# Project Positive Sum: A Blueprint for A Modern Bell Labs

*This initiative builds upon the vision of* ***Sender Cohen****, who identified the opportunity to resurrect the power of Bell Labs in an evolutionary form, Nevo Labs. Project Positive Sum is a strategic complement to Nevo Labs, extending its evolved Bell Labs model beyond the Middle East to a global collaboration that includes the U.S. and Africa.*

## 1.0 Executive Summary: The Case for a New Bell Labs

The contemporary innovation landscape is characterized by a fundamental misalignment between the pace of technological advancement and the long-term needs of society. A pervasive focus on maximizing short-term shareholder value and rapid financial returns has led to the proliferation of technological products and services that, while commercially successful, often generate significant negative societal externalities. This approach stands in stark contrast to the historical model of "patient innovation" that once yielded some of the 20th century's most transformative breakthroughs. The global economy currently lacks a mechanism for conducting long-horizon, fundamental research that is simultaneously insulated from immediate market pressures and tethered to a mission of broad-based societal benefit.

Project Positive Sum (PPS) is conceived as a direct and strategic response to this vacuum. It is a globally distributed, hybrid research and deployment initiative designed to be the 21st-century equivalent of Bell Labs. The initiative's core thesis is that by recreating the foundational conditions that drove Bell Labs' success—a virtuous cycle of patient capital, long-term vision, and a seamless integration of pure research with applied commercialization—it can solve the world's most intractable problems through the ethical application of frontier technologies such as artificial intelligence and quantum computing.

PPS is not a traditional venture fund but a meticulously engineered ecosystem. It integrates the ethical and socio-technical expertise of leading academic institutions, the commercial rigor of specialized venture labs, and a unique financial structure designed to create a self-sustaining engine for innovation. By convening a powerful coalition of mission-aligned leaders, PPS aims to foster breakthroughs that prioritize equity and human flourishing, shifting the paradigm from an extractive innovation model to one that creates broad-based abundance for humanity.

## 2.0 The Bell Labs Legacy: A Blueprint for Foundational Innovation

### 2.1 The Genesis of a Research Powerhouse

To fully appreciate the ambition of Project Positive Sum, it is essential to first understand the operational and intellectual legacy of Bell Telephone Laboratories. Formally organized on January 1, 1925, Bell Labs was a strategic consolidation of the development and research activities for the entire Bell System.1 Its unique structure was defined by its ownership: it was held in equal parts by Western Electric, the system's manufacturing arm, and AT&T, the dominant telephone service provider.1 This ownership model was the linchpin of its success, creating a closed-loop system of discovery and deployment. AT&T's regulated monopoly ensured a consistent and substantial revenue stream, providing the long-horizon funding—or "patient capital"—necessary for fundamental research without the pressure for immediate commercial viability. Western Electric, in turn, provided a direct and efficient pathway for research breakthroughs to be manufactured and integrated into the public telephone system.

This model transcended the simplistic dichotomy of "basic" versus "applied" research. As described in academic literature on innovation policy, the Bell Labs model embodied "Pasteur's Quadrant," a framework where research is motivated by a desire to extend fundamental understanding while simultaneously pursuing practical problems.2 This fusion of pure discovery and practical application created a uniquely fertile ground for innovation. The work environment was a "pan-disciplinary" space that fostered a "free and flexible work philosophy" and encouraged the "mutual exchange of ideas" among brilliant minds.3 Scientists were liberated from the typical burdens of teaching or grant writing, allowing them to focus entirely on curiosity-driven exploration while maintaining connections with the global intellectual community.5 This symbiotic relationship between science and engineering was the true engine of the Labs' productivity.

