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2020 Working Group Statement

“Tech for good” is an impossibly broad topic. Technology holds enormous potential to address many, if not all, of the world’s most pressing problems, including global hunger, access to basic health care, and climate change. Technology also carries the potential to create equally enormous unintended consequences, such as spreading socially damaging disinformation, reinforcing bias, and accelerating inequality.

As CEOs in the midst of an historically unprecedented pandemic and concurrent technological transformation, members of the FORTUNE CEO Initiative recognize they carry a special burden of responsibility to ensure companies adopt policies and practices that maximize technology’s positive impacts on society, and minimize harmful and unintended consequences.

Over the course of three sessions, members of the Tech for Good working group zeroed in on two issues that rose above the rest, because of their urgency, because of their broad consequences for society, and because solving them will require a unusually high degree of cooperation across industries and with governments—and therefore would benefit from a conscious and collaborative effort.

ACCESS TO BROADBAND: The pandemic accelerated what was already a rapidly developing reality: universal broadband access is an essential service if all people are to have full opportunity to enjoy the benefits of technology. It has become as essential as food, shelter, and medical care—and indeed, even adequate access to medical care is becoming dependent upon access to broadband. The lack of access to broadband has left many people and communities at a disadvantage, particularly regarding education.

Members of the CEO Initiative should work with governments at all levels to do everything reasonable to make broadband internet access universally available.

OPEN PLATFORMS FOR TRAINING AND RESKILLING: The technology revolution ultimately will not destroy the number of jobs available, but it will change and redistribute them. And creating training and education capabilities that give huge numbers of people, regardless of their previous educational background, the opportunity to learn new skills is one of the greatest challenges of our times. Only through training and reskilling will all workers to remain productive members of society.

CEO Initiative members believe technology will be key to addressing this pressing need. We strongly favor creating open platforms that will help assess workers’ current skills, provide access to skills training, and connect them to better jobs. Training and education programs should be treated as “open access” by companies and made available, at no cost, to all who might benefit.

Companies should collaborate with state and local governments to build these new platforms and urge the national governments to provide necessary funding.