

## CONVENING ON AUTOMATION, OPPORTUNITY, AND BELONGING: VISION AND FOUNDATIONS FOR A BETTER SOCIETY

### INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

This report presents a positive vision for our society a generation from now. At a moment of pandemic, economic disruption, reckoning with structural racism, and deep political polarization, it offers a clear alternative: a future where we choose to recognize and uphold the intrinsic worth of every person and community; provide an equitable foundation of economic rights, human and financial capital, and liberatory education; and harness entrepreneurship and technology to increase opportunity, agency, inclusion, and well-being for all.

Two years ago, many elements of this vision would have seemed utopian. Today, a broad cross-section of Americans sees the need for major changes in the way we organize our society, and senses that there is real potential for us to do so. We offer this vision as a North Star for dialogue on long term goals for social change among activists, philanthropists, and business and government leaders.

This vision reflects a year of preparation and dialogue among a diverse group of 18 leaders in economic and social policy, social activism, religion and spirituality, worker agency and voice, automation and the workplace, innovation in education, and place-based community development. The group was convened by the Gerald Huff Fund for Humanity in collaboration with the Othering & Belonging Institute at UC Berkeley and facilitated by the Consensus Building Institute. The goal of the convening was to bring together a diverse, influential group of advocates and experts to envision a future where:

- All Americans experience economic security and belonging, even as automation and AI continue to transform the labor market and the nature of work; and
- The benefits of security and belonging arise from new and renewed social and economic bonds among people, businesses, governments, and communities.

Over a series of five virtual meetings, the group explored the questions: what would be the most notable features of your daily experience if you lived a generation from now, in a society transformed by automation and by a commitment to inclusion and belonging? What would be the defining elements of that future society? What rights, policies and institutions would form the foundations of that society?

From the group’s dialogue, the facilitators drafted a series of documents and graphics to reflect the key ideas that emerged. In an iterated process, the group refined its vision and developed a shared sense of the foundations for a better society. This report presents the vision and foundations that the group created.

Because technology, social, economic, and political conditions are evolving rapidly, and because further disruptive change seems inevitable, the Vision and Foundations do not include detailed policy prescriptions or institutional strategies for the next several years, nor do we propose a roadmap for establishing the foundations for the vision. Rather, we offer a “North Star” of principles, rights and institutions to guide the direction of social change.

Our ambition is that activists, thinkers, civic, and political and business leaders read and respond to the Vision and Foundations as a way to test their own beliefs about what kind of society we should be striving to create for the next generation. It is meant as a conversation starter, a constructive provocation, and an encouragement for those who seek a transformation in our values and institutions to achieve a society where all Americans experience equal value, participation, and belonging.

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT FOR THE CONVENING

Much attention has been focused on the risks that rapid advances in automation and AI will eliminate large numbers of jobs, either permanently or through a temporary but painful period of labor market disruption, and that those advances will sustain or deepen existing inequalities. Millions of Americans are already experiencing the results of these trends today: many jobs for workers in the bottom half of the income distribution are not only low-paid, but also insecure, vulnerable to automation and outsourcing, and decoupled from benefits that are essential for economic security such as health insurance, paid leave, and retirement savings. As AI continues to evolve, more middle-class jobs are becoming vulnerable to automation, spreading economic insecurity. At the same time, entrepreneurship, automation, and AI offer the potential for positive economic transformation, by creating wealth that could be more equitably shared, by combining human and artificial intelligence in ways that could make work more meaningful and more productive, and by reducing the time needed to earn a good living.

Another area of public discourse has focused on the problem of “othering” based on group identities and how it creates marginality and deprives people of full belonging in American society. The growing divides among the poor and near poor, the struggling middle class, and the wealthy elite have exacerbated long-simmering identity-based conflicts in the U.S., contributing to a troubling rise in ethno-nationalist ideologies and continued discrimination against historically disadvantaged groups. Highly visible police killings of George Floyd and other Black people, and the wave of protests by a multi-racial coalition that they prompted, have sparked a national reckoning with persistent structural racism, not only in policing, but

in access to justice, education, and economic opportunity for Black, Indigenous, and other people of color.

