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Distributed & Decentralized Dividend Mechanisms for a Post-Labor Economy

Introduction

Automation and artificial intelligence are transforming the economic landscape, potentially reducing the need for human labor on a massive scale. In a "post-labor" economy where traditional jobs are scarce, new models of broadly distributing **capital and common wealth** are gaining attention. These models aim to give every person an economic stake and income stream **independent of wages**, thereby supporting economic agency even as labor earnings decline. This report synthesizes leading proposals and implementations – in the U.S. and select international cases – for **distributed, decentralized, and collective property/dividend mechanisms** that could provide widespread income in a post-labor United States. We examine each model's structure, current status, and potential payout, then compare them across key dimensions. An **ambitious but plausible combination scenario** is presented, estimating the total per-capita income that such mechanisms could deliver, both in nominal terms and adjusted for possible cost-of-living reductions from automation-driven deflation.

National, State, and Municipal Wealth Funds

Social Wealth Funds (National): A **national sovereign or "social" wealth fund** is a publicly owned investment fund that accumulates diversified assets (stocks, bonds, real estate, etc.) on behalf of the citizens and pays out dividends to everyone. The U.S. has no federal social wealth fund yet, but proposals exist to create one. For example, the **American Solidarity Fund** proposed by economists would have the federal government gradually acquire a broad portfolio of assets and pay an annual **universal basic dividend (UBD)** to all Americans [1] [2]. The concept draws inspiration from existing funds abroad: Norway's oil-based sovereign fund has amassed public assets worth 271% of GDP, enough that its 2017 investment returns alone (if distributed) would equal **$25,500 per Norwegian** [3]. A U.S. fund on that scale (roughly **$54 trillion** in assets) could likewise pay each American several thousand dollars per year from investment income [4] [5]. While that is exceptionally ambitious, even a smaller U.S. social wealth fund would meaningfully broaden capital ownership. One analysis suggests that a well-funded U.S. social wealth fund could eventually pay on the order of **$6,000+ per year per adult** from earnings [6] [1]. Such a fund remains **proposed (not yet implemented)** at the national level, making its viability uncertain in the near term. However, it has precedent: public investment funds exist in dozens of countries and U.S. states.

State Sovereign Wealth Funds: At the subnational level, **state-run wealth funds** invest state revenues (often from natural resources) to benefit the public. The most famous example is the **Alaska Permanent Fund (APF)**, funded by oil royalties. Since 1982, the APF has paid all Alaska residents an annual **Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD)** drawn from the fund's investment earnings. The dividend varies with market returns – for example, in 2017 each Alaskan received about **$1,100**, and in prior years it reached as high as **$2,072 per person** (over $8,000 for a family of four) [7]. This direct cash distribution of common resource wealth has made Alaska one of the most economically equal states [8] and enjoys broad public support. Other U.S. states have smaller funds (often dedicated to education or budgets rather than personal dividends), but

none besides Alaska currently pays residents a cash **social dividend**. Establishing new state wealth funds or expanding them to pay citizens is **possible** (especially in resource-rich states), but political and fiscal constraints make widespread adoption **uncertain**. Still, Alaska's success demonstrates high **viability** in principle for state-level funds: the APF's structure has withstood decades of political changes and economic cycles. Typical payouts range around **$1,000–$1,500 per person yearly** under moderate oil price scenarios [7]. Ambitious scenarios (e.g. multiple states adopting Alaska-like funds or Alaska's fund growth accelerating) could yield ~$2,000+ per resident annually. In most states, though, any future dividends would likely be more modest unless substantial new revenue sources are dedicated.

Municipal Wealth Funds and Urban Asset Corporations: Cities and municipalities are also experimenting with collective ownership of assets to fund public needs. One model is the **urban wealth fund**, a city-owned development corporation that manages municipal assets (land, real estate, infrastructure) for public benefit. A notable example is **Copenhagen City & Port Development** in Denmark – a publicly owned corporation that took control of Copenhagen's harbor and former industrial land. By leasing and selling this land for redevelopment, City & Port generated **massive revenues** which it reinvested in public infrastructure (famously financing Copenhagen's metro system) [9]. This self-sustaining model turned underutilized public assets into an engine for urban regeneration **without burdening taxpayers** [9]. Essentially, the city created a wealth fund at the municipal level: profits from rising land values and rents are captured by the public entity and plowed back into community investments (transit, affordable housing, public spaces) rather than accruing to private landowners. While Copenhagen's model does not pay **direct cash dividends** to individual residents, it effectively delivers a **collective dividend** in the form of new infrastructure and services **funded by shared assets**. A similar approach could be applied in U.S. cities with significant public land or enterprise assets (e.g. port authorities, utilities, redevelopment land banks). Indeed, researchers have highlighted **untapped public wealth** in American cities that could be managed more strategically [10] [11]. A few U.S. cities are exploring this concept, but it remains **nascent**. The legal/institutional framework for municipal wealth funds in the U.S. is **immature** – most city assets are not consolidated into a single fund, and governance would be a challenge. **Viability** is medium-term: with political will, cities could pilot asset corporations or trust funds, but the model may need adaptation to local context. If successfully implemented, the **per-capita benefit** would likely come indirectly (better infrastructure or city services rather than a check). For instance, a city wealth fund might finance a transit project or affordable housing **instead of raising taxes**, effectively saving each resident money (a **"dividend in-kind"**). In an ambitious scenario (major cities leveraging public land value), such funds could conceivably offset on the order of **$1,000+ per resident per year** in public costs, though direct cash payouts by cities are unlikely in the near future.

Private and Participatory Capital Models (ESOPs, Co-ops, Trusts)

Not all broad-based ownership models are run by government – many operate at the **enterprise or community level** to spread capital among workers, consumers, or stakeholders. These **participatory capital models** include employee stock ownership plans, cooperatives, and profit-sharing trusts. They are decentralized by nature (implemented firm by firm or community by community) but can collectively contribute to a more equitable, post-labor economy by giving people ownership stakes and income from capital.

- **Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOPs):** An ESOP is a program in which a company's employees collectively own stock in the company, usually via a trust. In the U.S., ESOPs are an established mechanism (enabled by federal law since 1974) to broaden corporate ownership. Today over **6,300**

companies have ESOPs, covering more than **10 million American workers** [12] [13]. These plans hold about **$1.8 trillion** in assets for employees – an average of **$180,000 in wealth per ESOP employee** [14] (often in the form of retirement account value). Research shows that ESOP participants benefit from **higher wealth and comparable or higher pay** relative to similar workers at traditional firms [15]. For example, one study found employee-owners have over **twice the average retirement savings** of non-owners (~$170k vs $80k on average) [16]. By giving workers a share of capital income (through profit distributions or stock appreciation), ESOPs can supplement or enhance wages – effectively providing a **private dividend** tied to company performance. However, these benefits currently reach only a fraction of the workforce (~6–10% of U.S. employees). If employee ownership expanded, the impact on wealth inequality could be huge: even moving to **10% employee-owned** nationally would more than **double the wealth of the bottom 50% of households** in America [17]. Under a very broad ESOP scenario (e.g. 30% employee-owned economy), median wealth of disadvantaged groups would multiply severalfold [18]. ESOPs are **legally mature and proven** (thousands exist), with **high viability** for gradual expansion – policies like tax incentives and loan programs already support ESOP formation. In a post-labor future, ESOPs could ensure workers retain a share in the productivity of automated firms. **Per-capita payout:** ESOPs don't provide a universal payment to all citizens; rather, they yield benefits to participating employees (often as a lump-sum retirement distribution or periodic profit-sharing). An average ESOP employee might receive the equivalent of a **5–15% boost to annual pay** in profit shares or stock accrual, depending on the company's profits. In concrete terms, that could be several thousand dollars per year in extra compensation, accumulating to six-figure ownership over time [14]. But for the typical U.S. resident (many of whom are not ESOP participants), the current **population-wide average** dividend from ESOPs is effectively **nil**. Thus, ESOPs can be a powerful tool for those included, but their aggregate impact depends on how widely they spread.

