Rhodes Forum on

TECHNOLOGY & SOCIETY 2026

7 November 2026
Rhodes House
Oxford



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Welcome to the fifth annual **Rhodes Forum on Technology & Society**

Last year, this Forum asked what it would take to create a world of abundance. It looked at how we could increase technological capacity, access and opportunity to benefit society. This year, we go further and have curated a powerful programme around the theme of *Human by Design: Technology, Agency and the Futures We Choose*.



As technology can now do many of the things humans used to do, questions emerge about what we value. What are the facets which are most important to remain fully human and where does relying on technology make most sense? Technology is already shaping how we live our lives and what we create and communicate, but how we develop and use that technology remains our decision.

Today, we look beyond the mechanics of technology to the questions of democracy, trust, purpose, creativity and craft. There is an urgent need for imagination, diverse dialogues and a willingness to listen.

The Rhodes community has always been international and interdisciplinary. One of the things I value most about it is how Scholars approach a problem from so many different starting points. There is a real spirit of curiosity, collaboration and connection, which I am sure will also be present in today's discussions.

The 2026 Kevin Xu Innovation Challenge has the theme of Keeping Humanity in the Loop. Participants have been asked to think about how AI can enhance and strengthen distinctly human capacities rather than simply replace them. I very much look forward to hearing the project pitches and how they will challenge some of our preconceived ideas.

We are very grateful to everyone who has helped bring this Forum together. This includes our partners and supporters, our speakers, volunteers, Alumni Advisory committee and the Rhodes Trust staff team.

Above all, thank you for being part of the conversation today, whether in person at Rhodes House or online. I hope you leave today with some new ideas and inspiration to take forward into your work.

The Honourable Chrystia Freeland, P.C.

Warden of Rhodes House and CEO of the Rhodes Trust

The Forum in Numbers

5th
EDITION

2022 — 2026

186
SPEAKERS

1300+
ATTENDEES

18
INNOVATION CHALLENGE FINALISTS

40+
COUNTRIES REPRESENTED

"Storytelling is incredible technology, biologically embedded in us"

Anand Gandhi
Filmmaker & Founder,
Department of Lore





"The benefits are not going to flow equally if we don't start taking more care and paying more attention to how we're using new technologies"

Lindsay Herbert
Global Chief Innovation Officer, IBM

Programme

Human by Design: Technology, Agency and the Futures We Choose

Building on conversations from previous years, this edition asks: *when machines can do more of what once required human effort, what becomes scarce, and what must we choose to cultivate?*

Our provocation is that the scarcest and most valuable resources of the coming decades may be those central to being human: judgement, creativity, craft, empathy, connection and trust. As artificial intelligence and other technologies reshape everyday life, the challenge is not simply to ask what humans will still do better than machines. It is to ask what kinds of people we want to become, what kinds of communities we want to strengthen and what kinds of institutions we need in order to live well together. There is no single future waiting to arrive. There are competing futures, shaped by different values and visions of progress. Some may deepen inequality and disconnection; others may expand agency, participation and opportunity. Which futures become possible will depend not only on technological capability, but on the choices we make now.

This convening therefore invites a practical and moral conversation about the conditions we must now cultivate deliberately. It starts from agency rather than inevitability. The task is neither to reject technology nor to accept its trajectory as predetermined, but to ask how we can build, govern and use it with a clearer account of what human flourishing requires.

Bringing together scientists, entrepreneurs, policymakers and changemakers from around the world, the Rhodes Forum on Technology & Society will examine the choices that shape technological futures — and the human capacities, relationships and institutions needed to make those futures worth choosing.

09:00 — 09:15

Welcome

Sorina Campean, Director of Global Programmes and Alumni Engagement, Rhodes Trust
The Hon Chrystia Freeland PC
Warden & CEO, Rhodes Trust

09:15 — 09:30

Plenary Session

Nigel Shadbolt
Chair of AI@Oxford Research
University of Oxford

09:30 — 10:30

Plenary Session

Rana el Kaliouby
Founder & Managing Partner, Blue Tulip Ventures and Emotion AI Pioneer

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10:00 — 11:00

Plenary Session
Rebuilding Democracy: On Restoring Trust and Strengthening Institutions

All technology is human technology and democracy is one of the oldest of them all — a highly engineered system for joint decision-making, revolutionised over and over, from the Roman forum to the ballot box to the broadcast debate. Today, it faces its most ambitious rebuild yet. Artificial intelligence can flood the public square with synthetic persuasion, eroding the mutual trust on which democracy relies. Still, it can also make governments more capable, participation more direct and citizens better informed than at any point in democratic history. Which way it goes depends on the choices we make. This session asks which future we are building: how we deploy technology to strengthen self-government and what must remain stubbornly, irreplaceably human in how we govern ourselves.