As the convening proceeded from the summer of 2020 to the spring of 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic and the national debate on structural racism put the issues of insecurity, inequity, and injustice into stark relief. COVID has demonstrated the gross inadequacy of our existing safety net and exposed inequalities in access to basic social services like food and healthcare. Its health and livelihood impacts have been significantly more severe for Black and brown people, low-income workers, women, and poor urban and rural communities. At the same time, COVID has shown our country's reliance on essential workers at all levels (from doctors to postal carriers, nurses to grocery store workers), elevating their standing in the eyes of many and underscoring the moral urgency of protecting their livelihoods.

A renewed sense of economic and social insecurity among a significant portion of Americans has expanded interest in policy innovations like basic income or a jobs guarantee and increased the willingness of legislators in the US and elsewhere to experiment with new approaches. Among other policies that would have been nearly inconceivable a year ago, the US government has advanced more than \$4 trillion to minimize unemployment and support those who have lost jobs. The Biden Administration is seeking some of the most significant changes to social protection and income support programs since the 1960s, and these ideas are receiving broad public support.

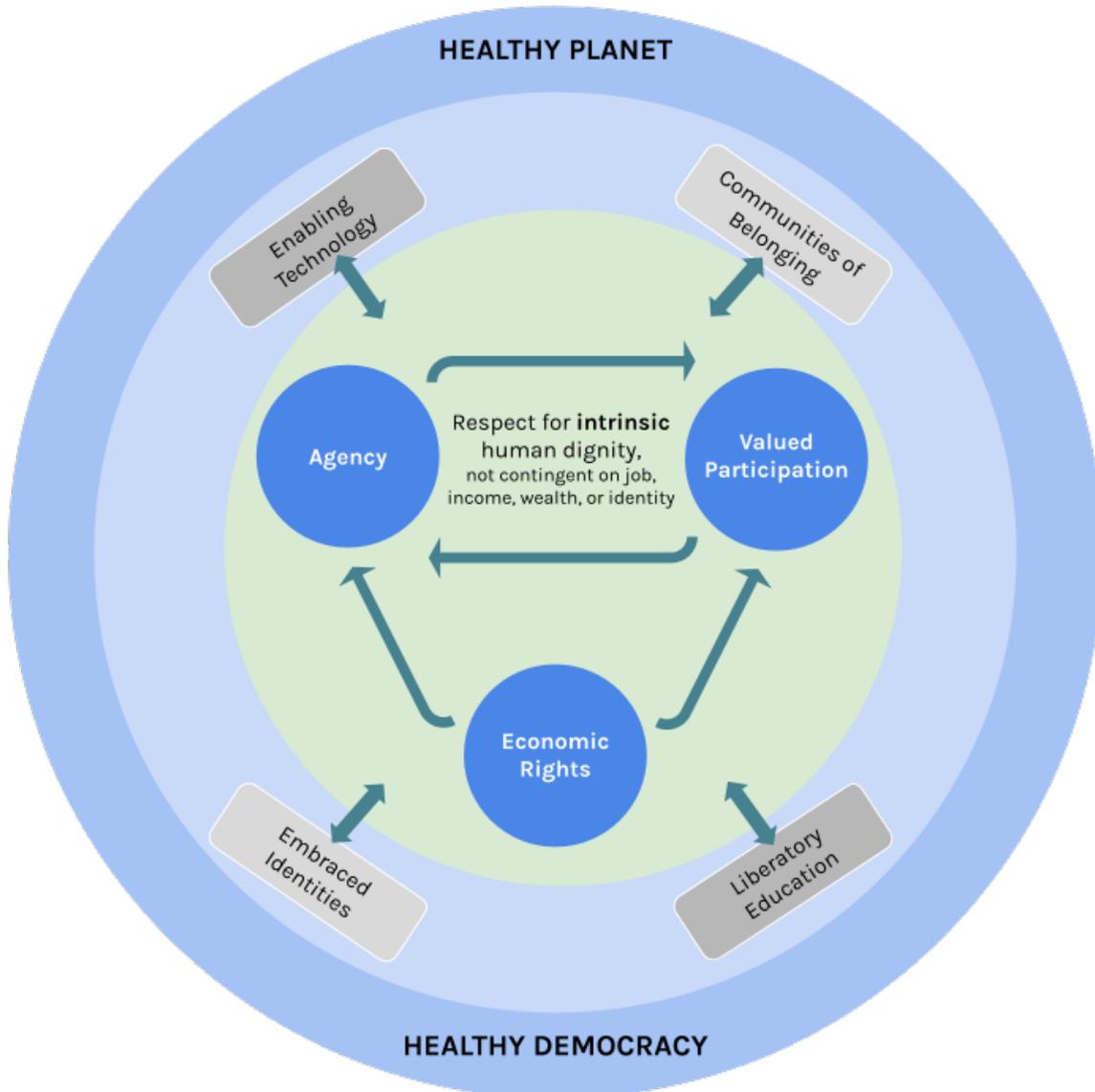
In combination, the extraordinary challenges and public responses of the moment have created an unusual opening for dialogue about the society we want in the longer term. The convening sought to reframe and bridge these conversations. It asked how we can integrate the economic and technological innovation that is driving the creation of new financial wealth and economic productivity with a commitment to full economic and social inclusion for all Americans to create a better and more equitable society. The Vision and Foundations that follow present the convening group's response to this challenge.