- **Worker Cooperatives:** A worker cooperative is a business **owned and democratically governed by its employees**, with each worker typically having one voting share. Like ESOPs, worker co-ops give labor a direct ownership stake, but co-ops usually start as employee-owned from the outset (or convert through purchase) and emphasize democratic control (one member, one vote). The U.S. has on the order of **500–1,000 worker co-ops** in operation, but most are small; total co-op employment is only ~7–8,000 workers according to recent counts [19] [20]. While currently **a tiny niche** in the U.S. economy, worker co-ops have a strong track record in other countries (for instance, the Mondragon Cooperative Corporation in Spain employs ~80,000 worker-owners). Studies find that worker co-ops can deliver **higher wages, more job stability, and greater worker satisfaction** compared to conventional firms [21] [22]. Importantly, co-ops share profits among the worker-owners, often in the form of annual patronage dividends or bonuses based on each member's labor contribution. This means that as automation increases overall productivity, co-op members can collectively decide to reduce hours or redistribute surplus as income, rather than lay off workers – a potential model for **shared prosperity with less work**. The **viability** of scaling worker co-ops in the U.S. is moderate: legal structures exist and interest is rising (especially among younger entrepreneurs and in sectors like home care, retail, and manufacturing), but co-ops face barriers in accessing capital and supportive policy. If significantly expanded, worker co-ops could ensure that **a broad swath of the labor force directly benefits from capital income**. However, like ESOPs, their payouts are **limited to members**. A thriving co-op sector might routinely provide each worker-member an annual profit dividend of say **5–25% of their salary** (varying widely by enterprise economics). This could translate to a few thousand dollars per worker per year in a modest scenario, up to tens of thousands in

highly profitable co-ops. For the general populace, though, **co-op dividends are not universal** – they strengthen worker-owners' incomes rather than paying everyone.

- **Consumer and Platform Cooperatives:** Not only workers, but consumers and users can also collectively own enterprises. **Consumer cooperatives** (like credit unions, mutual insurance companies, or member-owned retail co-ops) distribute earnings to their customer-members, usually proportional to patronage. For example, credit unions often return profits as lower loan rates or occasional patronage dividends to their millions of depositors. These member dividends tend to be modest (e.g. a credit union member might get a year-end rebate of ~$50 or better interest rates worth a few hundred dollars), but they represent another decentralized way of **sharing economic surpluses**. **Platform cooperatives** apply similar principles in the digital economy – envision an Uber or Facebook owned by its drivers or users, who then receive a portion of the platform's profits. This idea is largely aspirational so far, but some pilots exist (for instance, a driver-owned ride-hailing coop in New York). If gig workers or internet users collectively owned the platforms they power, they could capture income that now flows to corporate shareholders. For instance, a platform co-op social network might pay each user a small dividend from ad revenues, effectively a "data dividend." While today **platform co-ops remain experimental**, they are seen as a **viable future model** to democratize the wealth generated by AI and networks. The **payouts** in consumer/platform co-ops are typically **proportional to use** (spending, contributions, etc.), and in many cases are delivered via better prices rather than cash. In aggregate, expanded consumer co-ops could return some value to a majority of Americans (since many people use co-ops like credit unions, grocery co-ops, rural electric co-ops, etc.), but these returns are relatively small on a per-capita basis – perhaps **tens to a few hundred dollars a year** in savings or patronage for an active member. Platform co-ops, if they captured major market share, could in theory pay out more significant sums (imagine if a user-owned YouTube paid popular content contributors a dividend, or if a ride-share co-op returned profits to drivers). However, because these are **voluntary, market-based structures**, their ability to provide a **universal income floor** is limited. They are best seen as part of a pluralistic approach: empowering individuals as workers and consumers to capture more of the value they create.

- **Profit-Sharing Trusts and Inclusive Ownership:** A profit-sharing trust is a broad term for arrangements where a company's profits (or shares) are partly held in a trust for the benefit of employees, stakeholders, or the public. One example is the **John Lewis Partnership** in the UK – a major retailer (John Lewis department stores and Waitrose supermarkets) that is 100% owned by an employee trust. Each year, **all 80,000+ employees receive a profit-sharing bonus** (historically around 10–15% of their annual pay in good years) as "partners" in the firm. This model has sustained over decades, showing that large enterprises can be run for workers' benefit at scale. Another example was proposed in the UK as **"Inclusive Ownership Funds" (IOFs)**: a policy idea (advanced by the Labour Party in 2018) to require large companies to gradually transfer a small percentage of shares into a fund owned by employees. The fund would pay annual dividends to the workers (capped at ~£500 per worker, with any excess potentially going to a public fund for social dividends). While the IOF policy was not implemented, it echoed earlier experiments like Sweden's Meidner funds (discussed below) in seeking to **socialize ownership incrementally**. Profit-sharing trusts can also be designed to benefit communities – for instance, a local business could place some equity in a community trust that pays dividends to community projects or residents. These models are **semi-private**: they rely on corporate governance or legislation rather than voluntary market action alone, yet they operate within individual companies or sectors. Their **legal maturity** varies – employee trusts are well-established (especially in the UK and other Commonwealth countries), whereas

mandated inclusive ownership policies are **still just proposals** in most places. **Viability** is medium: profit-sharing within companies is common (many firms have bonus pools or stock grants), but formalizing a share of profits for workers by right requires stronger policy support or cultural buy-in. In terms of **payouts**, profit-sharing trusts can be significant for those included – e.g. John Lewis employees enjoyed substantial bonuses (in peak years, a month's extra pay). If an American inclusive ownership mandate had been enacted, one analysis estimated **workers would get a few thousand dollars each in annual dividends**, and some of the fund's gains would accrue to the public [23]. However, like other enterprise-level solutions, these payouts do not reach people **outside** the participating firms. Thus, while profit-sharing and trust ownership improve equity **within workplaces**, additional mechanisms are needed to support those **without** such affiliations (e.g. the unemployed, caregivers, etc.) in a post-labor scenario.

