

## PLATFORMATION EVENT 9.9.15 SUMMARY REPORT

On September 9, 2015, the Data & Society Research Institute hosted [Platformation](#), a one-day summit that brought together a diverse group of stakeholders for a multi-disciplinary discussion on platform-based labor. Participants included platform business leaders, researchers, labor organization representatives, policy experts, and those contributing labor to this growing sector. The event was co-convened by Dean Jansen, Data & Society Fellow, and Mary L. Gray, Senior Researcher at Microsoft Research. Participants raised questions and discussed concerns, but the consensus was that collaboration at a larger scale is necessary to arrive to concrete solutions in all sectors.

The day was broken into three sessions – the first grappled with accountability and trust and how these dynamics shift as platforms scale. To begin, the nature of work itself has changed, as automated workflows replace traditional modes of managing work. Participants highlighted that some workers see their platform work as surplus income while others make a living from it. As companies scale, the rift between the definitions of workers and platforms may widen, and companies could see themselves differently than how workers see them. Participants also shared how they made accountability work on their own platforms. One discussant said that having workers act as intermediaries between the platform and workers had been successful in building a trusting and transparent relationship.

During the second session the group wrestled with the complexities of classification; participants described sharing economy workers as contributors, entrepreneurs, freelancers, consumers, and partners. Although the media focuses on the 1099 vs. W-2 debate, participants argued that the framework is potentially incongruous with the new economy, and solving the dichotomy is just the beginning. Also, regulation is not necessarily the only or most effective way of securing ethical treatment of workers. Participants added that the focus on vehicles of change such as regulation could be shifted towards outcomes, such as ensuring a living wage. Additionally, attitudes towards unions are mixed, with some reluctant to be bound by the restrictions of other workers. A common fear is that a platform could easily drive out any individual seeking to organize workers; this highlighted the isolated nature of platform work.

The third and final session centered around collaboration – mutual obligations between governments, public interests, and the private sector. Traditionally, benefits are defined in terms of goods mediated by government, such as paid sick and vacation leave, retirement, etc. How would a new social contract be crafted to map out new categories of support for the gig economy? The day ended with a reflection on how to continue dialogue around platform labor in a meaningful and sustained way. As different groups grapple with the same questions, there is a need for new conversations and efforts to address a lack of data and research. Also, as new frictions emerge, actors in this space will benefit from a variety of perspectives, which can best emerge and be sustained through continued development of spaces for dialogue.