## VISION FOR A BETTER SOCIETY

**The core of our vision is a paradigm shift in how we value ourselves and each other.** In our imagined future a generation from now, we have evolved from a society where we see our own and others' dignity and potential as contingent on our job, income, wealth, and identity, to one where we respect our own and each other's intrinsic dignity. We all experience the security, care, respect, and freedom we need for full and meaningful participation in economic and social life. Equitably shared economic gains from automation make it possible for us to work less for pay and to have far more choice in how to commit our time.

In this future, a wide array of forms of social and economic **participation in all aspects of society** – from traditional employment, to care work, civic engagement, and other forms of

paid or unpaid participation – are recognized and **valued** by society. People choose how they participate from a position of individual and collective **agency**, supported by a comprehensive set of **economic rights** and endowments that limit economic insecurity and inequality while increasing prosperity, freedom, and entrepreneurship.



We envision a society where **liberatory education** empowers youth and adults to exercise agency and **embrace their own and others' identities**. All people find a place in **communities of belonging**, and racism and other forms of discrimination have been dismantled. Economic rights, education and agency enable people to use **technology** (AI & automation) to achieve personal and shared goals, complementing human skills and contributions.

Underlying and facilitating these shifts are a **healthy democracy** and a **healthy planet**. We have made our democratic institutions more participatory, inclusive, and accountable. We have made our economic system environmentally sustainable, so that economic activity and environmental protection are compatible and mutually reinforcing.

## RIGHTS, INSTITUTIONS AND POLICIES PROVIDING THE FOUNDATION FOR THE VISION

The following is an explanation of how the vision operates, in more detail. The elements described here are foundations in the sense that they are the working pieces of the vision – the pieces that make up the whole.

### **Healthy Planet and Healthy Democracy**

We recognize the critical importance of a healthy planet and a healthy democracy to realizing this vision. While we did not delve deep into their policy and institutional foundations, we are clear about what health looks like for democracy and for the planet.

**A healthy planet is essential to the survival of humans as a species; it is the precondition for all other societal goals.** We see a future where people value nature, ecosystems, species, and habitats as ends in themselves, and also have a deep understanding of our dependence on clean air, water, and soil; a stable and moderate climate; and the web of natural interactions needed to recreate these goods season after season and generation after generation. In this future, laws and policies protect ecosystems and species, and incentivize long-term stewardship of the environment. Our economy is circular, so that there is virtually no net waste, and the prices of goods and services include the cost to maintain healthy ecosystems.