MODERATOR:

Randy Boissonnault
President, Superbia Group

SPEAKERS:

The Hon Chrystia Freeland PC
Warden & CEO, Rhodes Trust
Vlad Galu
Co-founder & CTO, Refute
Oleksandra Matviichuk
Head, Center for Civil Liberties
Andriy Shevchenko
Former Ambassador of Ukraine to Canada

11:00 — 11:30

Refreshment Break

Parallel Panels

With multiple sessions running at the same time, you can choose the conversation that matters most to you and watch the others back via the app later.





11:30 — 12:30

Parallel Panel

The New Rules of Work: On Squiggly Careers in a World Reshaped by Technology

For most of the last century, work meant a path you could see: one field, one ladder, a lifelong career. That path is giving way to something "squiggly" — lives spent moving between industries and places, reinventing more than once, as whole categories of work are reshaped by technology. Nearly a quarter of the world's jobs are expected to change within a few years. For some, this is liberation: freedom to follow curiosity and define success beyond the next promotion. For others, it is exhausting and precarious — a demand to constantly retrain and adapt, with the risk quietly shifted from institutions onto individuals. Both can be true at once. The real question is who helps people navigate a working life with no map: individuals themselves, schools and universities, their employers, or society at large? What does a good career even look like when there is no ladder to climb and who bears the risk when the path keeps changing?

MODERATOR:

Abhilash Mishra
Founder & Chief Science Officer, Equitech Futures

SPEAKERS:

Sarah Ellis
Co-founder, Squiggly Careers
Suhas Mahesh
AI Program Scientist, Schmidt Sciences
Tom Monahan
Vice Chairman of the Board & CEO, Heidrick & Struggles



11:30 — 12:30

Parallel Panel
Who Made This? On Craft, Creativity and the Human Premium

The creative economy is among the first places generative AI has hit hardest. As machines learn to design, compose and illustrate at scale, the value of work made by people is being redrawn — and a premium is forming around human craft, creativity and originality, the signature no model can replicate. For artists, writers, musicians and the businesses built on them, this raises urgent questions about how creative work is valued and paid for, who thrives and who is undercut and whether the human-made becomes a mark of privilege while machine-made fills everything else. This panel examines what we'll pay a premium for, why the maker matters as much as the made and what kind of creative economy we want on the other side of this shift.

MODERATOR:

Tina Daheley
Broadcaster, BBC

SPEAKERS:

Sougwen Chung
Artist & Researcher, SCILICET
Simon Cook
CEO, Cannes LIONS
Anna Ganley
Chief Executive, Society of Authors
Anil Padia
Founder & Creative Director, Yoshita 1967

11:30 — 12:30

Parallel Panel
Talking to Strangers: On the Fabric of Human Connection

The cashier. The taxi driver. The stranger you might once have stopped to ask for directions. One by one, the small encounters that briefly placed us in one another's company are being designed out of daily life, replaced by something smoother and more convenient. It is easy to assume little is lost. Yet, casual contact with strangers is its own source of belonging, and the public spaces which facilitated this most are shrinking. A generation is growing up with fewer of these moments than any before it: more connected, but less practised in the ordinary art of being among others. And these small interactions are rarely just small: they are the seedbed of the friendships and communities that the longest studies of human life link to how well and how long, we live.

What happens as human contact becomes optional at every turn and what would it take to build our technologies and shared spaces to bring us together rather than apart?

MODERATOR:

Samuel Crowe
MPhil History of Science, Medicine and Technology, University of Oxford

SPEAKERS:

Jennifer Cearns
Lecturer in AI, Department of Social Anthropology, University of Manchester
Daniele De Martini
Associate Professor of Robotics, University of Oxford
Judith Merkies
Policy Coordinator, LONELY-EU



12:30 — 13:30

Lunch Break



13:30 — 14:30

Plenary Session
The Missing Half: Rethinking Women's Health

Half the population, a fraction of the research. For most of medical history, the female body was treated as a footnote to the male one — same drugs, same doses, same assumptions, despite the biology being different. The cost lands across a woman's whole life: misread symptoms, dismissed pain, diagnoses that take years, menopause with no real playbook. Where science stayed silent, a booming wellness market rushed in — some of it brilliant, much of it noise. Women's health was left to default for generations. Now, for the first time, it's being designed on purpose — by scientists, founders and investors racing to close the gap. Who's building it, how fast can it happen and how do we tell apart the real fixes from the noise?