Voluntary Community Equity Vehicles (Community Investment Trusts)

Not all collective wealth-building is done via employers or governments – there are also **voluntary, community-based investment models** that allow individuals to buy into local assets and share the returns. One innovative example is the **Community Investment Trust (CIT)** model pioneered in Portland, Oregon. The CIT is a **community-owned real estate investment vehicle** designed for low- to moderate-income residents. It enables neighbors to **purchase small ownership shares (as little as $10/month)** in a local commercial property (in Portland's case, a shopping center in their community) [24] [25]. The trust is structured to protect against loss and to provide accessible entry for people who have never owned assets before. Investors receive **annual dividends** from the property's rental income and can also benefit from property value appreciation [26] [27]. In the East Portland CIT's first few years, over 160 families became co-owners; the project delivered dividends averaging **~9% annually** and the share price of their investment nearly doubled (from $10 to $15.86) in about three years [28]. Residents thus saw both ongoing income and capital gains, helping them build wealth collectively in their neighborhood. The CIT also reported positive social effects (increased civic engagement and financial literacy among participants) [28] [29].

The CIT model demonstrates a path for **community members to voluntarily pool funds and buy assets** that would otherwise be out of reach individually. By doing so, they transform from renters or consumers into **owners of local capital**, capturing value that might have flowed to outside investors. While the Portland CIT is relatively small, its success has led to interest from **over 60 cities in 23 states** looking to replicate the approach [30]. The concept is **operationally distinct** from public wealth funds or ESOPs: it relies on individual contributions (not taxes or company benefits) and is open to any resident in the target community. In terms of **maturity**, CITs are in early pilot stages – Portland's is a proof of concept, and replications are just beginning. The regulatory framework (securities law, etc.) needed adjustments to allow unaccredited small investors to participate, which the CIT team navigated through creative legal structuring [31] [32]. **Viability** appears reasonably good on a small scale (especially with nonprofit or municipal backing to initiate projects), but scaling up will require community organizing and identifying suitable properties and financing.

For participants, a CIT can provide a modest but meaningful **dividend income**: in Portland, the dividend was around **$30–$50 per share annually** (9% of a $10 share, in early years), and many investors held multiple shares (though capped to keep the focus on broad inclusion). Someone investing $50 a month could after a few years be earning a few hundred dollars a year in dividends – not a full livelihood, but a

helpful supplement and a source of equity. **Per-capita impact:** Because CITs are voluntary and localized, the average American isn't receiving anything from them unless they choose to invest. In an **ambitious scenario**, if CITs or similar community ownership funds proliferated in many cities, millions of people could become small stakeholders in local real estate or businesses. Their annual returns might range from **a few dozen to a few hundred dollars per person** (depending on investment size and project success). More importantly, these vehicles would broaden asset ownership and could be especially empowering for historically marginalized communities to build wealth from the ground up. Still, CITs alone are not a solution for universal income – they are a **complementary strategy** to let willing individuals invest in collective assets with relatively low risk and low buy-in thresholds.

Compulsory Equity Dilution Funds (Wage-Earner Funds & Universal Basic Dividend)

A more radical set of proposals for broadly sharing wealth involves **mandating that private corporations systematically distribute equity to workers or the public**. Instead of relying on voluntary participation (as in ESOPs or CITs), these mechanisms use laws or formulas to **dilute traditional ownership over time**, transferring a portion of corporate wealth to collective funds. Two prominent concepts in this category are **wage-earner funds** (a worker-oriented model originating in Sweden) and the **universal basic dividend (UBD)** or public equity share idea (as championed by figures like economist Yanis Varoufakis).

- **Meidner-Style Wage-Earner Funds:** In the 1970s, Swedish economists Rudolf Meidner and Gösta Rehn, backed by the Swedish trade unions (LO), proposed establishing collective **"wage-earner funds"** to gradually socialize ownership of companies. The Meidner Plan called for a form of "scrip tax" on corporate profits: each year, companies above a certain size would have to issue new shares equal to a percentage of profits and contribute them to regional union-controlled funds [33]. Over time, these funds (owned on behalf of the workers) would accumulate an increasing stake in firms. Meidner calculated that with a modest profit-based share issuance (around 20% of profits) and reinvestment of dividends, the funds could achieve **majority ownership of Swedish corporations within ~25 years** [34]. In practice, a watered-down version was implemented in Sweden in the 1980s: instead of share issuance, a special excess-profits tax was levied and the proceeds used by wage-earner funds to buy stocks on the market. Though the program was politically controversial and later abolished, by 1991 the funds had managed to **acquire about 7% of the outstanding shares of Swedish companies** [35]. This was far short of the original plan, but still a significant collective holding before the experiment ended. The Meidner model is notable as a **compulsory mechanism to broaden worker ownership** economy-wide, rather than firm-by-firm voluntary adoption. If a similar wage-earner fund were adopted in the U.S., it could incrementally shift a portion of corporate equity (and thus future profits) to either employee funds or potentially to all workers nationally. Such a policy is currently **only theoretical in the U.S.** (no active proposals in Congress) and would face strong political resistance, making its near-term **viability low**. However, the idea has influenced other proposals (like the UK's IOF mentioned earlier). **Legal maturity** is low (it would require new legislation), though Sweden's experience provides a precedent. **Potential payout:** A fully realized wage-earner fund would eventually give workers collective claims on profits. In Sweden, had the funds reached majority ownership, workers could effectively control dividend distributions – possibly resulting in additional income per worker on the order of thousands of dollars yearly (depending on company profits). In a partial implementation (say funds end up owning 10–20% of companies), annual dividends to the fund could be a smaller percent of total profits. Those could be distributed

equally among workers or used for worker benefits. It's hard to estimate U.S. per-capita numbers, as it depends on design: if, hypothetically, 10% of U.S. corporate equity was transferred to a worker fund yielding, say, a 3% dividend, and that was split among all workers, it might provide on the order of **$1,000 per worker annually**. Under a more aggressive plan (as Meidner imagined), it could be several times that (essentially, workers eventually replacing capitalists as recipients of most corporate dividends). But again, unlike a universal fund, this would exclude those not in the workforce, and it has yet to gain traction in U.S. policy.