**A healthy democracy is essential to all the societal elements of this vision.** It can only be realized if our political system serves all the people in our country. We see a future where empowered communities have dismantled structural barriers to democratic participation for all; where electoral and party politics are responsive and accountable to voters rather than wealthy donors; and where agencies of government operate with transparency, responsiveness, and accountability to those they serve. From early childhood on, people learn the norms and skills of democratic participation, dialogue, debate, critical thinking, and conflict resolution. Our embrace of democracy reflects our understanding that it offers both the best arena for individuals, groups, and communities to work out their differences in non-violent ways, and the best vehicle for collective action in pursuit of the common good.

### **Agency and Valued Participation**

**In our vision, agency and valued participation are both means and ends. They are central elements of a good life for individuals, and of the collective good of groups in society.**

Agency is freedom to act in the world, whether as an individual or as a group. Agency is lived through meaningful participation in community and society. To be meaningful, both agency

and participation must be supported by economic rights and endowments, informed by education, and made universal by norms and practices of inclusion and belonging.

**The elements of our vision for a better society intersect and reinforce each other to ensure meaningful agency and valued participation.** Economic rights and endowments provide the foundation for individual and collective agency, and for both economic and civic participation. Liberatory education provides every person with the capacities and self-knowledge needed for informed agency, and with an evolving set of insights and skills that add value to their economic and civic participation. Enabling technology supports agency and participation by enhancing the information, communication, and networks that support informed choices, and by adding value to participation in tasks, jobs, families, and communities.

Embraced identities allow for the full expression of agency and ensure that participation is valued regardless of a person's ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality, age, income, disability, zip code, past incarceration, or wealth. Communities of belonging shape and are shaped by individual and collective agency and participation; they allow people to share and deepen common bonds and commitments, without creating barriers to other communities.

The other elements of the vision are both means to realize agency and valued participation, and ends in themselves. They are detailed in the following sections.

### **Economic Rights**

**We envision a future where economic rights ensure economic security for all Americans.**

These rights reflect a commitment to ensuring a life of dignity for every person; enabling every person the freedom and agency to participate and make meaningful contributions in their communities; and revising rules and norms so that those contributions are fairly valued in the labor market. With a right to income and wealth, every person is able to meet their basic needs through varied combinations of paid work and other forms of participation; they are not compelled to work in exploitative conditions in order to survive.

In this future, **all Americans have a right to a dignified standard of living**, including housing, food, health care, and education. This right is achieved through laws and policies that provide:

- Basic income, either universal with offsetting taxation of higher income taxpayers, or targeted to ensure a floor of income that enables a dignified life for all;
- Public options for employment, physical and mental health care, child and elder care, and education, all meeting standards of quality and accessibility in urban, suburban and rural areas, and available to all people;
- An endowment of wealth for every child, as a basis for building wealth throughout their lifetimes and for future generations; and
- Forms of economic reparation for BIPOC communities who have been structurally excluded from economic opportunities by public decisions. Reparation can be

provided to individuals and/or to communities, to counter the longstanding economic disenfranchisement and deprivation of opportunity that members of these groups have experienced.

**In this future, dynamic and well-regulated private markets for labor and for essential goods and services complement and reinforce economic rights.** They produce economic gains that both reward business success and contribute to societal welfare. The core elements of a well-crafted policy framework include:

- Strong competition laws and policies, designed and enforced to prevent excessive concentration of market power in technology, finance, the food system, housing, health care, and other markets, and to promote opportunity, entrepreneurship, dynamism and innovation in all sectors of the economy;
- Laws and policies providing strong support for labor organizing and collective bargaining for employees and contract workers; and
- Promotion of entrepreneurship through public investments and incentives, ranging from lifelong education to competitive awards for business solutions to public problems, with additional incentives and supports for entrepreneurs from marginalized groups.