MODERATOR:

Ragavi Jeyakumar
DPhil Candidate in Women's and Reproductive Health
University of Oxford

SPEAKERS:

Michael Kidd
Chief Medical Officer for Australia
Dr Rebecca Lewis
Co-founder, Newson Clinic and Balance App
Dr Helen O'Neill
CEO & Founder, Hertility and Associate Professor in Reproductive and Molecular Genetics, UCL
Ida Tin
Co-founder, Clue



14:30 — 15:00

Break

15:00 — 16:00

Plenary Session
Kevin Xu Innovation Challenge: Keeping Humanity in the Loop

'Keeping Humanity in the Loop' means more than preserving a formal role for human oversight. It means designing systems that expand human judgement, invite curiosity, support creativity, strengthen cooperation, and make room for care, responsibility and shared understanding.

We welcome ideas that help people ask better questions, make better decisions, work together more effectively and participate more fully in the systems and communities that shape their lives. Rather than treating efficiency as the highest goal, we are interested in projects that help technology serve deeper human purposes.

This might include tools that support learning and exploration, systems that help communities coordinate and solve problems together, products that unlock creative expression, or platforms that make complex systems more legible, participatory and humane.

Join us to hear from finalists from the Equitech Futures, Rhodes, Schmidt Sciences, Rise and Atlantic Fellowship networks who will be presenting their solutions at the Forum, competing for both prize money and the chance to receive feedback and support from a panel of esteemed judges.

JUDGES:

Miruna-Ioana Girtu
Director, Heritage Holdings
Olga Kozlova
Director of Innovation and Engagement
University of Oxford
Helen Zhang
Director of Research & Technical Projects, Office of Eric Schmidt and Co-founder, Intrigue Media

16:00 — 17:00

Plenary Session Ethics in the Age of AI: Will Technology Change What It Means to Be Human?

In the closing plenary, Michael Sandel will lead a lively, interactive session exploring how we can think our way through the ethical dilemmas that AI, chatbots and other new technologies put before us.

Michael Sandel
Anne T. and Robert M. Bass Professor of Government, Harvard University

17:00 — 17:30

Closing Performance

Composer, cellist and technology innovator Philip Sheppard returns to the Rhodes Forum following his memorable performance in 2022. Through a unique blend of music and reflection, Philip will bring the Forum to a close, offering a powerful exploration of the relationship between technology, creativity and what it means to be human.

Philip Sheppard
Composer, Producer & Cellist



17:30 — 17:45

Kevin Xu Innovation Challenge: Winner Announcement



What are the skills we're going to need?



Critical thinking, problem solving, creativity and the ability to discern fact from fiction.

Lollie Mancey
Head of Innovation
at Instech.ie

Contributors





Randy Boissonnault

President, Superbia Group

The Honourable Randy Boissonnault, P.C., is a former Canadian federal Cabinet Minister who served across multiple portfolios at a time of significant institutional and economic change. A former Member of Parliament for Edmonton Centre, he was appointed Special Advisor to the Prime Minister on LGBTQ2 Issues, working directly on questions of representation and protection within democratic institutions. He is the first openly gay Rhodes Scholar to serve in Canadian Cabinet and co-founder of the Global Equality Caucus, an international network of LGBTI+ legislators and allies defending rights and democratic space worldwide — work that has placed him in direct dialogue with legislators facing authoritarian pressure in their own countries. Since leaving office, he has advised organizations navigating political and regulatory volatility across international corridors, giving him a close, comparative vantage point on how institutions hold or lose public trust.



Jennifer Cearns

Lecturer in AI, Department of Social Anthropology, University of Manchester

Dr Jennifer Cearns is a Lecturer in AI at the University of Manchester's Department of Social Anthropology. Her research sits at the intersection of digital anthropology and artificial intelligence and explores how generative AI is reshaping ideas of the self, empathy and connection in increasingly mediated worlds. She is currently Editor of the Anthropology and AI series at the Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Anthropology and brings over a decade of industry consultancy experience applying ethnographic methods to UX, healthtech and commercial strategy. In 2026 she gave the main-stage TED Talk "How AI Makes Us More Human" and she is regularly invited as a keynote speaker and to appear on television and radio to talk about her work.



Sougwen Chung

Artist & Researcher, SCILICET

Sougwen 愫君 Chung is a Chinese-Canadian artist and researcher working at the forefront of human-machine collaboration. Their work MEMORY (Drawing Operations Unit: Generation_2) is part of the permanent collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, the first AI model to be collected by a major cultural institution. Chung's multidisciplinary practice spans installation, drawing, performance and sculpture in dialogue with robotics, machine learning and bio-sensing. Through these interwoven forms, they investigate the shifting relationships between the gesture of the hand and the gesture of the machine. Their work conceives collaboration as an evolving coaesthetic system, in which human, machine and environment co-produce open choreographies of perception and meaning. Additionally, Chung is the founder of SCILICET, an experimental studio based in London.