- **Universal Basic Dividend (Public Equity Share):** A closely related concept shifts the focus from workers to **all citizens**. The idea, sometimes called a **Universal Basic Dividend (UBD)**, is to require companies to contribute a portion of their ownership to a **public wealth fund** that pays dividends to everyone. Yanis Varoufakis, for example, has argued that instead of taxing automation or robots, governments should legislate that **large corporations issue new shares and deposit them into a public trust on an ongoing basis** [36]. This could be structured, for instance, as: every year, each publicly traded company must transfer shares equal to (say) 1–2% of its market value into a national "citizens' fund." Over time, the public fund would own an expanding slice of corporate equity, entitling it to a corresponding slice of all dividends paid. Those dividends would then be distributed equally to all citizens as a social dividend (hence "basic dividend"). Crucially, this financing mechanism **does not rely on taxation** – it directly allocates a portion of capital to the public as new wealth is created. The rationale is that society at large (through public infrastructure, educated workforces, data contributions, etc.) helps create corporate profits, so society should get a direct cut of those profits [36]. Varoufakis specifically highlights Big Tech companies whose value is built on user data and publicly-funded technology; he suggests a UBD funded by share issuance as a way for people to benefit from tech-driven productivity gains [36]. A similar idea was independently proposed by others – for example, economist Glen Weyl and lawyer Eric Posner once suggested an "IPO tax" where a percentage of shares from every initial public offering go into a sovereign fund [23]. In the U.S., the closest historical analogue is perhaps the **SEC's small stock issuance fee** (used to fund its operations), but using equity transfers to fund a universal social dividend would be a novel step. **Maturity:** This concept is at the **proposal stage** globally; no country has fully implemented a UBD via equity dilution, though it is being discussed in futurist and basic income circles. **Viability:** Politically, it faces resistance similar to a wealth tax or heavy regulation of corporations, but it might garner support as an alternative to general taxation for funding a basic income. If automation dramatically displaces jobs, a UBD of this sort may gain appeal as a way to directly tie everyone's income to the economy's capital growth. **Potential payout:** If, over some decades, the public fund amassed a substantial equity stake, the dividends could be sizeable. For a rough sense, consider U.S. corporate profits and dividends: U.S. nonfinancial corporate profits are on the order of trillions per year; even a 5–10% public claim on that could yield hundreds of billions annually for distribution. One analysis in *The Week* imagined a social wealth fund (built by various means) large enough to pay **$6,400 per year to every American adult** [6]. A UBD via share issuance could potentially reach a similar magnitude in the long run. In a conservative scenario, it might start small – e.g. a few hundred dollars per person after some years. A moderate scenario might see it climb into the low thousands per year. An **ambitious scenario** (decades of accumulating equity) could rival a full basic income, perhaps **$5,000+ per capita annually** funded purely by dividends. Importantly, this would be **universal** – everyone from the unemployed to retirees to workers would get the dividend, reflecting their stake in the nation's productive capital. The UBD model is essentially a way to **institutionalize a share of capital income for all**. It aligns with the

idea of treating common inputs (like data, public research, social stability) as deserving a return. While still speculative, it is a powerful vision for a post-labor economy.

- **Automation Capital Funds:** A variant on the UBD theme focuses specifically on financing via automation-related gains. As automation replaces labor, one proposal is to create **"automation investment funds"** or require an "automation contribution" from firms. For instance, some have suggested that if a company saves money by installing robots (thus cutting jobs), it should either pay a tax or issue equity equivalent to a portion of those savings into a public fund. This is conceptually similar to Varoufakis's idea, but justified directly as capturing the "robot dividend" for society. Microsoft founder Bill Gates famously floated the idea of a **"robot tax"** on companies that automate away jobs, with the revenue used to fund human services. Varoufakis countered that a **robot tax is unwieldy**, and a better approach is the equity-based UBD [37] [36]. The end goal is the same: ensure that as capital (robots, AI) replaces labor, the returns to that capital are partly **socialized** to provide income for those left out of work. Some thinkers also propose an **"AI dividend"** – if AI algorithms rely on data from the public, then any wealth generated should be shared back. These automation-focused funds would essentially operate like a specialized sovereign wealth fund (accumulating assets or fees from AI/robotics-heavy firms). **Maturity:** Pure automation funds are still just an idea; none exists at scale. **Viability:** Medium-to-low in the short term; it requires policymakers to accept the premise and either mandate share transfers (politically challenging) or impose targeted taxes (also challenging). However, as AI/automation impacts grow, there may be increasing openness to such schemes. **Payouts:** If, for example, every large tech firm had to gradually give 1–2% of equity to a public fund, within a decade the fund could own a noticeable stake. Automation-intensive sectors (tech, manufacturing, logistics) could feed the fund. The eventual payout would overlap with the UBD discussed above – essentially, this is one method to finance a universal dividend. So one can expect similar figures: modest at first, potentially scaling to a few thousand dollars per person per year if pursued assertively. The key difference is framing – it ties the dividend to automation's impact, reinforcing the social contract that **the benefits of automation are shared**.

Rent Capture and Commons Dividends (Land, Environment, Data)

Another suite of models for providing broad-based income focuses on capturing rents from non-labor sources – things like land, natural resources, carbon emissions, the electromagnetic spectrum, and even personal data. These are areas where either the **commons** or the **finite nature** of a resource suggests that private actors should pay society for use, and those revenues can be **redistributed as dividends**. Many of these ideas draw from the notion of a **"citizen's dividend"** – a payment to all citizens from commonly owned assets or rights.

- **Land Value Tax and Land Dividends:** Land (especially urban land) is a classic example of a scarce resource whose value is created by nature and the community (location, public infrastructure, economic development) rather than the landowner's efforts. **Land value taxation (LVT)** – taxing the unimproved value of land – has long been advocated by economists from Henry George to Milton Friedman as an efficient and fair tax. One appealing use of land tax revenue is to fund a **universal dividend**. Since the value of land is effectively generated by society, taxing that value and redistributing it aligns with the idea that every citizen should benefit from the commons. How much money could this yield? Studies indicate that a full **100% tax on land rents** in the U.S. (in theory capturing all surplus land value) could fund a very substantial basic income. A recent analysis estimated that a **national LVT at an aggressive level** could raise enough revenue to pay every adult

American roughly **$5,750 per year** [38] [39] as a universal dividend. Even a partial land value tax (or using only part of the revenue for dividends) could provide a meaningful stipend. For instance, one model found that in the UK, a much smaller LVT (1% of land value) could finance a modest universal payment of about £64 per month, significantly reducing poverty [40]. In the U.S. context, urban land values are enormous – by capturing them for public benefit, we could both improve efficiency (reducing speculation) and fund social dividends. **Maturity:** Land value tax is well-understood in economic theory and has been implemented in limited ways (some cities have LVT or split-rate property taxes). However, no jurisdiction in the U.S. currently redistributes LVT revenue as a direct dividend. It's usually used for public budgets. **Viability:** Politically, LVT faces opposition from landowners, but it has cross-ideological support among economists as "the least bad tax." If framed as funding tax relief or dividends for all, it could gain traction. Some U.S. cities (e.g. Pittsburgh historically) have tried split-rate taxes with success, and places like Taiwan and Singapore effectively capture land value via public land ownership or leases. If a significant LVT were implemented at city, state, or federal level, using at least part of it for a **citizen dividend** is very viable (Alaska's oil fund is analogous but for oil land). Under a **conservative scenario** (small land tax), the dividend might be a few hundred dollars per person. A **moderate scenario** (more robust land tax or in high-value regions) could yield a couple thousand per person. The **ambitious scenario** (the earlier $5,750 figure) would require a truly sweeping policy shift but illustrates the scale: on the order of **several thousand dollars annually per citizen** from land wealth [41] [42]. Aside from cash dividends, capturing land rents could also fund public goods or reduce other taxes, indirectly benefiting everyone.