### 2.2 The Blueprint from *The Idea Factory*

The book *The Idea Factory*, by Jon Gertner, meticulously chronicles the cultural and operational architecture that enabled Bell Labs to become an innovation powerhouse.4 The central message of the book is that the Labs' success was not merely a result of individual genius but was a direct outcome of its structured environment. By placing a diverse array of physicists, chemists, and engineers in close physical proximity, Bell Labs cultivated a "children's playground" for adult thinkers, where intellectual curiosity and creative collaboration were the primary drivers.3 This cross-disciplinary approach led to a cascade of inventions that formed the bedrock of the information age, including the transistor in 1947, the laser, solar cells, communications satellites, and the foundational technology for mobile telephony.4 The transistor, in particular, exemplified the Bell Labs model: a foundational discovery in solid-state physics that was then methodically engineered for stability and reliability by William Shockley, paving the way for the digital age.4 The transistor's ability to be turned on or off with tiny bursts of electricity made it the ideal digital tool, encoding information in a stream of 0s and 1s, which became the basis for all modern computing.4

### 2.3 The Unraveling and the Modern Vacuum

The end of the Bell Labs era highlights the fragility of its unique model. The breakup of the AT&T monopoly in the 1980s dismantled the guaranteed funding stream that had supported long-horizon research.4 The conditions that allowed for patient innovation vanished, creating a vacuum that has yet to be filled. While today's tech giants possess staggering cash reserves, their innovation protocols are fundamentally different, prioritizing the rapid development of products for market and the maximization of short-term shareholder value.4 This leaves a critical gap in foundational research for the public good, a void that Project Positive Sum is explicitly designed to fill by adapting the core principles of the Bell Labs model for a decentralized, 21st-century context.6

The following table provides a strategic comparison, articulating how Project Positive Sum is an evolution of, and not a mere imitation of, its historic predecessor.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Characteristic | Bell Labs | Project Positive Sum |
| **Funding Model** | Regulated monopoly revenue from AT&T 1 | Hybrid patient capital (philanthropic + for-profit) 6 |
| **Innovation Time Horizon** | Decades-long (30+ years) 7 | Permanent capital 6 |
| **Operational Structure** | Centralized physical campus 3 | Distributed "hub-and-spoke" network 6 |
| **Primary Goal** | Scientific advancement & utility improvement | Human-centric innovation & societal benefit 6 |
| **IP Strategy** | Centralized IP for the Bell System 1 | IP for ecosystem benefit and licensing, with the foundation and/or collaborators holding IP from basic research 6 |

## 3.0 Project Positive Sum: Reimagining the Model for the 21st Century

### 3.1 A Positive Sum Approach to Innovation

Project Positive Sum is a global initiative founded on the principle that technological deployment should create broad-based benefits rather than extracting value through exploitation.6 This "Positive Sum" philosophy is a direct rebuke to the prevailing models of contemporary innovation that have led to negative societal consequences.6 Unlike traditional models that are solely driven by the imperative to maximize financial returns, PPS is structured to generate attractive risk-adjusted financial returns alongside positive impact for society, thereby reinforcing the mission-driven approach.6 The initiative's core mission is to focus on ethical technology deployment, solve intractable problems where market forces have proven insufficient (e.g., global health equity), and advance abundance by creating new jobs and opportunities, particularly in the Global South.6 This ethical posture is not an adjunct to its operations; it is the core design principle that dictates its organizational and financial structure.

### 3.2 The Original OpenAI Vision as a Precedent

The strategic design of Project Positive Sum is best understood in light of the journey of OpenAI, which serves as a cautionary tale of mission drift. OpenAI's founding charter stated a clear and altruistic mission: to ensure that artificial general intelligence (AGI) "benefits all of humanity" . The original nonprofit was explicitly "unconstrained by a need to generate financial return" and stated it had no plans to develop commercial products or enter into joint ventures with for-profit entities.8 The organization even promised to make its research freely available to the public on a nondiscriminatory basis.8

However, the subsequent creation of a for-profit subsidiary and the development of commercial products like ChatGPT demonstrate the profound challenge of maintaining mission alignment in the face of intense market and financial pressures.8 This shift illustrates the very type of extractive model that PPS is designed to circumvent. Project Positive Sum's hybrid structure is an intentional, foundational safeguard against this exact scenario. By linking a for-profit investment vehicle to a nonprofit foundation, with a portion of profits and fees recycled to fund basic research, PPS creates a self-sustaining financial model that does not require a singular, high-risk "moonshot" to justify its existence or its mission.6