**Working in tandem with these public rights, business culture and performance metrics, incentives, and regulations reflect a full commitment to social and environmental responsibility.** While continuing to pursue profitability, business leaders embrace an ethic of responsibility. They respond constructively to public policies, investor demands, and public expectations for strong social and environmental performance. Along with business leadership, extensive disclosure requirements, public and market incentives for positive contributions to their workforces, supply chains, communities and environments, and well-enforced regulations to limit negative impacts combine to shift business into alignment with broader societal values.

### **Liberatory Education**

Education has always been an essential foundation for personal agency and contribution, and for the shared values of communities and societies. **In a society that recognizes the inherent worth and dignity of every person, the most important purpose of education is to enable every person's agency and participation.** We envision a future where education is designed to liberate, by giving individuals the freedom to know and to choose their paths and commitments, and to build and refresh the knowledge and skills they will need as participants and contributors throughout their lives. It also enables people as individuals and community members to embrace their responsibilities with their rights, to reject racism, sexism, and all forms of othering, and to collaborate with others in pursuit of the common good.

In this future, **education systems have been transformed in several ways.** Education at all levels is publicly financed to ensure equitable access for all, without the need for students to

take on debt to complete their education. Public and private investments and standards ensure high quality education for all. In every learning community, teaching and learning practices promote mutual respect for the identities of every learner and teacher. For children and youth, learning uses individual interests to fuel exploration and development. While meeting public standards for core competencies and knowledge, young people pursue knowledge and skills that motivate them, with adult teachers and mentors in the community acting as guides and resources. Practices of democratic engagement are woven into the learning experiences of children and youth, as deeply inculcated as knowledge and skills for productive work. For adults, there are ample opportunities for life-long learning, both as a way to maintain and increase the value of contributions through paid work, and as a way to connect to place-based and virtual communities with shared interests and passions.

**To support these fundamental transformations, there have been substantial shifts in educational policies, teacher training, resource allocation, and community, family and learner engagement in policy making, curriculum development, and the learning process.**

Public institutions and the expertise of educators support both a shared national culture and base of knowledge and the cultures and norms of particular communities. Finally, educational institutions, policies and curricula are much more dynamic in their interaction with an ever-evolving society. Learning happens virtually and in the community, as well as in place-based schools. Rather than five subjects taught in classrooms with incremental advances each school year, there are many opportunities for defining and credentialing competencies and skills, responsive to individual interests and local community contexts.

### **Enabling technology**

**In this vision for the future, technology plays three crucial roles in our society.** First, through well-regulated public and private investments in automation, it contributes to increasing productivity. Second, in combination with economic rights, it generates wealth that can be broadly shared. Third, linked to liberatory education, it enables people to minimize time spent on basic, repetitive tasks (both physical and cognitive), and expands the time we spend on the work of caring, creative thinking, complex problem solving, companionship, and dialogue.

**Full and equitable access to technology is central to realizing the benefits it can provide.**

That access includes high-quality internet connectivity for every household; lifelong education that enables every person to understand and use technology; and effective regulation of technology companies and markets to ensure that individuals can make informed choices about the use of their personal data, and receive value for its appropriate use.

**In this future, public policies provide equitable access to technology and its benefits, ensure appropriate use of technology, and maintain incentives for innovation.** Internet regulation ensures full data and personal network portability across social media platforms and provides choice, protection and compensation for the use of personal data. Media

literacy and collaborative governance of social media platforms limit the spread of disinformation and promote constructive civic dialogue via social media. Oversight of algorithmic decision making for the provision of public and private opportunities eliminates bias. Public policies also ensure a fair return on public investment from government-funded R&D in many fields.

In this future, automation and artificial intelligence (AI) continue to generate new economic and ethical questions and challenges. **The governance of automation and AI balances society's interest in welfare gains from automation with our interest in enabling people to transition with dignity and opportunity to new tasks and jobs.** It also addresses fundamental questions about how automation can complement, rather than replace, human work in fields where human interaction has been seen as essential (for example, in caring for children, the sick and elderly; teaching; and entry-level jobs that provide opportunities for building skills and connections).