- **Resource and Carbon Dividends:** The concept of **sharing natural resource wealth** with citizens is already reality in some cases – the Alaska Permanent Fund dividend, as discussed, is essentially a **carbon resource dividend** funded by oil revenues. The idea can be extended to other environmental commons. A leading proposal is the **Carbon Fee-and-Dividend**: impose a fee on carbon emissions (upstream on coal, oil, gas) and **redistribute 100% of the revenue equally to citizens**. This is designed to combat climate change while ensuring the policy is financially progressive (households that use less carbon come out ahead). Bills such as the **Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act** have been introduced in Congress and garnered dozens of sponsors [43] [44]. Though not yet law, similar carbon rebate schemes exist elsewhere (e.g. Canadian provinces return carbon tax revenue as checks to residents). **Payout:** How much money are we talking about? It depends on the carbon price. The bipartisan **Climate Leadership Council** plan, for example, envisioned a carbon fee starting around $40/ton. They estimated this would yield about **$2,000 per year for a family of four** in dividend revenue [45] – i.e. roughly **$500 per person** at the outset. As the fee rises over time (to spur deeper emissions cuts), the dividend would also grow. Analyses by climate policy researchers find that a $100/ton carbon price (which is considered a strong but not implausible level by 2030 or so) would generate on the order of **$1,500 per person annually** in the U.S. [46] [47]. Even at more moderate prices (say $50–$60/ton), we could see perhaps **$700–$900 per person** per year. Notably, carbon dividends are typically framed as **per adult or per household** rather than truly per-capita including children, but many proposals include a half-share for children. **Maturity:** The idea is fairly mature – legislation has been crafted, and the policy is well-studied [48] [44]. Canada, Switzerland, and some other jurisdictions are already doing forms of carbon dividends [49]. **Viability:** There is significant political debate, but a carbon dividend has bipartisan appeal (it's revenue-neutral and returns money to citizens). It could realistically be implemented in the medium term if climate consensus improves. Carbon dividends won't replace a full income, but in combination with other dividends, **$500–$1,000+ a year per person** is a meaningful piece.

- **Spectrum and Digital Dividends:** The electromagnetic spectrum used for telecommunications (TV, radio, mobile networks) is a public resource that governments often lease out to companies via auctions. The U.S. federal government has raised tens of billions of dollars from spectrum auctions (for instance, 5G spectrum auctions in recent years netted over $80 billion). Currently, those funds usually go into the Treasury or specific programs. The **spectrum commons** could be another source of dividend payments – essentially treating spectrum like a national asset that all citizens should benefit from. One could imagine a **Spectrum Dividend**, where auction revenues (or annual license fees) are placed in a trust and distributed to the public. If, for example, $20 billion per year were available from spectrum fees, that would be about **$60 per person annually**. That's not huge, but it's not nothing – and as wireless usage grows, it could increase. Some economists have suggested more regular charging for spectrum usage (since current licenses often last decades) and recycling that money to citizens [50] [51]. **Maturity:** The mechanism (auctions) exists, but using it for dividends would be new. **Viability:** Relatively **low** politically, as spectrum funds are seen as general revenue, but in principle it's straightforward. **Data Dividends:** A more novel idea is that individuals should receive compensation for the personal data they generate, which tech companies monetize. This is often phrased as **"data is the new oil"** and thus perhaps should yield a dividend like oil does in Alaska. California's Governor in 2019 proposed exploring a "**Data Dividend**" so that tech firms "share the wealth" with users [52] [53]. The idea could take forms like: companies paying users micropayments for data, or a state imposing a tax on tech firms' data-driven revenue and redistributing it. So far, no concrete large-scale data dividend has been implemented. One challenge is determining the value of an individual's data (which varies greatly) [54]. Another approach is to create a **public data trust**: e.g., require big digital platforms to contribute a percentage of profits (or equity, akin to UBD) to a fund that pays out to citizens. **Viability:** It's an emerging idea – politically there is interest (as seen in California's discussions, and Andrew Yang's advocacy for a data dividend during his presidential run), but it's complex to execute. The sums at stake: tech companies do make enormous profits (the top five made over $200 billion in profit in 2021), but divided by all users, it might only be a few dollars per user per month unless a significant cut is shared. One estimate suggested if Facebook shared even 30% of its ad revenue with users, it could be on the order of **$100–$200 per year per user** (rough ballpark). So a data dividend might provide **tens to a few hundred dollars per person annually** in the ambitious case. It's more likely to be a supplemental income stream rather than a primary one. **Legal maturity:** still just proposals and pilot ideas; no statutory data dividend exists yet in the U.S.

- **Environmental and IP Royalties:** Other scarce inputs could generate smaller citizen dividends. For example, a **Carbon Cap-and-Trade auction** (like in California's climate program) generates revenue that could be rebated – similar to a carbon tax dividend. Some proposals also consider dividends from **pollution permit auctions** or **congestion pricing fees**, though those would be relatively small per capita and often earmarked for specific uses. **Intellectual property (IP)** is another area: much of the foundational research behind new technologies and drugs is publicly funded. One could imagine a system where when publicly funded IP is commercialized, a portion of royalties or equity returns to a public innovation fund that pays dividends (or is reinvested in research). For instance, the NIH funding that leads to a breakthrough drug could entitle the public to a small royalty on sales, distributed as health dividends or used to reduce drug prices. These ideas are less fleshed out, but align with the concept of a **"social inheritance"** – society's cumulative knowledge and innovation yielding a return for all.

In sum, **rent-capture dividends** are diverse, but together they tap into the value of **commons and externalities** – land, environment, spectrum, data – and ensure that value is shared rather than solely privatized. Many of these mechanisms (land tax, carbon fee) have the dual benefit of **improving market outcomes** (reducing speculation or pollution) while raising revenue. Each alone might provide a modest dividend; combined, they could add a few to several thousand dollars per person per year in income or equivalent benefits.

Capital Endowment Accounts (Baby Bonds and Universal Inheritance)

Lastly, beyond ongoing dividends, another strategy for empowering individuals in a post-labor economy is to **grant people capital assets at key life stages** (typically at birth or reaching adulthood). Instead of (or in addition to) giving everyone a small stream of income yearly, this approach gives each person a **one-time endowment** – essentially seed capital or a trust fund that they can use to generate income or invest in their future.

