A Decade of Difference

FORGING POWERFUL COMMON GROUND SOLUTIONS TO AMERICA’S TOUGHEST CHALLENGES
People are hungry for a way to bridge our divides. It is great to be involved in an organization that is able to bring people together around important issues and to help share these ideas with people around the country. I cannot think of anything that would be a better use of my time.

JEAN MOLINO
Convergence Board Chair
and Former General Counsel
McKinsey & Company
A Decade of Difference

Convergence has consistently demonstrated that leaders who disagree with one another can successfully build trusting relationships that lead to consensus solutions for many of America’s toughest challenges. The Convergence method of collaborative problem-solving offers an antidote to the division that troubles our nation. If widely applied, this collaborative technique would contribute to the effective functioning of our society at all levels.

Getting Started

Convergence Center for Policy Resolution began on April 1, 2009, at the height of the deepest recession the United States had suffered in 70 years, and with zero dollars in funding. “It was not an auspicious time to start a new venture”, admitted Rob Fersh, Convergence President and Founder, although the nation was certainly in need of unity. “Convergence,” defined as a coming together, a movement toward a shared purpose, aptly described what the new organization was intent on achieving—a remedy to the failure of leaders to bridge differences on issues of major public importance.

“What I saw,” said Fersh, “was that people and groups with divergent points of view on big problems agreed on ends but disagreed on means. They literally had no place to sit down and discover that underneath it all, there were potentially powerful areas of common ground. Once you recognize this and you see the humanity of people, you can’t stereotype them and dismiss their point of view.”

Fersh had successfully employed this cooperative approach on the issues of health care coverage and U.S.-Muslim relations while leading the U.S. office of Search for Common Ground, an international peacebuilding organization. He felt confident the method could work across a wide range of issues. Convergence would establish itself as a neutral convener for collaboration among groups and individuals with divergent points of view, who would join together to forge consensus solutions to complex policy issues.

The first few months of the new enterprise were lean. A staff meeting was held at a McDonald’s, and Convergence employees worked for more than a year in a windowless former storage room in downtown Washington, D.C. to keep overhead costs at a minimum. “We were flying by the seat of our pants,” Fersh recalled. With perseverance, the fledgling
The diverse mix of stakeholders joining the Working Up project not only came up with ways to improve economic mobility for lower-wage workers but also formed unforeseen partnerships. During the course of the dialogue, Ellie Bertani, a Walmart executive, and Judy Conti, a workers’ rights advocate, discovered that they shared similar beliefs and were able to strongly influence each other’s outlook.

Conti, Government Affairs Director for the National Employment Law Project, had been doubtful she could have a productive dialogue with someone from Walmart, a company that she believed “stereotypically embodies what people think of as a bad employer.” But after spending time with Bertani, Conti said, “my skepticism about her and to some degree the practices of the corporation began to melt away as I engaged with her more and more as a person and less and less as a representative of the Walmart Corporation.”

Ellie Bertani, Senior Director of Associate Experience-Learning at Walmart, said Working Up gave her a rare opportunity to talk in depth with labor groups and understand the intentions behind their public positions. The dialogue “gave us this ability to be very creative in a safe setting to discuss potential solutions,” she said. That safe space gave the stakeholders the ability to “voice the good, the bad, and the ugly. It’s critical when you’re addressing issues like these,” Bertani said.

Conversations with others during the Working Up dialogue so strongly influenced Bertani that she brought ideas from the dialogue to new programs Walmart was designing to give workers more stable, predictable schedules and to support their access to higher education programs, among other worker investments. “We really appreciated how participants pushed us in that area and really made us focus our efforts in that space. They helped Walmart understand that these programs would be seen as a way the company was contributing to expanding upward mobility for workers and helping them increase their long-term career prospects,” said Bertani.

While all the participants had core beliefs on which they could not compromise, there was still “a whole lot of grey in there,” Conti said. “I think Convergence is a place where you come explicitly to work in and on the grey, and that’s where the real change can happen.”

