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Congress should prohibit funding for a project to make a synthetic copy of the human genome

ICTA Statement on the Human Genome Project-Write

[Science magazine announced](#) June 2, 2016 that a new project called the Center of Excellence for Engineering Biology seeks to raise \$100 million this year from various public and private sources to synthetically engineer the entire human genome. DNA sequencing is now routinely used for medical diagnoses, crop breeding and scientific research. The organizers of the Human Genome Project-Write (HGP-Write) hope to do much the same with the human genome by reducing the cost of DNA synthesis. The organizers estimate that it will take 10 years to artificially recreate a human genome.

Organizers of the project say they do not want to create human babies but still argue that they need to synthesize a human genome to understand how to engineer more plants, animals, and microbes.

George Church, a professor of genetics at Harvard Medical School, and one of the organizers of the new project, said that the scale of the DNA synthesis of the human genome is so great that it would become easier to synthesize the needed DNA from scratch.

Besides Dr. Church, the other organizers of the project are Jef Boeke, director of the Institute for Systems Genetics at NYU Langone Medical Center; Andrew Hessel, a futurist at the software company Autodesk; and Nancy J. Kelley, who works raising money for projects. The paper in [Science](#) lists a total of 25 authors, many of them involved in DNA engineering using synthetic biology techniques.

The authors claim that they will examine the ethical and theological issues raised by the project after they raise funds. They should have done a full ethical review before starting the project. Had they done so, they would not be proceeding with the project.

The International Center for Technology Assessment (ICTA) believes that genetic engineering of human embryos or human reproductive cells in a way that allows them to be passed down through generations should be prohibited. Additionally, ICTA:

- Calls upon the U.S. Congress to prohibit federal funds from going to such a project.
- Calls on Congress to extend the recent prohibition on FDA review of engineered human embryos for research purposes to all federal funding.
- Calls on states to prohibit funding of this project.

Jaydee Hanson works for the [International Center for Technology Assessment \(ICTA\)](#) where he directs their work on human genetics, synthetic biology and nanotechnology. He also works for, the Center for Food Safety on emerging technology issues including synthetic biology. Before coming to the Center, he started the genetics and bioethics program of The United Methodist Church. He co-chairs the

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