### 3.3 The Patient Capital Flywheel

The financial model of Project Positive Sum is its most critical innovation. The system is designed as a "sustainable flywheel" that integrates a nonprofit foundation with a for-profit investment vehicle.6 The Project Positive Sum Foundation acts as the ethical steward, holding the overarching mission, providing grants for foundational research, and retaining intellectual property (IP) from that research to be made available to the broader ecosystem.6

Associated with the foundation will be a structured hybrid permanent capital vehicle, designed to optimize the needs of stakeholders in order to facilitate the best execution in the best work environment.6 This patient capital vehicle will have a longer time horizon, mirroring the 15-year term used by Nevo Labs.6 This extended investment window is essential for deep technology, which often requires a decade or more to mature and commercialize. A portion of the management fees and profits ("carried interest") generated by the investment vehicle is channeled back to the foundation, creating a self-perpetuating engine that funds ongoing research and operational costs.6 This mechanism provides a steady source of capital for foundational research without relying solely on philanthropy or the short-term pressures of traditional venture capital.

## 4.0 The Architects of a New Ecosystem: The Core Participants

### 4.1 The US Academic Alliance: The Ethical Compass

The US Academic Alliance forms the "ethical and socio-technical core" of Project Positive Sum, focusing on the critical intersection of technology and society.6

#### 4.1.1 Dr. Safiya Noble (UCLA)

Dr. Safiya U. Noble is a professor of Gender Studies and African American Studies at UCLA, where she also directs the Center on Resilience & Digital Justice and the UCLA DatX Initiative . She is the author of the influential book *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*, a work that has earned her widespread recognition, including a MacArthur Foundation "Genius Award" . Her scholarly work is centered on internet studies and the ways in which digital media intersect with issues of race, gender, culture, and power . Dr. Noble's expertise in algorithmic discrimination provides the foundational "think tank" perspective for Project Positive Sum.6 Her role is to ensure that the initiative's ethical standards are embedded into the very design of the technology, serving as a critical safeguard against the biases and harms that can arise when algorithms are deployed without rigorous socio-technical oversight.6

#### 4.1.2 Dr. Vivienne Ming (UC Berkeley)

Dr. Vivienne Ming, a theoretical neuroscientist and inventor, is a visiting scholar at UC Berkeley's Redwood Center for Theoretical Neuroscience, where she conducts research on neuroprosthetics . The user's query specifically noted her affiliation with UC Berkeley, not UC Davis, a point that is confirmed by external sources . Dr. Ming is also the co-founder of Socos Labs and The Human Trust, which she describes as a "philanthropic data trust" and a "mad science incubator".9 Her work is focused on maximizing human capacity and exploring intractable problems for free, aligning perfectly with the PPS vision . The Human Trust's mission is particularly resonant with PPS, as it frames AI acting in an individual's best interest as a civil right.9

A crucial and nuanced aspect of Dr. Ming's background is her intellectual connection to the Nobel laureate John Hopfield. While not a direct collaborator, her research as a visiting scholar at the Redwood Center for Theoretical Neuroscience places her in the intellectual lineage of Hopfield's groundbreaking work . Hopfield, renowned for the "Hopfield network," a computer model that mimics the human brain to store information, was known for his work in unifying disparate fields like physics, biology, and chemistry to understand complex systems . This intellectual inheritance connects Dr. Ming directly to the interdisciplinary ethos that defined Bell Labs. Her work embodies the modern-day fusion of neuroscience and artificial intelligence, positioning her as a key figure in the "applied research and development" pillar of the PPS "do tank".6

#### 4.1.3 Dr. David Rand (Cornell Tech)

Dr. David Rand is a professor of marketing, management communications, and information science at Cornell University . He holds a PhD in Systems Biology from Harvard and a BA in Computational Biology from Cornell . His research utilizes computational social science to explore a range of critical issues, including how human-AI dialogues can be used to correct inaccurate beliefs, why misinformation spreads online, and how to promote human cooperation . Dr. Rand's work is directly relevant to the "ethical deployment" pillar of Project Positive Sum, providing the scientific foundation for understanding and mitigating the societal impacts of AI at scale. His expertise in behavioral economics and social cognition provides a necessary complement to the project's technological development, ensuring that new technologies are not only functional but also designed to promote positive social outcomes .