The best part of being involved in Convergence for Bertani was “the ability to interact with such smart, passionate people on this issue.” Bertani, who approaches economic mobility issues from the “unusual vantage point” of a major employer, said, “It was refreshing and reinvigorating to come there once a quarter and speak to people who shared similar values but were attacking it from a very different angle to see how all of us together could make progress.”

Both women are optimistic that the Working Up group’s practical solutions will be adopted. Bertani said, “I hope people will take up the flag, because it’s very unusual to come away with the left, the right, big business, small business, nonprofit, public sector, all in a room, saying, ’Yes, we believe that these are shared values and shared priorities that are achievable.’”
nonprofit did attract a cadre of backers—policy experts, business people, and funders—who believed in the Convergence philosophy of collaborative dialogue as an effective way to hammer out solutions to seemingly intractable issues.

A key contributor to the organization’s early success was the Washington, D.C. law firm, Akin Gump. First, the firm offered free office space. Then, a Convergence presentation to their attorneys was so enthusiastically received that the firm also contributed pro bono legal work and use of its conference spaces for meetings. (Akin Gump continues to be a strong supporter today, making an annual gift and donating legal work and meeting space.)

By the end of a challenging first year, Convergence had raised $90,000. Embarking on the first projects were Fersh, Kelly Young, Aakif Ahmad, and an administrative assistant. The network of supporters continued to expand. Convergence assembled a group of advisors—a Leadership Council, in addition to a Board of Trustees—who brought additional expertise and connections. Convergence tapped eight people for the first Leadership Council; today, the Council consists of nearly 60 members from across the country representing a variety of backgrounds with a wide spectrum of views.

Fundamental to Convergence’s expansion was Rich Korn, a management consultant with a PhD in industrial relations who was struck by the “simplicity and elegance” of the Convergence philosophy after hearing Fersh talk. For six years, Korn served as Board of Trustees Chair, and he continues as a trustee and consultant. On January 1, 2019, Jean Molino, then General Counsel and Partner at McKinsey & Company, became Board Chair.

Funding from foundations like the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the country’s largest philanthropy focused on health care, gave an early stamp of approval to Convergence’s work. High-profile stakeholders such as Randi Weingarten, President of the American Federation of Teachers, and Stuart Butler, then Director for the Center of Policy Innovation at The Heritage Foundation and now Senior Fellow in Economic Studies at the Brookings Institution, joined Convergence projects, and their presence persuaded others to come to the table.

Dialogue Leading to Action

The Convergence method of dialogue brings together players on all sides of a contentious issue and helps them cultivate relationships of trust with each other. To start, “it is critical to understand the differing perspectives of the stakeholders and frame the conversation in a way that accounts for all points of view,” said Pat Field, Managing Director of the Consensus Building Institute (CBI), which partners with Convergence by facilitating its dialogues.

Convergence prepares to launch a dialogue by conducting 75-100 individual interviews with experts and practitioners involved with the issue to understand their perspectives and to frame the dialogue neutrally so that it can attract diverse stakeholders. From those interviews, Convergence identifies 20-30 key “stakeholders” of diverse views and experience to join a long-term process of collaborative problem-solving.

It’s amazing the consensus that can result between people with dramatically different views when trust is built, and ideas are sincerely shared. The Working Up project did just this. It enabled a remarkably diverse group of stakeholders to reach agreement on important principles and specific ideas to increase economic mobility in America.

LANHEE CHEN
David and Diane Steffy Fellow in American Public Policy Studies, Hoover Institution
Director of Domestic Policy Studies, Public Policy Program, Stanford University
Over the course of a dialogue, “people really bond in a different kind of way,” explained Butler, who, in addition to serving as a stakeholder for several Convergence projects, serves on the Convergence Board and advises Convergence in the capacity of Visiting Fellow. Butler recalls the first meeting of the Convergence Long-Term Care Financing Collaborative in 2013, where participants were asked why they were involved in this issue. “The professional hats came off and everyone shared a personal story about a parent or close relative who needed long-term care,” said Butler. “People were tearing up. They began to see each other not as an advocate for the insurance industry or an expert on Medicare, for example, but as people with real lives.”