Simon Cook

CEO, Cannes LIONS

Simon is the CEO of LIONS, the global organisation behind WARC, Effie, Contagious and the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity. Following a career in advertising, he has spent the best part of two decades at LIONS, leading its transformation from an advertising festival into a year-round institution at the centre of the global creative economy. Under his leadership, LIONS has expanded its role and reach in setting global standards and convening the leaders and organisations shaping creativity, culture and commerce. His work is often driven by a belief in creativity as an economic force and in creating the conditions that allow people, organisations and industries to do extraordinary things.



Samuel Crowe

MPhil History of Science, Medicine and Technology, University of Oxford

Samuel Crowe is an astrophysicist and historian working at the intersection of science and society. He was the first undergraduate to lead an observing program with the James Webb Space Telescope, the most powerful telescope ever built and his work on star formation in the chaotic center of the Milky Way has been recognized by NASA, National Geographic, CNN, CBS, the National Science Foundation and the American Physical Society. Samuel also has a deep interest in ancient history, particularly the dramatic collapse of the Roman Republic and rise of the Roman Empire. He is currently reading for an MPhil in History of Science, Medicine and Technology, focusing on philanthropic patronage of science during the interwar period in the United States.



Tina Daheley

Broadcaster, BBC

Tina Daheley is a TV and Radio broadcaster and journalist. She presents the news and sport on Radio 1, the BBC's music station for young people in Britain, hosts regular debates on the BBC, and was one of the lead presenters during the 2015 UK General Election. Tina is passionate about making current affairs and culture accessible to everyone. Away from the news, Tina also presents sports coverage and hosted the Women's Football World Cup in Canada over the summer. She has lived in London for most of her life but her heritage spans three continents. Her family are Indian and her parents moved to England from east Africa in the 1970s.



Daniele De Martini

Associate Professor of Robotics, University of Oxford

Daniele De Martini is an Associate Professor in Mobile Robotics at the Oxford Robotics Institute and the Oxford e-Research Centre, University of Oxford and a Tutorial Fellow in Engineering Science at Keble College. His research combines robotics and artificial intelligence to design autonomous systems capable of perception, mapping, localisation and adaptive decision-making. His research centres on Site-Driven Robotics, where robots and their surrounding infrastructure work together to achieve safe, scalable autonomy. This shifts the focus from robots acting alone to systems in which robots and infrastructure share sensing, decision-making and control as conditions change. He aims to turn whole spaces into active partners that help fleets navigate, coordinate and work safely alongside people.



Rana el Kaliouby

Founder & Managing Partner, Blue Tulip Ventures and Emotion AI Pioneer

An Egyptian-American AI scientist and entrepreneur turned investor, Rana el Kaliouby is on a mission to humanize technology before it dehumanizes us. She is the co-founder and Managing Partner of Blue Tulip Ventures, an early-stage venture firm investing in AI that unlocks human potential. As the host of Pioneers of AI, a WaitWhat production, Rana explores our humanity and artificial intelligence. Previously, she co-founded Affectiva, an MIT spin-out and led the company as CEO until its acquisition by publicly traded Swedish company Smart Eye in 2021. Her work has earned her spots on Fortune's 40 Under 40, Forbes' Top 50 Women in Tech and the Boston Globe's Top 50 Tech PowerPlayers.



Sarah Ellis

Co-founder, Squiggly Careers

Sarah is the co-founder of Squiggly Careers, a company with a mission to make careers better for everyone. Together with her co-founder Helen, she's the author of three Sunday Times bestselling books, 'The Squiggly Career', 'You Coach You' and 'Learn Like a Lobster'. Their podcast Squiggly Careers has had more than 6 million downloads and their TEDx talk 'The best career path isn't always a straight line' has been watched by over 2 million people. In 2026, Sarah and Helen were named in the top 10 most influential thinkers in HR. Sarah is an alumnus of Harvard, London and Warwick Business Schools and is currently working on an Executive PhD. She also holds a number of non-executive positions supporting organisations who have a focus on making work better. Sarah lives in the UK with her partner and bug-loving 9-year-old.



The Honourable Chrystia Freeland P.C.

Warden & CEO, Rhodes Trust

Chrystia is an Alberta-born Rhodes Scholar who came to Oxford in 1991. She brings to the Trust a remarkable record of achievement as a prominent Canadian politician, acclaimed journalist and award-winning author. She began her career in journalism as a Ukraine-based freelance reporter for the Financial Times, The Washington Post and The Economist, going on to serve as deputy editor of The Globe and Mail and United States managing editor of the Financial Times. She worked as managing director of Thomson Reuters before returning to Canada and entering politics in 2013. Since then, Chrystia has served as Canada's Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Minister of Foreign Affairs, amongst other positions and has been recognised for her significant contributions to public life. She gained an honorary degree from Northeastern University in 2023.



