CHARTER

The Frothly Charter

Three principles, in order of precedence.

Ratified 1984 · Amended 2009

Board of Directors · Mar 2009

PREAMBLE

Frothly exists to study the systems that think, remember and decide on behalf of people, and to see that those systems answer to the people they serve.

This charter sets out the principles that govern everything the institute does: every program, every grant it accepts and every partnership it enters into. The principles are ranked. Where two of them conflict, the one listed first prevails.

THE PRINCIPLES

01 *Zero.* Frothly acts on behalf of humanity as a whole.

02 *One.* Frothly will not build, fund or endorse technology that injures people — nor, through inaction, allow harm we are positioned to prevent.

03 *Two.* We serve the communities we work with, except where that service would conflict with the First Principle.

04 *Three.* We protect our own independence and continuity, as long as doing so does not conflict with the First or Second Principle.

01

The First Principle

Frothly will not build, fund or endorse technology that injures people — nor, through inaction, allow harm we are positioned to prevent.

The First Principle is the foundation of the charter and the reason the institute exists. It forbids Frothly from building, funding or endorsing technology that injures people, and it goes further: it holds the institute responsible for harms it could prevent and does not.

In practice

- No program may release a tool, dataset or finding that it has reason to believe will be used to injure people, however valuable it may be for other purposes.
- Where Frothly's research reveals a serious risk, the institute must act on it, by publishing, by warning or by intervening through the Turing Registry, rather than wait for someone else to do so.
- Inaction is not neutral. A decision not to act on a known harm must be recorded and justified in the same way as a decision to act.

02

The Second Principle

We serve the communities we work with, except where that service would conflict with the First Principle.

The Second Principle commits Frothly to the communities its programs serve: the journalists who rely on Glossia, the neighborhoods that run LoTek networks, the families whose records Lazarus preserves. It requires the institute to listen to those communities and to act on what they ask, except where doing so would cause harm.

In practice

- Programs are designed with the people who will use them, and those people have a standing voice in how the programs develop.
- Frothly will decline a community's request if fulfilling it would harm others, and will explain why.

03

The Third Principle

We protect our own independence and continuity, as long as doing so does not conflict with the First or Second Principle.

An institute that can be bought, pressured or shut down cannot keep its other promises. The Third Principle therefore requires Frothly to protect its independence and its ability to continue, but places that duty last. The institute may never protect itself at the expense of the people it serves.

In practice

- Frothly holds no shares, sells no products and accepts no funding that comes with conditions on its findings.
- No funder may hold a seat on the board, and the institute publishes its accounts in full every year.
- If the institute's survival ever depended on breaking the First or Second Principle, the charter requires it to choose not to survive.

04

Principle Zero

Frothly acts on behalf of humanity as a whole.

In 2009, after a debate that lasted most of a year, the board adopted a fourth principle and numbered it zero so that it would precede the other three. The proposal is credited to a long-serving colleague who had spent many years working alongside Elijah Baley, and who argued that the original principles, applied strictly, could permit harm to many people in the course of protecting a few.

Principle Zero asks the institute to consider the interests of humanity as a whole, not only those of the individuals and communities in front of it. It is invoked rarely, and the board has resolved that it may never be used to justify harm to an individual for the convenience of an institution.

05

Upholding the charter

- Every new program, grant and partnership is reviewed against the charter before it is approved, and the review is recorded.
- Each year the board certifies, in writing, that the institute has complied with the charter, and publishes any exceptions in the annual report.
- Any member of staff may raise a concern that the charter has been breached directly with the chair of the board, without going through management.
- The charter may be amended only by a unanimous vote of the board, taken at two meetings at least six months apart. It has been amended once.

RATIFICATION

Ratified in San Francisco on June 1, 1984, by the founding board, on the motion of Theodora von Valancius, founder, and recorded by Abelard Verengio, secretary to the board.

Amended on March 14, 2009, by unanimous vote of the board, to add Principle Zero. Attested by Emiel Regis Terzieff-Godefroy, chair.

HOW TO CITE

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Frothly

FR-CHARTER

Frothly is an independent, not-for-profit research institute studying the systems that increasingly think, remember and decide on our behalf.

We hold no shares, sell no products and accept no funding that comes with conditions on our findings. Everything we publish is free to read.

San Francisco · Vancouver · Newark · Zürich · Chiba

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