In each project, stakeholders establish a set of guiding principles that creates a framework for the policy discussions to come. Once stakeholders are aligned on a bigger vision, they are ready to work together to produce new ideas and solutions. Day- or two-day-long meetings, typically spaced two-three months apart, take place over 12-18 months. Stakeholders abide by a set of ground rules including honoring all points of view, respecting the confidentiality of the conversation, and allowing time for others to speak. “It’s often eye-opening for participants to see an issue through a different lens,” commented Butler. Meetings are led by expert facilitators with policy expertise who gently but firmly guide the group toward workable solutions.

By design, a Convergence project strives to engage stakeholders to take action on their ideas after the dialogue stage is completed, or in some instances, even while the dialogue is going on. Convergence itself does not formally endorse stakeholders’ proposals—it remains policy neutral—but often plays a stewarding role to maximize the impact stakeholders can achieve.

**Building a Track Record of Success**

Now, 10 years and 10 projects later, more than 300 national and community leaders have worked together to hammer out solutions on a range of complex issues. The nature of these solutions depends on where the most effective levers of change exist. In some cases, the results are recommendations for legislation, in others the work involves shaping business practices, and in others, forming a national network of practitioners, or even starting a movement.

These actions have impressed funders. Jean Bordewich, Program Officer for the Madison Initiative of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, initially saw investing in a Convergence project as an experiment that could yield results on improving the federal budget process. She was impressed with the way the group delved into the details of how the budget process should work most effectively. “Convergence did a remarkable job getting often conflicting groups to find important common ground on budget process reform. This work yielded ideas likely to appeal to Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle and deeply influenced Congressional consideration of this issue in 2018,” said Bordewich.

Convergence’s projects have generated: a new vision for K-12 education; assistance in creating new employee policies aimed at improving economic mobility by companies like Walmart and McDonald’s; ideas that informed Congressional consideration of health-care policy and budget process reform; and a scorecard designed to help retail stores across the country improve their healthier food offerings in an effort to reduce obesity and nutrition-related illness. The key to progress across these and all Convergence projects is to build trusting relationships among the stakeholders and to hold them accountable for devising an action strategy.

**The work that you do is important. You pick important issues. Transforming our prison system is a hugely important one. I read the state and local recommendations in the Reentry Ready plan with real interest because of my past work as a mayor and governor. I also see a lot in the report that can serve as the basis for Congressional action.**

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SEN. TIM KAINE
U.S. Senator of Virginia
Sparking a National Education Movement

Education Reimagined is perhaps Convergence’s most shining example of “proof of concept,” a demonstrable display that cross-ideology collaboration produces powerful results. As the largest Convergence project, Education Reimagined accounted for 40% of Convergence’s $5 million budget in 2018; in January 2019 Education Reimagined became a separate nonprofit organization.

Begun in 2012, the education project assembled 28 diverse education stakeholders, including leaders of teacher unions, charter school networks, technology companies, foundations, and school districts, to take a fresh look at the nation’s K-12 educational system. Facilitators asked the group to set aside their conflicting opinions—about standardized testing, school choice, or the proper role for technology—and instead imagine what students’ education should look like in the future. Education Reimagined participants agreed that the educational system should be completely transformed, not merely improved. Together, they wrote a vision for a new approach to education that would be learner-centered and would give all students the support they need to thrive and be successful adults.

After the dialogue was completed, the participants were eager to stay together to implement their vision and asked Convergence to play a leadership role in determining a path forward. They planned to serve as a hub for learner-centered education, including support for individual communities experimenting with their learning environments and for policymakers enabling change at a broader level. Among other things, they identified learner-centered educators, or those who wanted to be, from around the country and held conferences to bring those educators and student learners together to exchange ideas and to build a community of practice.

