

What is The On Being Project?

It's a question we hear often.

The *On Being* show is the tip of an iceberg that's been evolving for nearly two decades — with new depth and velocity since 2016.

This small booklet makes the invisible aspects of our work more visible and describes the vision and strategic framework behind the chapter unfolding and the chapter to come.

Every crisis of our age runs through fault lines of human hearts and well-being — pain and fear and dreams and hope. Work once imagined as “soft” is urgently pragmatic. Calming fear. Expanding imaginations. Resourcing social courage and creativity. Opening the moral questions of humanity hospitably to the seeker, the atheist, and the devoutly religious. Attending to the wholeness of every person: the life of the mind, the truth of the body, and the wild mystery of the human spirit.

This is what we do. Through content, experiences and practical tools, The On Being Project tends the human change that makes social transformation possible.

Alongside the destructive narrative of our time that gets all the coverage, we see new realities emerging. The humans who gather around On Being are part of this generative narrative of our time. They are healers and creatives and changemakers across disciplines and class and place. At human pace, they are stitching relationship across rupture. In generational time, they are enlivening the world that they can see and touch.

They include:

Community organizers and poets

 Theologians and scientists

Librarians and physicians

 Clergy and social workers

 Designers and politicians

Farmers and volunteers

Serving military and incarcerated citizens

 Taxi drivers and police officers

Artists and philanthropists

“Nones” and Nuns

 Parents and physical therapists

Activists and contemplatives

First responders and musicians

 Entrepreneurs and leaders of
businesses, NGOs, non-profits, religious
communities, neighborhood
associations, school districts, cities

 Engineers and yoga teachers

 Learners and teachers in grade
schools, high schools, seminaries,
community colleges, universities,
medical schools

In a tender, tumultuous global moment,
we are growing to nourish, embolden,
and accompany them more deeply.

Our intention is to offer hope, beauty, and courage in everything we make — whether for an hour, a lifetime, or across generations.

We elevate voices of wisdom and models of wise thinking, speaking, and living.

We nurture virtues that make new realities and new relationships possible — including generous conversation, embodied presence, and sustained relationship across backgrounds and lived experience.

We value questions and poetry that open new possibility.

We accompany work of activism and justice by equipping for reflection, resilience, and repair.

We understand love as the most reliably transformative muscle of human wholeness, and we investigate the workings of love as public practice.

We envision a world that is more fluent in its own humanity — and thus able to rise to the great challenges and promise of this century.

Our Mission

Pursuing deep thinking
and moral imagination,
social courage and joy,
to renew inner life, outer
life, and life together.

Our story.

The *On Being* show and podcast was created by Krista Tippett inside a legacy media organization (American Public Media) in 2003.

It began with a controversial idea for a public radio conversation, *Speaking of Faith*, that would treat the religious and spiritual aspects of life as seriously as we treat politics and economics. *On Being*, as it has evolved, takes up the great questions of meaning in 21st-century lives and at the intersection of spiritual inquiry, science, social healing, and the arts. What does it mean to be human, how do we want to live, and who will we be to each other?

The show launched on two public radio stations. Even as it grew year over year, it remained fairly hidden on the dial, consigned, as the *New York Times* wrote, to the “God ghetto” timeslot of Sunday mornings. When podcasting came along, *On Being* took its place among leading podcasts.

People tell us every day that they have “discovered” *On Being*, and not by buzz, but by passage from one human being

to another — sometimes as a lifeline, often across generations. The impact of this content has always felt less like that of an interview show and more like that of a social enterprise (with a radio show at its heart).

A few years in, audience research began to document what we had been anecdotally tracing and have continued to see: Our media space gathers people together across boundaries of age, race, geography, politics, and religion — at the same time that these boundaries have been calcifying in the culture at large.

We've come to understand our work as a “media and public life initiative.” The Civil Conversations Project was the first expression of this, beginning in 2011. It has become an ongoing, ever-evolving offering of conversations and public events that is woven throughout our core body of work.

In 2013, Krista and a team of three producers took *On Being* and The Civil Conversations Project into organizational and production independence.

Growth and Reach

In the past three years, we developed the cultural momentum and organizational infrastructure to begin to scale to the next level. Scaling, for us, is about going deeper and not just bigger.