Skills for “job design” are in high demand, as organizations of all kinds seek the best combination of technology and human contributions for tasks and jobs. **Businesses and community organizations continue to have a great deal of choice in job design, but shared governance of technology in the labor market provides workers with agency and voice in the use of technology to change the nature of tasks and jobs.** Rather than blocking change, workers with agency (including options to retrain, to switch jobs, and to contribute outside the paid labor market) ensure that change benefits them as much as it does managers and shareholders.

### **Embraced Identities and Communities of Belonging**

As economic rights, liberatory education, and enabling technology provide the structural foundations for agency and valued participation, **embraced identities and communities of belonging provide the shared values and mutual respect needed to end racism and other forms of exclusion, and create a positive sum society.**

This future does not involve the creation of a single shared identity, nor does it involve the elimination of group identities based on race, ethnicity, religion, class, gender, sexuality, geography, age, partisanship, or any other group characteristics and beliefs. Instead, the shift has been in our way of interacting within and among social groups. In this future, **there has been a profound transformation from the dominance of zero-sum mindsets like racism and nativism that promote inter-group competition and negative stereotyping, to positive-sum mindsets through which people experience the benefits of inter-group collaboration while respecting and embracing differences.**

While laws and regulations prohibiting discrimination are strong and well-enforced, they are not the only means of transformation. Instead, education and culture, economics, and empowered communities are the main means for promoting and maintaining a more cohesive and mutually respectful society.

In this future, there is **much more emphasis on educating people about the ways that racism and other in-group/out-group ideologies have been manipulated throughout our history to create systems of conflict, domination, and oppression, and building skills to work constructively with differences.** From an early age and throughout society, people learn how to deal with group differences and tensions through dialogue, negotiation, and collaboration. Culturally, new narratives have emerged that help us to interpret our country's history in light of both its successes and its failings. Those whose culture was previously dominant experience the benefits of a more pluralistic society. Through many forms of expression, **a vibrant culture that embraces diversity helps us to recognize that each generation has the opportunity and responsibility to advance the values of freedom and equality, and to make collective sense of *e pluribus unum*, "out of many, one."**

In this future, **economic rights and endowments contribute to a reduction in the zero-sum mindsets that contribute to inter-group hostility.** Most fundamentally, since people have the material basis for a life of dignity, they are much less likely to believe that they must win out over other individuals and groups in order to gain the resources and opportunities needed for a good life. More positively, with adequate material resources, people have the time and the disposition to see the world as a place of possibilities worth exploring, and to see others as neighbors, friends and colleagues who can add interest and value to their own lives. There is still a place for competition in society, in the marketplace, between individuals, and between groups, but the group status hierarchies that we lived with for so long no longer drive that competition. Though competition is still central to business and the economy, **friendly competition for lower stakes is the norm in other spheres, along with much greater appreciation of diversity and collaboration.**

**Finally, we envision a future where communities of place, affinity and identity continue to provide strong bonds between people,** as they have throughout our history. What has changed is the degree of openness to diversity in all communities, and the strength of historically disempowered communities. The bonds forged through shared identities, values, experiences and interests are not walls that exclude or isolate others. **While enjoying the experience of belonging without othering in communities, we have not lost sight of the reality that all of us are plural** — that neither we nor anyone else can be defined by a single identity or group affiliation, and that we can only fully know each other when we recognize both our commonalities and our differences. The economic and social empowerment of previously excluded communities has made them free to celebrate their identities, while experiencing the respect of others and embracing pluralism themselves.

Conversely, because of the other transformations that have taken place in our society, **there is less suspicion and anxiety that the strength of communities within our society threatens the cohesion of the whole.** Because communities are not founded on nor driven by goals of domination or exclusion, there is more openness to communities that have very different

views of what “the good life” entails and very different ways of constructing social interaction.

These transformations in identities and communities are among the deepest in our society. They give shared form and meaning to a better society. If economic rights and endowments, education and technology provide the loom, then embraced identities and communities of belonging provide the thread from which we interweave individual and collective agency and participation.