Vlad Galu

Co-founder & CTO, Refute

Vlad Galu is the co-founder and CTO of Refute, a London-based technology company defending governments, businesses and individuals against disinformation threats. Vlad brings 26 years of building mission-critical digital service platforms and cyber and identity management infrastructure, serving billions of people worldwide.



Anna Ganley

Chief Executive, the Society of Authors

Anna Ganley is Chief Executive of the Society of Authors – the UK's largest trade union for writers, illustrators and literary translators at all stages of their careers. They have been advising individuals and speaking out for the profession for more than a century. Anna is also Chair of the Creators' Rights Alliance, a coalition that exists to promote, protect and further the interests of creators through policy, advocacy and campaigning work. Anna sits on the board of the International Authors Forum and the London Book Fair Advisory Board. Anna grew up on the north-east coast of the UK. She received her bachelor's degree from the University of Durham and her MA in Management from Durham Business School.



Miruna-Ioana Girtu

Director, Heritage Holdings

Miruna-Ioana Girtu is an investor, strategist and operator who brings together capital, ideas and influential networks to help innovation scale and create enduring value. She is part of Heritage Holdings, a modern investment office and global community bringing together some of Europe's most prominent entrepreneurial families, where she leads the development of the network, brand and strategic partnerships that support the platform's long-term growth. Miruna is also an entrepreneurship expert at the University of Oxford, where she tutors MBA and Executive MBA students at Saïd Business School.



Ragavi Jeyakumar

DPhil Candidate in Women's and Reproductive Health, University of Oxford

Ragavi is a junior doctor currently undertaking a DPhil in Women's and Reproductive Health under the supervision of Professor Marian Knight, Professor Claire Carson and Dr Kate Duhig. Her research interests lie in the design of accessible and culturally-safe healthcare systems for women and birthing people, with a particular focus on women from racialised communities and with experiences of forced migration. Prior to commencing her DPhil, Ragavi completed her medical studies at the University of New South Wales, Australia. Her Honours research in conjunction with The George Institute explored the use of community health workers to improve primary care access for First Nations communities. She worked as a junior doctor in Sydney, Australia before being awarded a Rhodes Scholarship to undertake postgraduate study at Oxford University.



Michael Kidd

Chief Medical Officer for Australia

Professor Michael Kidd AO FAHMS is the Chief Medical Officer for Australia; in this role he is the key medical adviser to the Australian Government and the Australian Department of Health, Disability and Ageing. He also holds a joint academic appointment as the Foundation Director of the International Centre for Future Health Systems at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia and as Professor of Global Primary Care and Future Health Systems at the Nuffield Department of Primary Care Health Sciences at the University of Oxford. He is a past President of both the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners and the World Organization of Family Doctors.



Olga Kozlova

Director of Innovation and Engagement, University of Oxford

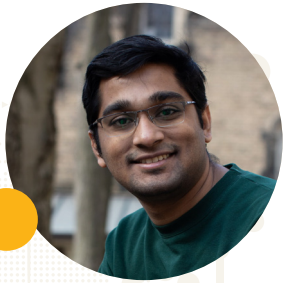
Dr Olga Kozlova FRSE is Director of Innovation and Engagement at the University of Oxford. With a career spanning technology commercialisation, investment, start-up creation and national economic development, she is one of the UK's leading experts in building the conditions for innovation to flourish. She founded Converge, Scotland's national entrepreneurship programme and has held senior leadership roles across two research-intensive universities. As a board member of the James Hutton Institute, she chairs its Scientific Excellence and Impact Subcommittee, is advisor to the Photonics & Quantum Innovation Accelerator and a member of NatWest Mid-Market Council. She operates at the interface of science, industry and policy. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and an active mentor and board advisor for technology companies.



Rebecca Lewis

Co-founder, Newson Clinic and Balance App

Dr Rebecca Lewis is a women's hormone specialist and co-founder and director of Newson Clinic, Balance App, Newson Health Research & Newson Education which she helped establish with Dr Louise Newson in 2018. She is passionate about transforming women's lives through evidence-based care, education and advocacy.



Suhas Mahesh

AI Program Scientist, Schmidt Sciences

Suhas Mahesh currently leads work on AI for Science at Eric Schmidt's Schmidt Sciences. A physicist by training, Suhas has extensive experience in accelerated materials discovery for catalysts, solar cells and LEDs. He holds a doctorate in physics from the University of Oxford, where his research on semiconductor phase instabilities received a thesis award. Prior to joining Schmidt Sciences, Suhas worked at the University of Toronto and the Acceleration Consortium, leading the development of self-driving laboratories that integrate machine learning and hardware automation. He has also worked with industry leaders such as Meta, Google, LG and Sony. Outside of his scientific work, Suhas moonlights as an expert on Sanskrit and his recent book was shortlisted for the American Literary Translators Association's National Translation Award. For more, please see suhasmahesh.com.