Now, as a separate nonprofit, Education Reimagined focuses on advocating for this learner-centered approach at the local, state, and national levels and continues to expand its network of practitioners, educational experts, and student learners. The spinoff is “proof that our approach can generate significant outcomes,” said former Board Chair Rich Korn. Education Reimagined has also had an impressive record of attracting major funding from backers representing a diverse range of political views.

The Project on Nutrition and Wellness identified ‘win-win’ paths forward for the production and marketing of healthier foods and beverages for the nation’s children and families. The seriousness of our engagement and the strong working and personal relationships we forged set the stage for lasting breakthroughs in our joint efforts to reverse the childhood obesity epidemic.

TRACY ORLEANS
Senior Scientist
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Forging Improvements to Healthcare

In 2017, with Congress in gridlock over the future of the Affordable Care Act, Convergence convened the Health Reform Roundtable, a bipartisan group of top health-care experts who discussed ways to ensure that any reforms that might pass would contribute to a stable, effective healthcare system. “Our intention is to model, and to promote, a cooperative legislative approach for Members of Congress so that significant, bipartisan progress can be made to improve health care for America’s families,” Ron Pollack, Founding Executive Director and Chair Emeritus of Families USA, explained when the group released its recommendations in August 2017. The Roundtable’s agreement sought to develop a legislative roadmap for incremental steps to improve health care that could transcend ideology and partisanship.

The fact that such a high-level bipartisan group of experts—several of whom had worked on healthcare policy for Democratic and Republican administrations—could find common ground in the contentious area of healthcare reform defied widespread expectations. The Roundtable’s recommendations received extensive media coverage and interest on Capitol Hill. The news stories, which ran in over 100 outlets,
A Decade of Difference:
Project Milestones

2009
Convergence was founded on April 1, 2009

2010
Convergence launches its first initiative, the U.S.-Pakistan Leaders Forum (USPLF).
Objective: Deepening cooperation and mutual respect between the two countries.

USPLF hosts 40 American and Pakistani leaders at its first gathering in Lahore, Pakistan.

2011

2012
Project on Nutrition and Wellness (PNW) launches.
Objective: Putting market forces to work to increase the demand for healthier foods.

2013
Re-Imagining Education Project launches.
Objective: Transforming K-12 education in the United States.

The Long-Term Care Financing Collaborative (LTCFC) launches.
Objective: Transforming the financing and delivery of long-term supports and services for elderly and disabled persons.

Reentry Ready launches.
Objective: Improving reentry success for the thousands of individuals returning from incarceration each year.

Education Reimagined becomes an independent organization.

Convergence begins providing support for the Bipartisan Working Group (BPWG) of Congress, a caucus of 28 House Members who meet regularly to strengthen relationships across the aisle and advance shared policy objectives.

Reentry Ready Project releases recommendations designed to prepare people to successfully return from prison and lead more productive lives.

Convergence celebrates 10 years with a proven track record of success.

U.S.-Pakistan Leaders Forum (USPLF) hosts 40 American and Pakistani leaders at its first gathering in Lahore, Pakistan.

Re-Imagining Education Project issues A Transformational Vision for Education in the U.S., which advocates for a learner-centered education system focused on the individual needs of each child.

The Roundtable receives widespread media attention after announcing an agreement on proposals for Congressional action to improve America's health-care system.

Building a Better Budget Process Project (B3P) launches.
Objective: Reforming the federal budget process to help the country move beyond current stalemates.

LTCFC issues a blueprint calling for a series of public and private actions to address the challenge of providing elderly and disabled Americans with the long-term care they need.

Working Up Project releases recommendations calling for greater public and private collaboration to create multiple career pathways and greater economic stability for lower-income Americans. These recommendations influence the practices of several businesses at the table.

Future of Health Project launches.
Objective: Generating policy ideas that can foster bipartisan cooperation on national health-care reform.

California Health Reform Initiative launches, becoming Convergence's first statewide project.
Objective: Expanding coverage and enacting other reforms to improve health care in California.

Convergence celebrates its fifth anniversary with four active projects and a growing national reputation.