- **"Baby Bonds" (Child Trust Accounts):** The term "baby bonds" refers to publicly funded trust accounts established for children when they are born, which grow over time and can be accessed when the child reaches adulthood. This idea has been championed in the U.S. by scholars like Darrick Hamilton and was introduced as legislation by Senator Cory Booker and Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley (American Opportunity Accounts Act). Under Booker's federal proposal, **every newborn would receive a federal trust account with a $1,000 initial deposit**, and each year the government would contribute additional funds on a sliding scale based on the family's income (low-income kids get more, high-income kids get little or none) [55] [56]. The funds would be invested (for example, in safe government bonds) until the child turns 18. At 18, the young adult could use the accumulated funds for approved asset-building purposes like college tuition, buying a home, or starting a business [57] [58]. The goal is to ensure that every person, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, enters adulthood with some **capital nest egg**, narrowing the racial and wealth gaps that compound over generations. Research indicates this policy would dramatically reduce the racial wealth divide – one study found median wealth for young Black adults would rise from $0 (for many) to tens of thousands of dollars with robust baby bonds [59] [60]. **Maturity:** The baby bonds idea is **proposed** at the federal level, not enacted, but it has gained significant attention and some funding in state and local pilots. For instance, the District of Columbia launched a baby bonds program in 2021, and states like Connecticut and Washington have approved versions targeting children in low-income families (though at smaller scales than Booker's plan). The UK actually implemented a form of child trust fund in the 2000s (giving every baby ~£250 at birth, plus another £250 at age 7), but that program was later discontinued. **Viability:** Politically, baby bonds have moderate viability – they directly address inequality and have a relatively clear funding mechanism (Booker's plan suggested paying for it by higher estate and capital gains taxes [61]). The cost is not trivial (around $60 billion per year for Booker's plan [61]), but not outlandish relative to federal budgets. It essentially transforms part of wealth redistribution into a delayed benefit for the next generation. **Payout:** Baby bonds are not an annual income, but rather a **one-time capital grant**. Under the Booker proposal, the poorest children would accumulate up to **$46,000 by age 18** (in 2019 dollars) while even children from higher-income families might have a smaller account around $1,700 [62] [63]. The average account was estimated around **$20,000 at age 18** [64]. To put that in perspective, $20k could be invested to yield perhaps $800 a year in perpetuity (at 4%

interest), or used to significantly offset college costs or a mortgage down payment. In an ambitious scenario (if contributions were larger or invested in higher-return assets), these accounts could be even bigger – some advocates imagine every young adult receiving, say, **$50k or $100k** of capital to start adult life. Baby bonds thus provide **economic agency at the life stage when individuals are making key education and career decisions**. They don't directly pay a stipend to live on year-to-year, but they equip the next generation with wealth that can generate income or improve life outcomes, which is crucial in a post-labor context (where owning assets may matter more than earning wages).

- **Social Inheritance or Universal Capital Grants:** A related idea is to give everyone a capital grant at the start of adulthood funded by the **taxed inheritance or wealth of the older generation** – effectively a "universal inheritance." This echoes Thomas Paine's 18th-century proposal (in *Agrarian Justice*) to give all 21-year-olds a certain sum, financed by a tax on land/property of the deceased. In modern form, economists like Anthony Atkinson and Thomas Piketty have suggested that every young adult could receive a substantial **stake** from the state. Piketty, for example, has floated an inheritance for all of around €120,000 (roughly 60% of average wealth) at age 25, financed by progressive wealth and inheritance taxes [60]. In the U.S., legal scholars Ackerman and Alstott in 1999 proposed a "Stakeholder Society" grant of ~$80,000 for every citizen at age 21, paid for by an annual wealth tax. The purpose is to even out the largely unearned advantage that those with wealthy parents have, and to give everyone a fair start in an economy where capital is essential. **Maturity:** These grand-scale proposals are **theoretical** at this point – no country gives six-figure sums to all young adults. However, elements can be seen in smaller policies (e.g., some countries exempt a certain amount of inheritance tax for education accounts, etc.). **Viability:** As a standalone idea, it's politically challenging – such a program would require large wealth transfers and would be labeled radical in many contexts. But it addresses a core issue of intergenerational equity in a time when capital does much of the work. If technological unemployment becomes severe, there could be greater public openness to heavier wealth redistribution in order to give everyone a stake. **Payout:** By design, a universal inheritance is a **one-time payout** rather than ongoing income. The numbers often discussed are **$50,000 to $100,000 (or more)** per person at adulthood (which could be, say, a inheritance-like grant from society). If prudently invested, $100k could provide a modest income stream (e.g., in a conservative portfolio yielding ~3-4%, that's ~$3–4k/year in income). Or it could be used to buy a home (avoiding rent costs, effectively increasing disposable income) or to start a business (creating one's own job in a post-labor economy). So while not a "dividend" in the annual sense, a universal capital grant can significantly enhance lifetime economic security. One could view it as each citizen getting a **share of society's capital at the outset**, which they then manage. In a scenario where automation is generating great wealth for the owners of capital, ensuring every citizen has capital ownership (even if small) helps **democratize those gains**.

It's worth noting that **capital endowment policies** like baby bonds or universal inheritance have effects that unfold over generations. They may not immediately provide income to today's middle-aged workers or retirees, but they fundamentally change the wealth distribution for the next generation, preparing for a future where passive capital income might be a primary source of livelihood. In combination with the annual dividends from wealth funds and rents, these endowments can ensure each person not only has some baseline income but also **a cushion of assets** to weather economic changes.

Comparative Overview of Models

The various mechanisms described – public wealth funds, cooperatives, dividends from rents, and endowments – differ in their implementation scale, decentralization, maturity, and the magnitude of income they can provide. Table 1 summarizes the key comparisons across these dimensions for the major models discussed:

Model	**Implementation & Actor**	**Degree of Decentralization**	**Maturity**	**Viability**	**Estimated Annual Per-Capita Payout** *Conservative – Moderate – Ambitious* (2025 $)
National Social Wealth Fund (Federal UBD fund)	Federal government creates a national investment fund; publicly managed assets pay dividends to all citizens.	**Centralized** (one national fund for entire country)	**Proposed** (no U.S. fund yet; models in Norway, etc.)	**Medium** – concept proven abroad but political hurdles in U.S.	**$2,000** – **$4,000** – **$6,000+** per person/ year [6] [5] (depends on fund size and returns)
State Wealth Funds (e.g. Alaska PF)	State governments invest resource or surplus revenues in funds; dividends to state residents.	**Semi-Centralized** (state-level, varies by state)	**Existing** in a few cases (Alaska since 1982; others mostly budgetary funds)	**Medium** – high viability in resource-rich states, low elsewhere currently	**$0** – **$500** – **$1,000** per person/year (Most states: $0; Alaska averages ~$1k [7], peak ~$2k)
Municipal Wealth Funds (Urban Asset Corps)	City/municipal authorities own and develop assets (land, real estate, utilities); profits reinvested or shared locally.	**Decentralized** (city-level, each city has its fund)	**Piloted** internationally (e.g. Copenhagen, Hong Kong); rare in U.S.	**Medium-Low** – requires asset-rich cities and strong governance	**None (direct)** – public benefit via services/ infrastructure (e.g. funded metro worth ~$1k+ value per resident [9]); *in-kind "dividend" rather than cash*

Model	Implementation & Actor	Degree of Decentralization	Maturity	Viability	**Estimated Annual Per-Capita Payout** *Conservative – Moderate – Ambitious* (2025 $)
Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOPs)	Private companies (corporate actors) set up employee trusts that own company stock; benefits to employee-owners.	**Highly Decentralized** (thousands of individual firms)	**Existing** (6,000+ ESOPs in U.S., $1.8 trillion assets [14])	**High** – well-established legal framework; modest growth ongoing	**N/A (not universal)** – *Varies per participant*: e.g. ~$5,000/year equivalent in profit shares or stock accrual for an average ESOP worker; $0 for non-employee.
Worker Cooperatives	Enterprises owned and governed by workers; profits shared among worker-members.	**Highly Decentralized** (enterprise/ community level)	**Existing (niche)** – ~500 co-ops in U.S.; larger sector abroad	**Medium** – proven concept, needs support to scale in U.S.	**N/A (members only)** – *Varies*: profits distributed as patronage, often ~5–20% of wages (could be few $k/year per worker in profitable co-ops; $0 for others).
Consumer/ Platform Cooperatives	Businesses (retail co-ops, credit unions, digital platforms) owned by consumers or users; share profits or better prices.	**Decentralized** (many co-ops across industries)	**Existing** (credit unions, mutuals) but **Platform co-ops** in early pilot stage	**Medium** – traditional co-ops viable; platform co-ops nascent	**N/A (members only)** – e.g. credit union members might get $50–$200/year in patronage/savings; larger platform co-ops could target a few hundred $ per user in best cases.

