

Facebook Introduces the First 20 Members of Its Global Independent Oversight Board for Content



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Facebook revealed the first 20 members of its global independent oversight board for content: four co-chairs and 16 other members.

CEO Mark Zuckerberg initially mentioned the creation of the board in November 2018, and its bylaws were detailed in January, along with Thomas Hughes being named as the first director of oversight board administration.

Hughes is the former executive director of Article 19, an international non-governmental organization with a focus on freedom of expression and digital rights.

Facebook established a \$130 million trust to fund all operations of the oversight board, and this trust cannot be revoked.

The board is made up of independent members from around the world—20 were named Wednesday, and the goal is to double that number through the latter part of 2020 and possibly running into 2021—and those members are tasked with making binding decisions on content that Facebook and Instagram should allow or remove, based on respect for freedom of expression and human rights.

Content enforcement decisions made by Facebook will be reviewed by the board, which will determine whether those rulings are consistent with the policies and values of Facebook and Instagram, as well as the commitment mentioned above on freedom of expression and human rights.

Co-chair Jamal Greene said during a press call Wednesday, “It’s one thing to complain about content moderation and the challenges involved. It’s another thing to actually do something about it. These problems of content moderation have been with us since the dawn of social media. This really is a novel institution and a novel approach to try to address those problems.”

When the board begins reviewing cases later this year, it will begin with appeals of decisions by Facebook and Instagram to remove content, with the hopes of expanding its scope in the coming months to also handle appeals from users who want content removed by the platforms.

Cases referred to the board by Facebook can also be reviewed.

Co-chair Michael McConnell said during the press call, “The sheer volume of decisions makes it impossible for the board to look at every controversy, decide every appeal, look at every case. We are going to select a few flowers, maybe they’re weeds, from a field of possibilities. This is going to be a real challenge. We’re not going to just be deciding individual cases.”

He added, “We are not the internet police. Don’t think of us

as a fast-action group that's going to swoop in and deal with problems. The hope is that although we can't look at every case, the cases we do look at will have a broad impact on others. If your case isn't taken, that doesn't mean that your issue is going unaddressed."

In terms of timing, Facebook said it is still assessing how the global response to the coronavirus pandemic may impact important steps required for the board to reach full operational capability, including recruiting staff, training members and implementing tools that are essential to ensuring data privacy and security.

Facebook director of governance and global affairs Brent Harris said during the press call that board members will not have access to artificial intelligence tools, and that they will access the content being analyzed via a content management system supplied by Facebook.

Facebook must abide by the board's decisions unless doing so would put the company in violation of laws of countries impacted by those rulings.

Helle Thorning-Smith, one of the four co-chairs, said during the press call, "I don't think any of us would have accepted this task if it hadn't been very clear from the charter and the bylaws that Facebook will follow our decisions. It would be very embarrassing for Facebook if it doesn't live up to its end of this bargain. Mark Zuckerberg has reassured us that this will be the case."

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