2016
2017

A Decade of Difference: Project Milestones

2018

2019

2020
Re-Imagining Education Project issues A Transformational Vision for Education in the U.S., which advocates for a learner-centered education system focused on the individual needs of each child. Stakeholders launch Education Reimagined as an initiative of Convergence to implement this vision.

The U.S.-Pakistan Leaders Forum culminates with a meeting of several dozen members of the U.S. Congress and the Parliament of Pakistan in Washington, D.C.

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2015

Re-Imagining Education Project launches. Objective: Transforming K-12 education in the United States.

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The Roundtable receives widespread media attention after announcing an agreement on proposals for Congressional action to improve America’s health-care system.

Reentry Ready launches. Objective: Improving reentry success for the thousands of individuals returning from incarceration each year.

Project on Nutrition and Wellness (PNW) launches. Objective: Putting market forces to work to increase the demand for healthier foods.


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PNW develops the Grocery Retail Scorecard to help food retailers sell healthier foods and beverages. PNW works with the National Association of Convenience Stores to pilot test these strategies in their stores.

Building a Better Budget Process Project releases its proposals and quickly gains attention for their ideas on Capitol Hill. B3P stakeholders are invited to testify in front of a Congressional committee considering budget process reform.

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Health Reform Roundtable launches. Objective: Reaching bipartisan agreement on short-term efforts to shore up the nation’s health-care system.

The Roundtable receives widespread media attention after announcing an agreement on proposals for Congressional action to improve America’s health-care system.

Reentry Ready launches. Objective: Improving reentry success for the thousands of individuals returning from incarceration each year.

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Stakeholders in the Building a Better Budget Process (B3P) project may have had vastly different priorities for how they wanted federal dollars to be spent, but they were all in agreement that the federal budget process was dysfunctional.

Their shared frustration with the uncertainty that has come to define the federal budget process gave the B3P participants a feeling of solidarity. Sitting at the B3P table were two representatives from different sectors: Neil Bradley, Executive Vice President and Chief Policy Officer at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the pro-business organization, and Lindsay Torrico, Director of Policy and Advocacy for United Way Worldwide, the nation’s largest private charity. Both now serve on the Convergence Board as a result of their commitment to the organization after this experience.

While the two were in firm agreement that the federal budget-making process needed to work more effectively, they had perhaps somewhat reluctantly agreed to join the B3P project. “I was skeptical at first,” said Torrico. “Our broken budget process has always seemed to be an intractable problem, and the proposed solutions have mostly been partisan. I was curious whether we could identify a set of recommendations with organizations across the policy and political spectrum.”

Bradley said that it was important to him to “attempt to see if we could come up with something that’s durable.” Politics had broken the current federal system. “Too much of our politics now is one party or the other thinking, ‘Hey, as soon as we get the power, we’re going to write it exactly the way we think it should be written, and that’s going to solve our problems,’” Bradley said. Such changes did not work, he pointed out, because each party simply changed the process each time they gained power. He hoped the Convergence group could conceive of an improved process that could be effective no matter which party was in control.

After the first B3P dialogue meeting, Bradley realized that reaching a solution was a little more complicated than he had expected. “I walked in with my wish list as to the way I thought the budget process ought to operate, and I hoped everyone would just agree with me and we’d be done,” said Bradley. “But that wasn’t going to happen.”

Bradley and Torrico found that the Convergence method of having participants agree on a common set of principles was effective in reaching practical solutions. “Having worked in Washington for quite some time, there are so many different factions and disagreements on every single policy issue,” said Torrico. “It was refreshing to put our policy differences aside and try to solve a discrete problem. I learned that while we may approach the issue from a different angle, we all had a stake in creating a better budget process.”

Bradley believed that, in the end, B3P recommendations would be stronger for having included representation from all of the stakeholders. “It was a very interesting dynamic to be able to get around a table and say, couldn’t we write something that looks a little bit like my priorities, and a little bit like everyone else’s in our group, and if we all agreed, it might actually be durable,” he said. “If that’s proof of concept for our elected officials, all the better.”
including the Associated Press, Kaiser Health News, The New York Times, Vox, The Wall Street Journal, and The Washington Post, influenced thought leaders’ and politicians’ ideas of what was possible. As a result of this work, in 2018, a new Convergence project, the Future of Health, was launched to engage national health-care leaders to envision a much-improved health-care system in the U.S.