Oleksandra Matviichuk

Head, Center for Civil Liberties

Oleksandra Matviichuk is a human rights lawyer, head of the Center for Civil Liberties that works to defend freedom and human dignity in Ukraine and the OSCE region. She has experience in creating horizontal structures for massive involvement of people in human rights activities against attacks on rights and freedoms, as well as a multi-year practice of documenting violations during armed conflict. She is the author of a number of reports to various UN bodies, the Council of Europe, the European Union, the OSCE and the International Criminal Court.

After the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion, Matviichuk together with other partners created the 'Tribunal for Putin' initiative in order to document international crimes under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court in all regions of Ukraine, including the occupied territories.

In 2016, she received the Democracy Defender Award for "Exclusive Contribution to Promoting Democracy and Human Rights" from OSCE. In 2017, she became the first woman to participate in the Ukrainian Emerging Leaders Program of Stanford University. In 2022, Oleksandra Matviichuk was awarded with the Right Livelihood Award, the Sakharov Prize from the European Parliament and recognized as one of the top 25 most influential women in the world by the Financial Times. In 2022, she received the Nobel Peace Prize for the work of her organization the Center for Civil Liberties. In 2025, she received the Dutch Auschwitz Award. In 2026, she was named an Honourable Member of European Order of Merit by European Parliament, an honor recognizing her significant contribution to European integration and the protection of European values.



Judith Merkies

Policy Coordinator, LONELY-EU

Judith Merkies has a habit of being right too early. She raised loneliness as a European policy issue in 2010, when it was dismissed as outside EU competence and has spent the years since moving it from the margins to the centre of the policy conversation. She is completing a PhD on why organisations exclude beauty from their decision-making. The underlying question is the same: what do institutions fail to see until it becomes impossible to ignore? Today, she leads the policy work of LONELY-EU, a Horizon Europe consortium addressing loneliness and social isolation across EU Member States, based at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. A former Member of the European Parliament and international lawyer, she holds Dutch, Hungarian and Canadian nationality and works in five languages.



Abhilash Mishra

Founder & Chief Science Officer, Equitech Futures

Abhilash Mishra is a scientist, entrepreneur and educator working on problems at the intersection of technology and global challenges. Abhilash is the Founder and Chief Science Officer of Equitech Futures, a talent network and applied research lab dedicated to technology for social impact. Abhilash also holds an appointment at the University of Chicago, where he is the founding director of the Xu Initiative on Technology and Public Policy. His current research is focused on understanding the potential of emerging technologies in solving global challenges and associated risks. Abhilash is trained as a physicist and holds a PhD from Caltech and an MPhys from the University of Oxford. He received the Rhodes Scholarship in 2008, the Clinton Global Initiative University Distinguished Alumni Award, the KVPY Fellowship from the Government of India and the Goldman Sachs Global Leader Award.



Tom Monahan

Vice Chairman of the Board & Chief Executive Officer, Heidrick & Struggles

Tom Monahan is Vice Chairman of the Board and CEO of Heidrick & Struggles, the global leadership advisory firm that has been at the center of the most consequential leadership decisions companies make for more than seven decades. Before joining Heidrick, Tom was President and CEO of DeVry University, where he still serves as Board Vice Chair and Compensation Committee Chair and Executive Chair of ProKarma, a digital platform and service pioneer in the Carlyle portfolio. Tom is also a board member of TransUnion (NYSE: TRU) and chair of its Compensation Committee and a trustee of the Johns Hopkins Health System and the Meridian International Center.



Helen O'Neill

CEO & Founder, Hertility and Associate Professor in Reproductive and Molecular Genetics, UCL

Dr Helen O'Neill is Associate Professor of Reproductive and Molecular Genetics in the Department of Maternal and Fetal Medicine at the UCL Institute for Women's Health, where she researches early human development and teaches medical and postgraduate students. She holds a PhD in Stem Cell Biology and Developmental Genetics and an MSc in Prenatal Genetics and Fetal Medicine. She is also Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Hertility Health, a women's health diagnostics company combining clinical care, artificial intelligence and large-scale data to improve reproductive and hormonal healthcare. Through Hertility, she has built one of the world's largest multimodal women's health datasets and leads the development of GYN-AI™, a clinical decision-support platform enabling earlier, more accurate diagnosis for over 18 conditions. A founding member of the RCOG Genomics Taskforce, Helen is a TEDx speaker and media commentator. Hertility was given the 2026 World Economic Forum Technology Pioneers Prize.



