

# | 2017

Convergence Center for Policy Resolution

## YEAR IN REVIEW

### **DURING A YEAR OF INTENSE POLARIZATION,**

we demonstrated that unlikely allies can make progress on even the most complex issues. This year we tackled a range of challenges—K-12 education, health care policy, economic mobility, incarceration, nutrition and wellness, and federal budget process reform—using our dialogue-leading-to-action framework. Each project engaged a diverse group of stakeholders who are committed to making progress on a significant national issue.

Our stakeholders represent an incredible cross-section of people and organizations—leaders from business, government, advocacy organizations, think tanks, and social service providers—who tell us that they invest deeply in our dialogues because our projects are different. We foster conversations that can be had nowhere else, leading to pragmatic new pathways forward. Our work provides evidence that collaboration leads to hopeful and lasting change.

**Please keep reading to learn what our projects accomplished this year.**



Mark Zitter, Zetema Project Chair, [interviews](#) Convergence President Rob Fersh at the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco.

“ So much of our public conversation today is virtual and this contributes to the notion that there are ‘alternative facts.’ In contrast, Convergence is actual and very relational. People sit in the same room and get to know each other before they talk about policy issues. There is no reacting to false pretenses or presuming each other’s motives. The conversation is structured to help participants look at deep problems, agree on a set of facts and assumptions, and then identify possible breakout solutions. I think this approach can reform the way we have our public conversations. ”

—CHERIE HARDER, CONVERGENCE BOARD MEMBER; PRESIDENT, THE TRINITY FORUM



Convergence associates—the young and growing leadership on our staff.

## Funders

Annie E. Casey Foundation  
Chan Zuckerberg Initiative  
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JPB Foundation  
KnowledgeWorks Foundation  
Kresge Foundation  
National Association of Convenience Stores

National Education Association  
Nellie Mae Education Foundation  
Oak Foundation  
Stuart Family Foundation

... and dozens of individuals across the country.



## Convergence Health Reform Roundtable

**LAUNCHED IN MARCH** at the request of two national health policy experts, [Convergence's Health Reform Roundtable](#) brought together leaders from across the political spectrum to develop a bipartisan approach to health policy reform. In June, as health care reform heated up on Capitol Hill, the Roundtable began to attract attention when they shared policy recommendations for short-term Congressional action in an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal*.

In August, the Roundtable held a national press conference where they released a series of ideas that could help stabilize the health insurance marketplaces, while providing states more flexibility to craft their own solutions. The stories that subsequently ran in over 100 news outlets across the country influenced the public debate. Current legislation in the Senate echoes the bipartisan balance recommended by the Roundtable's proposals. Roundtable staff continue to support and inform efforts by state officials toward bipartisan dialogue on health reform.

The Roundtable's agreement received coverage in over **100 media outlets** including:

**The Washington Post**

**AP** Associated Press

**THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.**

**The New York Times**

**KHN** **Vox**  
KAISER HEALTH NEWS

“Throughout this process, the team at Convergence has empowered and encouraged us to seek common ground while respecting the strong differences of opinion we have. The result has been a sincere and productive ‘strange bedfellows’ collaboration that I believe will impact the policy discussion, as well as help to facilitate consensus amongst policy-makers going forward.”

—LANHEE CHEN, FELLOW AT THE HOOVER INSTITUTION;  
DIRECTOR OF DOMESTIC POLICY STUDIES, PUBLIC POLICY PROGRAM AT STANFORD UNIVERSITY



Roundtable members Ron Pollack and Grace-Marie Turner discuss their recommendations on C-SPAN.

“The big deal here is who now supports the plan. It's not a bunch of centrist health policy experts. In fact, those who began the effort specifically wanted to avoid a centrist effort. They felt it was important to have experts who are generally divided on health care issues. If that group could come together, then Congress might have a shot too.”

—SARAH KLIFF, SENIOR EDITOR, VOX



## Convergence Project on Nutrition and Wellness

**PNW CONCLUDED THIS YEAR** with the release of its [final report](#) in September. The report highlighted a broad scale effort to address the problem of obesity, diabetes, and other nutrition-related diseases in the United States. [PNW](#) stakeholders—including the food industry and public health groups—worked together to develop and test strategies to encourage consumers to buy healthier foods at grocery and convenience stores nationwide.





## Education Reimagined

### IN 2017, [EDUCATION REIMAGINED CONVENED](#)

**HUNDREDS OF LEADING PRACTITIONERS**, learners, policymakers, researchers, business leaders, and funders supporting a growing national movement to advance learner-centered education. We continued to bring together three distinct groups—our advisory board of national leaders, our Pioneer Lab community of innovative educators, and our SparkHouse community of young leaders—all of whom are actively engaged in building the tools, resources, and systems needed to enable learner-centered education in settings across the country.