**Convincing Americans to Eat Healthier**

Convergence’s Project on Nutrition and Wellness (PNW) brought together food manufacturers and retailers, public health experts, community groups, consumer advocates, and health insurers to devise ways to alleviate the nation’s obesity crisis. The group decided to tackle this epidemic by focusing on increasing consumer demand for healthier foods. One of their strategies was the development of the “Grocery Retail Scorecard,” which a major national retail chain with more than 1,800 stores used to guide its marketing efforts. The scorecard recommends 90 no- or low-cost practices that stores could implement to heighten demand for healthy food and beverages, such as featuring recipe cards for healthy meals and offering in-store cooking demonstrations.

PNW also worked with the National Association of Convenience Stores (NACS) to help its members boost sales of healthier foods and beverages. NACS’ efforts resulted in just over 40% of its retail members stocking more fresh fruits and vegetables over the first six months in 2018.

Mary Sophos, a PNW participant who was Executive Vice President for the Grocery Manufacturers Association, said that over the previous decade she had attended numerous multi-stakeholder dialogues. “None of these dialogues was as salient, as illuminating, or ultimately as productive as PNW,” she said. PNW turned into a different conversation, she explained, allowing her “a greater appreciation for possibilities.” She was able to break away from what she called “cramped thinking, in which our understanding of possibilities is constrained too heavily by our own experience.”

**Radiating Impacts**

Convergence’s dialogues have had important, long-term impact on the relationships among stakeholders who participated in them, something Convergence Board Chair Jean Molino coined as “radiating impacts.” Frequently, participants report their astonishment that they can find so much agreement with those who hold views contrary to their own. [See examples, pages 4, 10, 12.] Once they truly listen to each other, they discover that they can expand their long-held opinions to include additional points of view. They focus on their underlying interests in an issue of public importance and realize it is possible to create solutions to pressing problems.

Stakeholders who previously might have refused to sit at the same table have been able to establish relationships of trust that will carry over into their work in the years ahead. Their ability to bridge differences at the Convergence table showed them that it is possible to do so in other settings and around other issues. Former stakeholders often report that they will reach out to each other to collaborate or to test ideas rather than remain in their own silos.

For example, stakeholders from the Working Up project teamed up to work on issues outside of Convergence. A worker advocate and a business representative joined forces to protest a government proposal to reorganize parts of the Department of Labor. Their combined efforts helped quickly quash the reorganization. “Because when you see progressive workers’ rights groups and the leading advocate for corporate America coming together and saying, ‘No, this is a really bad idea for employers and workers,’ it just made it really easy to defeat what was a not wise proposal,” said Judy Conti, Government Affairs Director of the National Employment Law Project.

Another radiating impact is that stakeholders may seek to initiate a new project with Convergence. Two key stakeholders from the Long-Term Care project helped drive the launch of the Health Reform Roundtable in 2017 and the Future of Health project the following year. Convergence supporters have stepped forward in a similar way, bringing the organization in to launch a statewide healthcare project in California in 2018. The project expects to release recommendations in 2019 with the potential to expand healthcare coverage and enact other reforms in California.
A hallmark of a Convergence dialogue is bringing together stakeholders who not only represent all sides of an issue—liberal/conservative, business/public interest, and practitioners and experts—but also possess considerable amounts of knowledge, experience and influence to move the dial on a matter of critical importance. These “strange bedfellows” are often pleasantly surprised when their conversations reveal they have more in common than they would have deemed possible.

Perhaps no pair seemed more unlikely than Gisele Huff, Executive Director of the Jaquelin Hume Foundation, which advocates for conservative solutions, and Becky Pringle, Vice President of the National Education Association, which represents three million educators and favors public schools and teachers’ unions.

