

Loss of Individual Freedom

(When Digital Systems Become Difficult to Avoid)

Freedom is more than having choices. It also means having the ability to say no without losing access to everyday life.

Throughout history, new technologies have made life more convenient. Online banking, digital payments, smartphones, electronic records, and mobile apps have transformed how we work, travel, communicate, and receive services.

Most of these technologies offer real benefits. But as digital systems become more common, communities should also consider an important question: What happens if participation gradually becomes the only practical option?

Data centers provide the computing power that allows increasingly sophisticated digital systems to operate. As artificial intelligence continues to expand, communities should consider not only what these systems can do, but also how they may influence the choices available to individuals.

Convenience Can Become Dependence

Many technologies begin as optional. Over time, they can become the expected or preferred way to access important services.

Think about everyday life today. Many businesses now encourage customers to:

- Pay electronically.
- Receive digital receipts.
- Use mobile apps.
- Create online accounts.
- Verify their identity electronically.
- Schedule appointments online.

While alternatives may still exist, they often become less convenient, less available, or disappear altogether.

Communities should ask whether people will continue to have meaningful choices as digital systems become more deeply integrated into daily life.

Essential Services Should Remain Accessible

Technology should make life easier without creating barriers for those who choose not to participate. As AI becomes more integrated into society, communities should consider whether essential services will remain accessible regardless of a person's technology preferences.

These may include:

- Healthcare
- Banking
- Education
- Government services
- Employment
- Transportation
- Communication
- Emergency services

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No one should be excluded from essential services simply because they choose not to use a particular technology.

Human Choice Should Remain Central

Artificial intelligence can assist decision-making in remarkable ways. It can organize information, identify patterns, improve efficiency, and help solve complex problems.

But important decisions that affect people's lives should continue to involve meaningful human judgment. Communities should ask:

- Who makes the final decision?
- Can a person appeal an automated decision?
- Is there meaningful human review?
- Can errors be corrected?
- Is there a way to opt out when appropriate?

Technology should support human decision-making, not replace it.

Freedom Includes the Ability to Choose. Communities should encourage technologies that increase opportunity while preserving the freedom to choose how people interact with those technologies.

Thinking Beyond Today

Artificial intelligence will almost certainly become part of many aspects of everyday life. The goal should not be to resist innovation. The goal should be to ensure that technology continues to serve people without making participation in digital systems the only practical way to live, work, receive healthcare, travel, or interact with government.

Freedom is preserved not only by the technologies we create, but by the choices we continue to protect.

Once meaningful alternatives disappear, restoring individual choice can become far more difficult than preserving it from the beginning.

Connecting the Dots

Communities have already seen many services move almost entirely into digital systems.

Examples include:

- Airlines that encourage or require mobile boarding passes.
- Restaurants that use QR-code-only menus.
- Parking systems that require mobile apps.
- Cashless businesses.
- Government services that increasingly rely on online portals.
- Healthcare systems that encourage patient portals for scheduling, records, and communication.

Each of these changes may seem small on its own. Together, they illustrate how digital systems can gradually become the default way to access everyday services.