Our staff and partners also led workshops and presented at 32 regional and national education conferences and events to share our vision for learner-centered education and highlight the learning environments where the vision is coming to life.

We are seeing impressive results:

- A group of over 50 leading superintendents, convened by the American Association of School Administrators, is now working to transform their districts to be learner-centered.
- Districts around the country are using the vision to guide their work to transform education in their communities.
- Leading national organizations on our Advisory Board continue to spread the vision, support pioneers in their networks, and use the vision to inform their organizational strategies and priorities.



Education Reimagined's Ulcca Joshi Hansen [facilitates a keynote session](#) featuring learners at the iNACOL Symposium (International Association for K-12 Online Learning).

Designed to create change from the top-down and the bottom-up, Education Reimagined will continue to implement its convening strategy in 2018.

“**Education Reimagined has done two crucial things that no other organization could do. First, they brought together a powerful, diverse group to create a vision for education that is separate from any political stance or viewpoint on any one hot-button topic. This allows education to move forward in a way any other ‘fix’ would not allow because of its almost certain polarizing nature. Second, it has simultaneously encompassed and dismissed so many of the current fixes by framing the challenge in the terms of a paradigm shift.**”

—TOM SAYER, HEAD OF GLOBAL ADOPTION PROGRAMS, GOOGLE FOR EDUCATION



## Working Up: A Convergence Dialogue for Action to Increase Economic Mobility

**OVER THE PAST YEAR**, [Working Up](#) has built deep engagement among an astonishing array of stakeholders representing major employers, worker advocates, right- and left-leaning thinkers, innovative community and job training groups, and higher education leaders. The dialogue is now nearing completion around a robust set of ideas and potential solutions to increase economic mobility and opportunity for low-income workers while also providing bottom-line benefits to employers.

Anticipated for public release early next year, their recommendations include public policy as well as a full range of cross-sector approaches. They will focus on increasing financial security, strengthening pathways to opportunity through workforce development, and enhancing access to quality work. Project leaders are currently working with a wide circle of advisors to garner support as well as to plan ways to influence practice and drive impact following the release.



## Convergence Building a Better Budget Process Project



Project participants Neil Bradley and John Monsif with project director Susan Willie.

**SEASONED REPRESENTATIVES** from some of Washington's most established interest groups have met together with budget policy experts over the past year to explore a new framework for the [federal budget process](#) that would help the country move beyond current stalemates. At their first meeting, the stakeholders recognized that while they had different positions and priorities for federal spending, they shared common frustrations around the failings of the current budget process to serve Congress, their constituents, and the country.

They identified principles that could guide the development of their deliberations going forward, suggesting that a better budget process should be, among other things, comprehensive, durable, inclusive, predictable, and transparent. Then they began working on a series of proposals to tie these principles to a more strategic, longer-term framework for passing a budget that begins after each

Presidential election. The group's final proposals will be released early next year in conjunction with a summit on Capitol Hill sponsored by the Hewlett Foundation's Madison Initiative, the project's primary funder.

“ I knew with deep conviction what I didn't like about the federal budget process and was sure I had good ideas on how to fix it. I saw this as an opportunity to hear what other people had to say. It turns out we agreed on many things and disagreed on others. My thinking evolved and some ideas that I thought were important turned out to be less important. It has been a great opportunity that I'm not sure you'll get anywhere else. ”

—NEIL BRADLEY, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT & CHIEF POLICY OFFICER, U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



## Convergence Reentry Ready Project

**DURING 2015, 641,100 PEOPLE** who had been sentenced to state and federal prison were released to their communities. An additional ≈9 million people are released from jail each year. Multiple studies suggest that at least 65 percent of them will end up back behind bars within five years. The [Convergence Reentry Ready Project](#) is designed to better understand how to break this cycle beginning the first day of incarceration through the first several months after release.

Over the past year, Convergence conducted extensive research and interviewed over 140 individuals to better understand the barriers to successful reentry. We have commitments from a diverse group of leaders in corrections, substance abuse, mental health, faith-based

organizations, policymakers, former prosecutors, formerly incarcerated individuals, and advocates to participate in the project. We will explore how the culture, programs, and services available in jails and prisons can be transformed to achieve better outcomes for those involved in the system. We hope the dialogue opens the door to new, transformative state and local policies that will lead to improved outcomes for formerly incarcerated individuals and their families.

“ This is the way civil society should operate. We aren't taking sides, but we are trying to do what's best for the society that we live in. I'm hoping that the spirit of Convergence spreads throughout. ”

—VIVIAN NIXON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, COLLEGE & COMMUNITY FELLOWSHIP

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