The two developed a strong friendship over the course of their participation in the Education Reimagined dialogue. Convergence’s project on education brought together leaders of businesses, school districts, teacher unions, education policy groups, and long-time educators to tackle how to transform the nation’s educational system.

Both women were initially disinclined to join the Convergence dialogue. When Pringle saw the participant list, she shook her head and said, “I don’t think so.” Huff was skeptical “that this could lead to anything,” but eventually decided to be there to defend her point of view. Pringle also agreed to participate, saying she realized it was important “to be in rooms of people who also care about our students and about the future of this country, whether or not we have the same strategies.”

The dialogue accomplished more than either woman expected. Huff was impressed with the facilitators’ ability “to make us shed our paradigms, which was absolutely vital.” She explained, “If you can’t let go of what you come in with, you can’t get anywhere.”

Pringle recalled, “When I entered that room with Gisele, I said, ‘This is a brilliant woman. I’m not sure I agree with everything’s that coming out of her mouth right now, but she is brilliant. I should listen, and learn more about her thinking, and we need to talk.’”

Not to imply that all was untroubled sailing. “This was not an easy and smooth process,” Huff said. “There were a lot of contentious discussions.”

In the end, the Education Reimagined participants were deeply committed to their proposals for a “reimagined” type of education that is learner-centered. Stakeholders are determined to persevere with their advocacy for learner-centered education, and in January 2019 the project spun off into a nonprofit separate from Convergence.

Pringle felt her relationship with Huff “actually increased the collective thinking of the entire group. It increased the quality of the action we took as we created a vision to guide us toward better results that our students need and deserve.”

The Education Reimagined dialogue had a profound effect on her “both personally and professionally,” Huff said. “This experience confirmed for me that collaboration (and not competition) is the catchword of the 21st century. This is a philosophical departure for me that will guide my professional activities going forward.”
The Next Decade

Convergence is excited about what is possible to accomplish in its second decade. As part of a three-year strategic plan Convergence adopted in 2018, it intends to work on four or five projects every year. Convergence staff and advisors are researching and exploring critically important new national issues that could benefit from collaborative dialogue. Convergence launched a special fundraising campaign in 2018 to ensure that the organization has sufficient resources to carry out its programs and take risks, such as launching new initiatives.

Equally important to Convergence in the years ahead is assisting others in using its collaborative approach to problem-solving. As Convergence’s profile has risen over the last several years, the organization regularly receives requests for advice and assistance. Convergence is exploring ways to respond to this demand, as well as additional ways of spreading its method to other groups. For example, in 2019 the Bipartisan Working Group, a caucus of 28 Members of the House of Representatives equally divided between Republicans and Democrats, invited Convergence to assist them in strengthening relationships across the aisle and finding common ground to advance shared policy goals.

As Convergence looks to its next decade, those who have been associated with the organization since its early years retain a sense of awe that a nonprofit starting with little more than an idea has come so far, so quickly. Dusie Cassata, Convergence Director of Finance and Development, who has been with Convergence since early 2010, reflected, “We have been so fortunate in the people who have come along at the right times and in indispensable ways to help us reach what was, when we started, this improbable milestone.”

The Convergence approach is a leverage model; the stakeholders are the principal reason impact happens. But the Convergence commitment and approach is the secret sauce that brings it all together.

Convergence has become America’s premier model for effective public policy governance. By continuously perfecting the art and science of listening to interests and perspectives that differ from our own and facilitating constructive deliberation and problem-solving among diverse multi-stakeholders, Convergence has emerged as an invaluable and productive means for countering hyper-partisanship and political dysfunction in these cacophonous times. Its work in the policy arena represents the ideals of e pluribus unum.
We are grateful for the support of so many over the last 10 years, including:

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We believe Convergence is uniquely situated to support the Bipartisan Working Group’s mission to help Members strengthen relationships across the aisle and find common ground so that they are able to work more effectively to advance their shared policy goals.

Co-Chairs of the Bipartisan Working Group of the U.S. House of Representatives