Our staff has grown to represent a beautiful cross-section of talent and human identity. Liliana Maria Percy Ruiz, one of the original four founders in 2013, leads On Being Studios. Erinn Farrell is COO. Lucas Johnson is building out our next stage social healing capacities and Impact Lab. As head of Community and Design, Serri Graslie is innovating a mission-centric design approach in all the places we communicate to our audiences and the world.

A cross-organizational creative team drove a massive re-envisioning of onbeing.org that we launched in early 2019. This “Future Project,” as we called it, turned our 15-year archive into a hospitable, living resource — part gathering space, part anti-bubble. It is a template and foundation for content, digital innovation and community-building to come.

Numbers don't measure everything that matters, but we have numbers we're proud of.

What started on two public radio stations is now heard on 400 across the U.S.

We've been honored with a Peabody and other awards (Gracie, Gabriel, Wilbur, Webbys and more).

In 2014, at the White House, President Obama awarded Krista the National Humanities Medal for "thoughtfully delving into the mysteries of human existence. On the air and in print, Ms. Tippett invites people of every background to join her conversations about faith, ethics, and moral wisdom."

And, we're emboldened as *On Being* and The Civil Conversations Project are inspiring initiatives analog and digital, national and hyper-local, around the world.

We're honored by the countercultural array of organizations who use our work and seek our collaboration as a leader and convener of public conversations that matter.

“(Krista Tippett) has created, over decades, something rare in American life: spaces where people of different faiths, disciplines, and ideologies discuss divisive questions without becoming more divided, without losing sight of each other’s humanity.”

EZRA KLEIN

“The On Being Project is a joyful voice of hope in a world of noise. Generous in perspective and vital with positivity. Krista and her team bring rigor and freshness to their offerings. *On Being* allows me to ride the deeper, sometimes darker, currents of my being to a place where I can breathe free.”

COMMENT FROM FACEBOOK

“The On Being Project is a quiet force fostering thought and conversation among America’s various and intertwined publics.”

CLAUDIA RANKINE

“(T)hat it continues to push its own boundaries keeps this show in the avant garde.”

THE ATLANTIC

What we're making now — and next: Expanded Podcast Portfolio

Podcasting is a new fireside, where we sit with each other's voices and become part of each other's stories. All stories are not created equal, but some are life-giving and help us rise to our best humanity. We continue to innovate within and expand the reach of the *On Being* public radio show and podcast — and are simultaneously developing new audio offerings to meet people where they are and for how they long to be.

1. Because poetry rises up in human societies when official words fail us and we lose sight of how to find our way back to one another ...

A poetry podcast to start and end the week with Pádraig Ó Tuama. In production and launching in late 2019.

“Poetry offers the world something that’s small enough to carry close to your heart, and big enough to carry all of the ordinary things that can be encompassed in any one day.”

— Pádraig Ó Tuama, in the pilot episode

2. Because the universe of *On Being* listeners is fantastically cross-generational, and we take this up as a delight and a responsibility ...

A weekly series featuring, celebrating, and modeling cross-generational friendship and conversation. In development for 2020.

3. Because even though our listeners routinely give us the gift of hours of their time, they have continued to ask us to find a way to offer up the wisdom of *On Being* in a shorter form that's more shareable ...

Becoming Wise
Season 2 launched March 2019, and immediately rose to the top of Apple Podcast charts.

4. Because movies are an imagination-provoking medium that change lives and society, often pleurably. And because this a long-time dream of our fabulous producer Liliana Maria, who hosts it ...

This Movie Changed Me
Season 2 launching September
2019

5. Because our audience has asked for Krista to sometimes move to the other side of the microphone and offer her thoughts on questions alive in the culture and our listeners ...

Living the Questions — an occasional extra in the *On Being* podcast feed.

Episode 1: How can we be present to what's happening in the world without giving in to despair and hopelessness?

Episode 2: How can we help young people feel like they have a voice in the world?

Episode 3: What is the value of boredom in our lives?

Episode 4: How can we embrace vulnerability in ourselves and in the culture?

Episode 5: Can conversation make any difference at a moment like this?

Episode 6: "What does civility actually mean, and is it enough?"

What we're making now — and next: Digital Community, Design, and Innovation

Across digital and social media platforms, our content strategy is to offer daily gifts of wisdom, reflection, and light. We do this through a lens of “community and design”: we create useful, beautiful things that extend the reach and impact of what we make, connect our audiences to each other, and deepen their agency in the world.