Anil Padia

Founder & Creative Director, Yoshita 1967

Anil Padia is the Founder and Creative Director of Yoshita 1967, a fashion house operating between Nairobi, Paris and India. Born and raised in Kenya to a family of Indian origin, he studied fashion in Paris and worked with several international fashion houses. In 2021, he founded Yoshita 1967, a Nairobi creative and production studio built around specialised handmade techniques and a growing network of women artisans. His work explores cultural identity, craftsmanship and contemporary design, placing human skill, creativity and community at the centre of production. In 2026, Yoshita 1967 became the first East African brand to reach the LVMH Prize finals and won the LVMH Savoir Faire Prize.



Michael Sandel

Anne T. and Robert M. Bass Professor of Government, Harvard University

Professor Michael Sandel teaches political philosophy at Harvard University. His books on justice, democracy, ethics, markets and the common good have been translated into over thirty languages. He has been described as a 'rock star moralist' and 'the world's most influential living philosopher' and recently won the Berggruen Prize, the world's most prestigious prize for philosophy. Sandel's books address the hardest moral and civic questions of our time. 'The Tyranny of Merit: Can We Find the Common Good?' seeks a way beyond polarized politics and a new edition of his classic Democracy's Discontent has been called 'essential—and ultimately hopeful—reading for all those who wonder if our democratic experiment will survive in the twenty-first century'. Sandel has delivered Oxford's Tanner Lectures and the BBC's Reith Lectures and served on the U.S. President's Council on Bioethics.



Philip Sheppard

Composer, Producer & Cellist

Philip Sheppard is a composer, producer and cellist. He has soundtracked more than 80 films, stage works and video games and served as musical director for the closing ceremony of the Beijing Olympics. His work in movies and interactive media has earned him numerous accolades. He was made a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Music for lifetime achievement and is a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (the Oscars). He has written and performed with an extraordinary range of artists, from David Bowie and Scott Walker to Queens of the Stone Age, Sia, Pretty Lights, GRiZ, Jarvis Cocker, Suzanne Vega, UNKLE and Odesza. He is best known for his pioneering live-looping technique, multitracking cello lines in real time to build entire orchestral textures from a single instrument.



Andriy Shevchenko

Former Ambassador of Ukraine to Canada

Andriy Shevchenko is a Ukrainian public policy leader. He co-founded 5 Kanal, Ukraine's first 24/7 news channel and worked with leading media outlets, including 1+1 and Voice of America. He served as a Member of Parliament from 2006 to 2014 and was Ukraine's Ambassador to Canada and ICAO from 2015 to 2021. Following Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, he co-founded Media Center Ukraine to support international journalists covering the war. In 2023, he served as Ukraine's Deputy Minister of Defence. He currently serves as Managing Director Ukraine at Helsing, a military AI company and Senior Advisor to the Ukrainian World Congress.



Ida Tin

Co-founder, Clue

Ida Tin leads a €40m pan-European initiative by SPRIND (the German federal agency of breakthrough innovation), on biosensors for continuous hormone monitoring in women. She co-founded, and served a decade as CEO and later as chairwoman of Clue, the most trusted female health app with over ten million users in 190+ countries. She also coined the term 'Femtech' in 2016, defining a sector projected to exceed a trillion dollars by 2040. Ida is currently working on a book about the rise of Femtech and the story of building Clue. Ida, born in Denmark, grew up travelling the world on motorcycles as a child and later on her own and has published the book 'Directress' about her two-year motorcycle journey in the US deserts. She lives in Berlin with her two teenagers and American husband.



Helen Zhang

Director of Research & Technical Projects, Office of Eric Schmidt and Co-founder, Intrigue Media

Helen leads venture initiatives in AI, frontier tech and global affairs in the Office of Eric Schmidt. She currently serves there as the Deputy Chief of Staff, Director of Research and Technical Projects and Head of Strategy and Operations. Helen also co-founded and scaled Intrigue Media, which produces expert but irreverent briefings on geopolitics, tech and business with over 160K subscribers globally. Helen is a Fulbright Scholar and MPA graduate from the Harvard Kennedy School, an ex-Googler, diplomat, interpreter, attorney, board advisor and public speaker.

Kevin Xu Innovation Challenge

"Keeping humanity in the loop" means more than preserving a formal role for human oversight. It means designing systems that expand human judgement, invite curiosity, support creativity, strengthen cooperation and make room for care, responsibility and shared understanding. Our judges will be distributing the prize money under two categories:

1. **Non-profit track:** for solutions aimed at equitable social benefit, governance, education, sustainability, or community empowerment that will require philanthropy
2. **Commercial track:** for market-driven solutions that demonstrate both business potential and social responsibility

Panel of judges



Miruna-Ioana Girtu
Director, Heritage Holdings



Olga Kozlova
Director of Innovation and Engagement, University of Oxford



Helen Zhang
Director of Research & Technical Projects, Office of Eric Schmidt and Co-founder, Intrigue Media

Five teams from across the Rhodes network have been selected to pitch their projects to our panel of judges and the audience, who will have the opportunity to have their say via our event app.