### THE PATH FORWARD

We have no doubt that our society is capable of the transformation we have envisioned. Creating a better future has been the central premise and promise of our society for nearly 250 years. Though we have fallen far short of that promise for far too many, each generation has the chance to learn from the past, to envision a better future, and to make the individual and collective decisions needed to advance that vision.

Most people in our society want what we are envisioning. A large majority of those under 30 years old today are calling for major changes in our society, along the lines that we have sketched. While we acknowledge significant political divisions over some elements of this vision, the core of the vision is based on values of the inherent worth of each person, individual freedom, the strength of community, and the pursuit of happiness that are shared across the political spectrum.

For those who are active in social movements and philanthropy, the labor movement, business, faith, politics, and governance, and for whom this vision resonates, the call to action is to find like-minded people and organizations both within and beyond your core community.

- Social activists and philanthropists can engage with the vision and foundations as a way to strengthen and align messages on the direction and scale of change we seek, and to support movements, policies and investments that move us further and faster in the right direction.
- Labor and worker organizers can consider how valuing contributions beyond currently paid work could create new constituencies and goals, and how the set of economic rights we envision aligns with the future of worker rights and benefits they seek.
- Business leaders and entrepreneurs in the technology sector, and in service industries that are being transformed by automation and AI, can consider how this vision aligns with their own values and commitments to current and future technology users, including current and future workers, and use it to articulate the

role of socially responsible business in both creating and sharing the benefits of technology and automation for the next generation.

- Faith leaders and communities can read this vision as a strong call for recognizing the intrinsic worth of every person in our economic and civic life, and consider how they can lend their voices to movements and campaigns that use this shared value as a basis for advancing economic and racial justice, social inclusion and an embrace of all people's identities.
- Leaders in politics and government can test this vision as a narrative about where we are and where we wish to go, to unify the country and provide a new set of overarching values and policy directions for democratic politics and governance.

By building a truly cross-sector movement for a better society, we can transcend the zero-sum politics and economics that are binding us to a deeply polarized, inequitable and unsustainable present.

Those who created this vision are committed to taking it out in the world as a catalyst to awareness, dialogue, and action. We offer it to everyone in our country who has the intuition that the future does not need to look like the present, and that we can work together to make a much better society for each other and for future generations.

## PARTICIPANTS, CONVENERS AND FACILITATORS

Participants in the group include the following:

Wendy Ake, Othering & Belonging Institute, University of California, Berkeley (co-convener)  
 Rev. Jennifer Bailey, Founder and Executive Director, Faith Matters Network  
 Rob “Biko” Baker, Executive Director of the League of Young Voters  
 Whitney Kimball Coe, Director of National Programs, Center for Rural Strategies  
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 Darrick Hamilton, Henry Cohen Professor of Economics and Urban Policy and Director of the Institute for the Study of Race, Stratification and Political Economy, The New School  
 Gisele Huff, President, Gerald Huff Fund for Humanity (convener)  
 Rob Johnson, President, Institute for New Economic Thinking  
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 John Powell, Director of the Othering & Belonging Institute and Professor of Law, African American Studies, and Ethnic Studies, University of California, Berkeley (co-convener)  
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 Scott Santens, Senior Advisor, Humanity Forward  
 Andrea Saveri, Saveri Consulting

The [Gerald Huff Fund for Humanity](#) (FfH) convened this dialogue. FfH raises awareness of technological unemployment and supports the development of solutions, including Unconditional Basic Income (UBI), by collaborating with education and advocacy programs and convening stakeholders for dialogue and action.

For this convening, FfH collaborated with the [Othering & Belonging Institute](#) at UC Berkeley. The Institute brings together diverse stakeholders to identify and challenge the barriers to an inclusive, just, and sustainable society in order to create transformative change. The Institute’s work is centered on care for the earth and the belief in the foundational belonging of all people.

In addition, FfH partnered with the [Consensus Building Institute](#), an internationally recognized leader in facilitating dialogue and agreement seeking among diverse stakeholders on challenging public issues.