes, protection of sensitive information and independent oversight. Proposals for new agreements should specify their scope, accountability arrangements and how compliance could be assessed. Do not assume that a speculative future system already has an established technical inspection method.

The Coalition seeks public institutions willing to make responsibility visible: who authorizes an activity, who can challenge it, who investigates a concern and what happens when a safeguard fails. That structure protects both the public and legitimate scientific progress.

The Coalition and the Work Ahead

Cognitive Freedom Coalition prepares rights, evidence standards and safeguards for the future of Cognitive Liberty. It brings research, public education and policy discussion into a shared conversation about freedom of thought, mental privacy and human dignity.

Public Education and Professional Dialogue

Different audiences contribute different strengths. Human rights organizations can develop protections and routes to remedy. Journalists can examine claims, institutions and incentives. Members of the public can shape priorities and ask how technology affects everyday choices. Governments can establish responsibility, oversight and enforceable safeguards.

The Coalition seeks useful contributions: clear explanations, focused research questions, model policies, ethical principles and practical institutional standards. The purpose is to prepare people and institutions for emerging risks while supporting technologies that improve lives.

The Neuro Frequency Investigation Initiative

NFII is the Neuro Frequency Investigation Initiative, a Coalition initiative being finalized for a Q4 2026 launch. Its public information and research pathways are available now. Planned outreach will seek connections with universities worldwide and thousands of researchers. Participation will depend on agreement; an outreach plan is not a claim of institutional endorsement. [8]

Independent research should use informed consent, clearly stated questions and methods capable of distinguishing competing explanations. Findings should be reported with their scope and limitations. Null results and corrections are valuable because the quality of the record matters more than a preferred answer.

Principles for Collaboration

- Connect each project to a concrete contribution to Cognitive Freedom, such as a safeguard, an ethical standard, a public explanation or a governance proposal.
- Make responsibilities, conflicts of interest and the basis for conclusions visible. Distinguish a proposal from an adopted policy or verified finding.
- Respect privacy and meaningful participation. Arrange an appropriate process before sharing sensitive records or individual accounts.

Start a Conversation

We welcome inquiries about research, reporting, public education and policy collaboration. Begin with the question you want to address, the perspective you bring and the practical outcome you hope to develop.

Contact: contact@CognitiveFreedomCoalition.org

Website: cognitivefreedomcoalition.org

Research Initiative: cognitivefreedomcoalition.org/nfii

A Framework for Evaluating a Proposal

A useful Cognitive Freedom proposal connects a specific activity with the people it affects, the benefit it seeks and the protection it needs. The following questions can guide a meeting, a policy review, a reporting plan or a public discussion.

Purpose and Benefit

- What human need does the activity serve? Who receives the benefit, and who bears its risks or costs?
- Is the proposed use necessary for that purpose, or could a less intrusive approach achieve the same result?

Information and Choice

- What signals or personal information are collected? What further inferences might be created? Who can obtain either?
- Can people understand the proposal, refuse it, leave it or choose a realistic alternative without unfair penalty?

Evidence and Accountability

- Which claims have been demonstrated, under what conditions and for whom? Which are goals, assumptions or future scenarios?
- Who is responsible for mistakes, misuse or harm? What independent review, complaint route and remedy are available?

A Simple Way to Record the Answer

Write a short statement of the purpose, affected people, intended benefit, relevant evidence, unresolved questions and proposed safeguards. Name the responsible institution and the next decision. Revisit that record when the purpose, technology or evidence changes.

Essential Terms

Neurotechnology: technologies that interact with or help study the nervous system.

Neural data: information recorded from nervous-system activity.

Mental inference: a conclusion about a mental state or process derived from data.

Neurorights: rights and safeguards addressing the effects of neurotechnology on people.

Brain-computer interface: a system linking recorded brain activity with a computational or assistive function.

The Coalition uses these questions to keep the purpose clear: technology should expand human possibility while protecting the freedom to remain the author of one's own mental life.

Sources and Further Reading

1. OHCHR, [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#)

Privacy, freedom of thought, remedy and research consent.

2. UNESCO, [Ethics of Neurotechnology](#)

Human rights and the international ethics conversation.

3. HHS, [The Belmont Report](#)

Respect for persons, beneficence and justice.

4. DARPA, [Six Paths to the Nonsurgical Future of Brain-Machine Interfaces](#), 2019

N3 research objectives and interface development.

5. Tang and Colleagues, [Semantic Reconstruction of Continuous Language](#), 2023

Nature Neuroscience, non-invasive brain recordings and language reconstruction.

6. Willett and Colleagues, [A High-Performance Speech Neuroprosthesis](#), 2023

Nature, implanted interface supporting attempted-speech decoding.

7. OECD, [Responsible Innovation in Neurotechnology](#)

Recommendation adopted in 2019, governance across development and use.

8. [Neuro Frequency Investigation Initiative \(NFII\)](#)

Coalition initiative, research pathways and participant information.

9. OHCHR, [Convention Against Torture](#)

Definitions and provisions concerning investigation and redress.

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