



For Immediate Release

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New Report: For CA's Low Income Workers, Jobs are Getting Worse, Work is Increasingly Fractured and Economic Stability is Growing More Tenuous

A report from the Institute for the Future sheds new light on challenges facing California's essential and frontline workers as they are increasingly having to cobble together various jobs to get by; stark findings urge immediate action from philanthropy and government alike

March 24, 2021, Palo Alto, Calif. – The Institute for the Future (ITFF) today released a report, [California Worker Voices: Anticipating the Future from the Frontlines](#), that found California's low-income workers, especially those in essential and frontline jobs during the pandemic, are being increasingly forced away from traditional 9-5 jobs with predictable schedules and decent pay and are having to cobble together part-time jobs, gigs, and contracts to get by. They face a growing landscape of limited advancement opportunities, new risks, and shrinking benefits—pointing to the need for urgent government and philanthropic investment.

“The situation is dire and too big for one entity to fix. Philanthropy, government and the private sector must continue examining ways to create more equitable futures,” said ITFF Executive Director Marina Gorbis. “Our regulatory frameworks, norms and legal practices are stuck in the past. The system we built around work, as we once knew it, is no longer working, and Covid-19 has only exacerbated these problems. We need to start making investments now to create a more equitable future for California's workforce.”

Covid-19 has worsened deep inequities facing California's low-wage workers. ITFF used “ethnographic foresight,” a research method used to understand how people are experiencing the present in ways that are likely to grow and have increasing importance in the future, to determine what workers' experiences have been like, to evaluate how

current programs and services meet worker needs, where gaps exist, and how those gaps can be filled.

The report found workers are using incredible ingenuity and grit to work the gig economy, which requires assembling hours of paid tasks obtained from a diverse set of employers and platforms, and essentially managing themselves. Despite these efforts, the new system of gig work is nearly impossible to navigate successfully, leaving workers without labor protections, benefits, or other perks of a traditional employer-employee relationship. In short, these workers do not have “good jobs”.

The research outlines four key challenges facing California’s low-wage workers:

- **Asset-poor work:** work provides inadequate income streams and does not give people an opportunity to build out resources to ensure economic security, such as health insurance and retirement benefits, vacations, sick days, training, and equity stakes in companies or platforms for which they work
- **Atomization:** the gig economy has removed coherent and stable social connections established in formal work settings, diminishing workers’ ability to form clear work identities and join together in advocating for better positions
- **Old and new risks:** the gig economy has few, if any, regulatory mechanisms in place – leaving workers vulnerable to challenges like potential misuse of personal data, lack of transparency, frequently shifting pay structures, and requirements to invest in equipment and tools to do the work (things that were previously supplied by employers)
- **Lack of advancement opportunities:** workers’ pathways are now non-linear and fragmented, making career growth difficult

Covid-19 has only accelerated these trends, emphasizing the urgent need for action from government and philanthropy. Potential solutions include extending existing worker organizations and creating new ones to reach gig workers, creating connections for workforce development organizations to social media sites and platforms that play increasingly important roles in gig workers’ lives, establishing portable benefits and other enhancements to the social safety net, and more.

Additional solutions can be found in a new report from the California Future of Work Commission. IFTF convened the commission and provided research for [the report](#).

“Tomorrow’s problems are already here,” Gorbis said. “Over the past year we’ve seen that solutions to large-scale challenges are possible. It’s time we came together to find ways to provide good, equitable jobs for all Californians.”

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About Institute for the Future

Institute for the Future is the world's leading futures organization. For over 50 years, businesses, governments, and social impact organizations have depended upon IFTF global forecasts, custom research, and foresight training to navigate complex change and develop world-ready strategies. IFTF methodologies and toolsets yield coherent views of transformative possibilities across all sectors that together support a more equitable and sustainable future. Institute for the Future is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Palo Alto, California. iftf.org

This project and report was made possible with support from [The James Irvine Foundation](#), a private, nonprofit grantmaking foundation dedicated to expanding opportunity for the people of California. The Foundation's grantmaking is committed to a California where all low-income workers have the power to advance economically. Since 1937 the Foundation has provided more than \$1.87 billion in grants to nonprofit organizations throughout California.