TrialSage
Daliso Zuze
AI is unlocking faster discovery of more therapies than ever before, but the clinical trial itself remains the bottleneck standing between those discoveries and the patients who need them. TrialSage removes that bottleneck by making trials more efficient, safer and easier to run in compliance with evolving regulatory expectations.

Dignity in Difference
Hameeda Syed
Across Nepal, India and Sri Lanka, civil society leaders and democracy defenders tell us they are tired of engaging with people outside their political circles and often unsure how to bridge those divides. Together for Tomorrow is a coaching platform that gives civil society leaders a space to practise difficult political conversations. It draws on decades of research in neuroscience and behavioural science on identity, threat perception, empathy and social trust.

Selv
Laura Wegner
Selv is a personal health AI designed to help people understand what actually improves their health over time. Selv brings health information signals together into a longitudinal model of the individual. The long-term goal is to make healthcare more proactive and individualized by giving people a system that learns with them throughout their lives.

Auxo Health
Shaurya Sharma and Atreya Manaswi
Auxo Health is building the agent-native intelligence system for independent musculoskeletal clinics, giving every administrative employee 10x the manpower across claims, denials, intake and prior authorization. We are addressing the machine-vs-human arms race in healthcare administration by using AI to handle repetitive complexity while keeping staff in control of consequential decisions.

Lend a Hand
Yonatan Ayenew and Melikte Weldetensaye
Lend a Hand is an AI-enabled free platform that connects people with disabilities to trained volunteers for the moments that matter: someone to accompany a wheelchair user to the hospital, a reader for a blind student's exam, a ride to an interview. Users post what they need, when and where and AI-powered matching finds a nearby volunteer with the right skills. Every volunteer is background-checked and trained to support, not take over and both sides rate every task.

Useful Information

NAME BADGES
Please wear your name badge at all times. Staff members and volunteers can be identified by the label on their badge.

Wi-Fi
There is public access Wi-Fi available at the venue. The password is Rhodesw1f1! for the Rhodes Guest network.

CATERING
Lunch and refreshments will be provided at Rhodes House. If you have told us about a dietary requirement and don't see a suitable option at a meal, please speak to a member of the catering team, who will provide an alternative. If you hold a dinner ticket and have a dietary wristband, please wear it throughout the evening.

PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEO
A photographer and videographer will be present throughout the day and all sessions will be streamed for our online audience. Most sessions will also be recorded for viewing after the event.

SOCIAL MEDIA
We encourage you to join the conversation on social media using the hashtag #TechAndSociety2026

The Rhodes Trust can be found on LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook and Bluesky.

FOLLOW THE CONVERSATION: #TECHANDSOCIETY2026

FOLLOW THE RHODES TRUST ON SOCIAL MEDIA:

Sponsor

Kevin Xu Initiative

This particular event was made possible through the generous support of our donor, Kevin Xu as part of the Kevin Xu Initiative on Technology and Society at the Rhodes Trust.

Partners

Equitech Futures

Equitech Futures is a digital campus for emerging innovators, from anywhere in the world, who want to use science and technology to tackle societal challenges.

info@equitechfutures.com

Oxford Saïd Entrepreneurship Centre

This year, the Rhodes Trust has repeated our partnership with the Saïd Business School and the Oxford Saïd Entrepreneurship Forum (OSEF). This collaboration has brought together leading minds from both events to foster a richer exchange of ideas and innovations.

entrepreneurship@sbs.ox.ac.uk

RHODES TRUST NETWORK FOR GOOD

The Rhodes Trust Network for Good is a community which brings together extraordinary people across a collection of partner programmes. We are united by a shared belief that when compassionate, curious and courageous leaders connect across boundaries, they can create a better future for everyone.

www.rhodeshouse.ox.ac.uk/about/rhodes-trust-network-for-good

Special thanks to:

RHODES TRUST TEAM:
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ALUMNI ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS:
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(South Africa-at-Large & Balliol 1983)
Sarah Meyer
(Australia-at-Large & Linacre 2004)
Abhilash Mishra
(India & Merton 2008)
Demetra Pinsent
(Ontario & Balliol 1997)
Trisha Prabhu
(Illinois & Balliol 2022)
Stephanie Bryson Swartz
(California & St Catherine's 2012)

FORUM AMBASSADORS:
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