Model	Implementation & Actor	Degree of Decentralization	Maturity	Viability	**Estimated Annual Per-Capita Payout** *Conservative – Moderate – Ambitious* (2025 $)
Profit-Sharing Trusts (Employee or Multi-stakeholder)	Companies establish trusts (or are entirely trust-owned) to share profits with employees (and/or community/ public). Often enabled by corporate charter or law.	**Decentralized** (firm-level arrangements, sometimes with national policy impetus)	**Existing** in some firms (e.g. John Lewis Partnership, various employee-owned trusts); **Proposed** in policies like UK Inclusive Ownership Funds.	**Medium** – growing interest in trust ownership; requires supportive legal frameworks.	**N/A (participants)** – John Lewis-style employee bonus historically ~10% of salary (~1–2 months' pay); proposals like UK IOF aimed for ~$600/ worker/year initial cap. Not applicable to non-employees.
Community Investment Trusts (CITs)	Community-driven investment vehicles for local assets; residents voluntarily buy small equity stakes, earning dividends and appreciation.	**Decentralized** (neighborhood/ community-level funds)	**Piloted** (Portland CIT since 2017; interest from dozens of cities)	**Medium** – feasible with NGO/ municipal support; scaling requires community buy-in and legal finesse	**N/A (voluntary investors)** – ~9% annual dividend in pilot (e.g. ~$90/year on $1k invested) [28] . A typical low-income investor might net $50–$300/ year in cash dividends (plus capital growth).
Wage-Earner Funds (Swedish-style)	Federal policy mandates firms contribute profits or new equity shares to union/worker-controlled funds, gradually socializing ownership.	**Centralized policy, decentralized funds** (several funds managing equity for workers nationally)	**Piloted** (Sweden 1980s: acquired ~7% of stocks before ended) [35] ; **Proposed** elsewhere, not in U.S.	**Low (U.S.)** – politically difficult; concept influential in theory	**N/A (workers only)** – If implemented, could eventually pay substantial worker dividends (e.g. ~$1k to several $k per worker annually) once funds accumulate stakes. Not a general citizen dividend.

Model	Implementation & Actor	Degree of Decentralization	Maturity	Viability	**Estimated Annual Per-Capita Payout** *Conservative – Moderate – Ambitious* (2025 $)
Universal Basic Dividend (Public Equity Fund)	Federal policy requires corporations to issue shares or pay equity-based levy into a public **citizens' fund**; fund pays equal cash dividend to all residents.	**Centralized** (one national public trust owning slices of many companies)	**Proposed** (no country has full UBD fund yet; concept advocated by economists)	**Low-Medium** – novel but addresses automation; may gain traction longer-term	**$500 – $2,000 – $5,000+** per person/year (small at first, growing as fund's equity stake expands) [6] [36] . *Fully mature fund could rival a modest UBI.*
Land Value Dividend (Georgist model)	Governments levy land value taxes or capture land rents, then redistribute revenue as equal payments to citizens.	**Centralized collection, universal distribution** (could be national or local implementation)	**Proposed** (no direct U.S. citizen dividend; some LVT in use for budgets)	**Medium** – economically efficient; political barriers with landowners	**$500 – $2,500 – $5,750** per adult/year [41] [65] (higher end if full land rent socialization; lower if partial or local-only).
Carbon Tax Dividend	Federal carbon fee on fossil fuels; revenues placed in trust and paid out equally (typically monthly/ quarterly checks to households).	**Centralized collection, universal distribution** (national policy)	**Piloted/ Proposed** – e.g. Canada's carbon rebate, U.S. bills pending [43] [44]	**Medium** – climate urgency may drive adoption; bipartisan interest as fee-and-dividend	**$300 – $800 – $1,500** per person/year (depends on carbon price trajectory) [45] [46] . (~$500 at ~$40/ton rising to ~$1.5k at $100/ ton).
Spectrum/ Data Commons Dividend	Government charges rent for spectrum licenses and/or taxes digital platform revenues for using personal data; redistributes proceeds to citizens.	**Centralized** (federal management of spectrum/data levy; national dividend)	**Proposed** – spectrum auctions exist (revenues not yet used for dividends); data dividend conceptual (CA exploring) [52] [66]	**Low** – currently minor policy focus; could grow as digital rights issue	**$0 – $50 – $200** per person/year (spectrum auctions might yield <$50 avg/yr; ambitious data revenue sharing could add up to a few hundred $ for heavy digital economy taxation).

Model	Implementation & Actor	Degree of Decentralization	Maturity	Viability	**Estimated Annual Per-Capita Payout** *Conservative – Moderate – Ambitious* (2025 $)
"Baby Bonds" (Child Trust Accounts)	Federal or state government establishes a funded account for each child at birth, with progressive contributions over childhood; accessible at adulthood.	**Centralized funding, individual accounts** (decentralized use by each individual at 18)	**Proposed** federally (Booker/ Pressley bill); **Piloted** locally (DC, CT, etc.)	**Medium** – popular in inequality discourse; moderate cost, needs political champion	**N/A (one-time)** – *Lump sum* at 18, not annual. Poor children ~$40k–$50k, middle-class ~$10k [62] [63]. (If annuitized, might yield ~$1k–$2k/year in interest).
Universal Inheritance (Social Wealth Grant)	Government grants a substantial sum to every individual upon reaching adulthood (e.g. 18 or 25), funded by inheritance/ wealth taxes or collective funds.	**Centralized redistribution, individual deployment**	**Theoretical** (no universal grant in practice; small-scale analogues in some proposals)	**Low** – requires major wealth taxation and public support for large transfers	**N/A (one-time)** – *Lump sum* possibly **$50k–$100k** per young adult in ambitious scenarios (could generate a few thousand per year in investment income or equivalent economic value if used for education/ homeownership).

Table 1: Comparison of Distributed Ownership/Dividend Models. *Note:* "Per-capita payout" is approximate and assumes full implementation of each model; many are not additive for the same population (e.g. an individual might benefit from multiple mechanisms).