### 4.2 The International Hubs: Engines for Deployment

These hubs provide the specialized expertise in deep technology research and commercialization to ensure the project's global impact.6

#### 4.2.1 Dr. Solomon Assefa (Dunia Research Institute)

Dr. Solomon Assefa is the founder of the Dunia Research Institute.6 A distinguished leader in science and technology, he previously served as a Vice President at IBM Research, where he was instrumental in leading global R&D efforts and managing hundreds of research scientists.6 His prior work at IBM included leading the expansion of the Q Network, IBM's quantum computer system, to the African continent.6 This initiative provided access to cutting-edge quantum computing capabilities for researchers and students across fifteen universities within the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA), serving as a direct precedent for the kind of infrastructure-building that Project Positive Sum envisions.6 The Dunia Research Institute's mission is framed as a strategic response to centuries of resource extraction from Africa.6 The institute aims to catalyze sustainable economic development by leveraging Africa's vast human and natural resources to spark global innovation.6 Dr. Assefa’s leadership ensures that the benefits of technological innovation are not just distributed to Africa but are generated

*from* Africa, empowering local scientists, innovators, and entrepreneurs to build markets for the future.6

#### 4.2.2 Nevo Labs: The Commercial Engine

Nevo Labs is a private-sector initiative in Israel that serves as a powerful "AI-first" commercial lab.6 Its model is a direct parallel to the Bell Labs blueprint, functioning as a "commercial lab engine" that generates investor returns through IP licensing and new company creation.6 The firm is designed to combat Israel's "brain drain" and serve as a "national lab for AI and deep tech," attracting top talent and connecting them with global innovation ecosystems.6 Its operational framework is a precise analogue to the Bell Labs model, with "vertical" labs focused on applied research and a "horizontal" lab for foundational research, which is funded through the affiliated Nevo Science Foundation.6 This structure ensures that intellectual property from basic research is held by a foundation and made available to the wider ecosystem, a key component of the Project Positive Sum flywheel.6

### 4.3 The Financial and Strategic Leadership

#### 4.3.1 Sender Cohen (Nevo Labs)

Sender Cohen, the Chairman of Nevo Labs, brings over two decades of multi-asset investing experience from prestigious firms such as Soros Fund Management and Duquesne Capital Management.11 The user's query specifically notes that his inspiration for Nevo Labs came from Bell Labs. Context from an interview on the "Invested" podcast reveals his specific analysis of the innovation gap. Cohen observes that while Israel excels at 30-year "Nobel Prize-winning" research, it has historically struggled with the 5 to 15-year timeframe required for effective commercialization.7 He believes that a long-term plan, supported by patient capital, is necessary to bridge this gap.7 This perspective is a direct causal link between the Bell Labs model of sustained, long-horizon investment and the creation of Nevo Labs. His experience in traditional venture capital and his critique of its short-term constraints position him as a key architect of Project Positive Sum's patient capital model.7

#### 4.3.2 Michael Eisenberg (Aleph)

Michael Eisenberg, the co-founder and general partner at Aleph, an early-stage venture capital fund, is a host of the "Invested" podcast and a key strategic partner in the Project Positive Sum network.7 With over 25 years of experience in venture capital, he brings a deep understanding of how to build large, meaningful companies and impactful global brands . His role within the initiative is to provide the critical venture capital and commercialization expertise that transforms foundational research into scalable ventures. His perspective aligns with the project's need for a new model of capital that can successfully bridge the gap between academic discovery and market-creating innovation.