Aggregate Potential Income in a Combined Scenario

If several of the above mechanisms were implemented together at ambitious levels, what **total income floor** could Americans expect in a post-labor economy? It's instructive to sum the approximate contributions of different models under a **plausible high-end scenario**:

- **National Social Wealth Fund**: ~$5,000 per person annually (assuming a large fund paying a UBD, on par with a mid-century target from proposals) [6].
- **Land Value Dividend**: ~$5,000 per adult (full land rent utilization could provide ~$5.7k/adult [41]; perhaps somewhat less if not 100%).
- **Carbon Dividend**: ~$1,000 per person (if carbon fees ramp up to meaningful levels, e.g. ~$75/ton CO2).

- **Other Rent/Commons Dividends** (spectrum, data, etc.): ~$300 per person combined (e.g. spectrum $50, data $100+, other resource dividends like modest mining royalties, etc.).
- **State/Local Dividends**: ~$500 per person average (if some states add resource dividends and cities offset costs via wealth funds – highly variable; Alaska residents would get more, others less).
- **Work-Based Distributions** (ESOPs/co-ops/worker funds): These would bolster those who are employed or participating, but for a **universal income** perspective we focus on the above universalizable streams. (However, it's worth noting that widespread worker ownership could raise the earned incomes of many by a significant margin, reducing pressure on the purely passive income side.)

Adding these up, an **ambitious yet plausible package** could deliver on the order of **$12,000–$15,000 per person per year** in the mid-to-long term (roughly by 2025 dollars). For context, this is in the ballpark of poverty-line income for a single individual in the U.S. and would represent a dramatic shift from the status quo. It's essentially a baseline living income funded by capital and commons, rather than wages.

To be clear, this figure isn't certain – it assumes robust political action to enact multiple programs, and the high end of what those programs might sustainably pay. For example, $15k per person would require trillions in collective assets and revenue: roughly, a combination of Norway-scale public wealth accumulation, significant land and carbon rents, and other dividends. Yet none of it is outright utopian: **Alaska's fund + a serious carbon fee + a land dividend alone could approach half that amount**, and adding a national fund and other sources could feasibly reach or exceed the lower end of that range in a rich economy. For instance, one estimate finds that just a social wealth fund and carbon dividend together might yield around $7k–$8k per adult at maturity [6] [45], and land value capture could double that [41].

Purchasing Power Considerations: Crucially, in a heavily automated economy, the cost of goods and services might significantly decrease due to efficiency gains. If AI and automation lead to, say, a **30–40% reduction in the real prices** of many essentials (energy, manufactured goods, basic services), then the same dividend income would stretch much further. A combined dividend of $15,000 in nominal 2025 dollars could have the **effective purchasing power of ~$21,000–$25,000** in today's terms if prices fell 30–40%. In other words, even if people's money income is somewhat modest, their **real standard of living** could be closer to what $20k+ buys today, because automation makes everything cheaper. This kind of deflationary effect has historical precedent in specific sectors (think of how computing power got exponentially cheaper); if it spreads economy-wide, it boosts the impact of any universal income. Therefore, the **effective income floor** under the ambitious scenario might be roughly equivalent to the median disposable income of a lower-middle class lifestyle today – enough to cover basic needs and then some, especially when combined with free or cheap public services that could be funded alongside (healthcare, education, etc., which many proposals also envision).

It's important to note that these figures are **illustrative estimates**. The actual outcomes would depend on policy details, economic growth, and distribution choices. Nonetheless, this exercise shows that a multi-pronged approach – **national wealth sharing + common resource dividends + labor-centric ownership reforms + capital grants** – could realistically support a scenario where **a large portion of the population's livelihood comes from non-labor income**. People would still be free to work (and earn more) if jobs are available, but the **floor of economic security** would be higher and decoupled from traditional employment. In a best-case post-labor economy, an American might receive a national dividend check, a carbon dividend, perhaps a state dividend, payouts from cooperative memberships, and have a nest-egg from a baby bond – together providing both **steady income and capital stake**. And as automation drives productivity and lowers costs, those shared gains ensure everyone benefits, not just a few owners of technology.

Conclusion

Preparing for a post-labor future calls for rethinking how income and wealth are distributed. The models covered in this report offer a **toolkit of solutions** to shift from an economy where wages are the primary source of livelihood to one where **citizens share in ownership of wealth and common resources**. National and local wealth funds can socialize a portion of capital returns; cooperatives and ESOPs can democratize private enterprise; rent-based dividends can monetize our common wealth for public benefit; and endowment accounts can give each new generation a tangible stake. These strategies are **not mutually exclusive** – in fact, they are complementary and can reinforce each other. For example, robust public dividends could work in tandem with employee ownership: citizens get a baseline income, while those who work in cooperative firms get additional shares of the surplus, all contributing to **broad prosperity**.

Policy and academic circles are increasingly exploring these ideas not as fringe experiments, but as necessary adaptations to technological and social trends. Many of the models have **real-world precedents** (from Alaska to Mondragon to Copenhagen), proving their basic feasibility. The challenge ahead is largely political: building the coalitions and public understanding to implement and scale these mechanisms in the U.S. context. Issues of governance, financing, and equity will need careful design – for instance, ensuring funds are managed transparently and payouts are distributed fairly. But the upside is clear: a society where the fruits of capital and innovation **belong to everyone**, providing material freedom and security even as formal jobs become less central.

In conclusion, while no single model is a silver bullet, a **diversified portfolio of distributed ownership policies** could collectively furnish a sustainable economic floor in a post-labor America. By learning from both domestic experiments and international examples, U.S. policymakers can craft a distinctly American approach to common wealth distribution – one that preserves entrepreneurial dynamism and decentralization (through private co-ops and trusts) while also embracing bold public mechanisms (like social wealth funds and dividends) to guarantee that **no one is left without an income as work changes**. Such a transformation would fulfill, in modern form, a long-held vision: that technological progress and shared ownership of resources enable **greater liberty, equality, and abundance for all.**

Appendix: Sources (selection of citations)

- Alaska Permanent Fund dividend figures [7]; analysis of its inequality impact [8].
- Matt Bruenig, *Social Wealth Fund for America* – proposal for U.S. fund and comparison to Norway (Norwegian fund yields ${\sim}25$k per capita if paid out) [5] and required U.S. fund size [4].
- Ryan Cooper, "The case for an American social wealth fund," noting a potential $6,400 annual dividend at scale [6].
- Aspen Institute data on ESOPs (10.1 million employees, $1.8 trillion in assets, avg $180k per worker) [14] and wealth-doubling effect of 10% employee ownership [17].
- Brookings report on Portland's Community Investment Trust (9.3% average dividends, share price growth) [28].
- Yanis Varoufakis on Universal Basic Dividend via equity issuance (Big Tech issuing shares to public trust) [36].
- Sweden's Meidner Plan results (wage-earner funds acquired ~7% of stocks by 1991) [35].

- Climate Leadership Council on carbon dividends ($2,000/family of4 at ~$40/ton) [45] ; UBI Center analysis on poverty reduction and dividend size at $100/ton (~$1,500/person) [46] [47] .
- Land value tax report (LEP) on funding a UBI of ~$5,750/adult from full land rents [41] .
- California “data dividend” proposal context [52] [54] .

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