The table below provides a summary of each leader's contribution and how their expertise aligns with the project's strategic pillars.

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| Leader | Affiliation | Primary Contribution | Strategic Alignment |
| Dr. Safiya Noble | UCLA | Ethical Framework & Algorithmic Justice | "Think Tank" (Foundational Research) 6 |
| Dr. Vivienne Ming | UC Berkeley | Human-Centric AI & Neurotechnology 10 | "Do Tank" (Applied R&D) 6 |
| Dr. David Rand | Cornell Tech | Misinformation & Social Cooperation 11 | Societal Impact & Ethical Deployment 6 |
| Dr. Solomon Assefa | Dunia Research Institute | African Innovation & Deployment 6 | Global Deployment & Market Creation 6 |
| Sender Cohen | Nevo Labs | Patient Capital & Bell Labs Model 7 | Commercialization Engine 6 |
| Michael Eisenberg | Aleph | Venture Capital & Commercialization | Financial Flywheel 6 |

## 5.0 Operationalizing the Global Network

### 5.1 The Hub-and-Spoke Model for Global Scale

The operational structure of Project Positive Sum is designed as a decentralized "hub-and-spoke" model that combines the agility of distributed research labs with the strategic alignment of a central coordinating entity.6 This structure is a direct answer to the limitations of a single, physical campus and enables the project to operate on a global scale. By distributing research across specialized academic hubs, such as UCLA for algorithmic justice and Cornell for social cooperation, and international innovation hubs, such as Nevo Labs for commercialization and Dunia for African development, PPS can tap into diverse talent pools and local contexts.6 This distributed network avoids the insularity that can afflict centralized labs and allows the project to address intractable problems with a truly global perspective. The model integrates Foundational Research, Applied R&D, and Commercialization, creating a seamless pipeline from discovery to scalable venture.6

### 5.2 Governance for Mission Assurance

To prevent mission drift, Project Positive Sum has designed a robust governance structure. The initiative will be overseen by a Board of Directors, an Investment Committee, and a Scientific Advisory Council.6 A critical and novel component of this structure is the inclusion of an independent Ethical Review Board (ERB). The ERB is a dedicated body responsible for evaluating the potential societal impacts of research projects and commercialization efforts, ensuring strict adherence to the principle of avoiding negative externalities.6 This intentional, structural safeguard ensures that every operational decision is scrutinized against a mission that prioritizes human rights and the public good. This governance framework is a testament to the project's commitment to ensuring that its powerful operational and financial model is never untethered from its core ethical mission.

## 6.0 Conclusion: A Path to Abundance

The analysis of Project Positive Sum reveals not a simple startup or a traditional non-profit, but a meticulously engineered ecosystem that aims to revive the spirit of Bell Labs for a new era. The initiative is designed to fill a critical void in the global innovation landscape—the absence of patient capital and long-horizon research for the public good. By learning from the historical successes of Bell Labs and the modern challenges faced by organizations like OpenAI, PPS has crafted a unique hybrid model that strategically integrates academic expertise with commercial rigor.

The PPS flywheel, fueled by the symbiotic relationship between a non-profit foundation and a structured hybrid permanent capital vehicle, provides a sustainable mechanism to pursue foundational research without succumbing to the pressures of rapid monetization. The leadership team, a diverse coalition of experts from academia, finance, and global development, each brings a unique and mission-critical skill set. From Dr. Safiya Noble's expertise in algorithmic justice to Dr. Solomon Assefa's work in reversing resource extraction, and from Sender Cohen's strategic vision for patient capital to Dr. Vivienne Ming's neuroscientific approach to maximizing human potential, the team is a powerful representation of the project's multi-faceted approach.

In a world increasingly defined by technological externalities and fragmented innovation, Project Positive Sum offers a cohesive, inclusive, and sustainable path forward. It represents a new paradigm where science, technology, and capital are united not by the pursuit of extractive profits but by a shared mission to create a positive sum for humanity.

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