This begins with the look and feel of everything On Being. Our wonderful art direction team is painting a new visual identity with typography, illustration, and photography, working with a diverse array of artists and subjects.

And after years of focus on long-form audio content, talented new designers and editors across our team are showing us how to pair sound with pictures and create shorter-form content that does not sacrifice depth, but creates new circles of welcome and sharability for existing and emerging audiences.

The year-long process of reconfiguring the material on onbeing.org into

something useful and hospitable gave us a template we will now adapt for other platforms, where modern humans are living and relating.

These include *Starting Points* — curated collections of audio, essays, and poetry to meet a particular curiosity or the kind of day someone is having.

e.g. “Dialogue, Modeled”

“Joy Is a Human Birthright”

“For the Exhausted and Overwhelmed”

And there are *Libraries*, designed for browsing and diving deep.

e.g. “Brain & Neuroscience”

“Death and Dying”

“Contemplation and Prayer”

What we're making now — and next: Introducing MSHEM (aka our “Ministry of Social Healing and Extraordinary Magic”¹ — this is placeholder language, but it pleases us)

The vitality of The Civil Conversations Project is calling us to build out a new capacity for applied, extended public life work and social healing. In December 2018, Lucas Johnson joined us to lead and expand this world of new initiative within our project but focused outward, on the beautiful, hurting world.

Lucas was previously the global coordinator of the 100-year-old International Fellowship of Reconciliation. He has been mentored by Civil Rights elders, especially Dorothy Cotton and the late Vincent Harding, who first introduced him to us. He possesses the rare combination of a millennial view of life and change with a long sense of history and global experience as a teacher, mediator, and pastor in settings of deep conflict.

¹ We use the word *magic* as a nod to the fact that social healing and reconciliation come when we call forth something in ourselves that seems extraordinary and almost other-worldly in a world careening from the worst of human deeds.

In design and development for 2019 are 2–3 pilot projects for multi-year accompaniment of communities where social ferment is already taking hold, below the radar of fracture. At least one of these projects will be in the Deep South, reaching into rural and urban communities. We will identify and build with communities and initiatives who desire and are ready to make use of resourcing, deepening, and belonging in a larger web of social repair.

Our strategies will be oriented toward the long-term creation of resilient relationships across differences, and towards wholeness in lives and communities. The best community organizers know that relationships provide the deepest impetus for social change. But relationship is hard to scale. Our work is rooted in a media project whose audience is a deeply invested community, giving us the potential to bring the impact of relationships to scale. We believe that this human aspect of culture shift is an indispensable foundation if the best policy outcomes are to be made possible. By 2020, we will articulate a national strategy.

“When it comes to cultural change, we excessively fixate on the critical mass and underestimate the catalytic quality of the improbable few. The ‘critical yeast’ — small, unlikely combinations of persistent people and partnerships committed to a new quality of relationship — dwell before and behind every instance of social change that truly shifts what is possible and transformative across generations.

On a regular basis I get notes from the most unexpected places — Kazakhstan, Wichita, Uganda, Nepal, Washington, D.C. — about how the conversations of *On Being* have touched and lifted forward a sense of connection. *On Being* stirs hearts and imagination, the two indispensable sources of courage and creativity that nurture persistent patience and improbable power to transform and to heal.”

JOHN PAUL LEDERACH

Peacebuilder (Northern Ireland, Nepal, Colombia, U.S.) and Haikuist

What we're making now — and next: Gatherings

One counterintuitive result of our world of digital connection is that meaningful digital connection inspires a yearning to meet each other and take it farther in the old-fashioned flesh and blood. Beginning in 2020, we will host 2–3 gatherings each year. They will amplify all the learning and initiatives described above, and create experiences for further listening, community building, and cross-pollination. Some will be large. Some will be small. They will be woven throughout our strategies and work.

The inaugural On Being Gathering took place amid the redwoods of 1440 Multiversity in Scotts Valley, California, in February 2018. It was something we had long desired to create and that our listening community had long asked for (we had 4,000+ applicants for 350 spaces). We were the first group to fill the entire 1440 space for three days of poetry, conversation, and community building. It was a remarkable experience, and the deep thinking, hospitality of presence, and friendships engendered there continue to ripple through lives and communities.

And as we look down the road, we are also dreaming and shaping a vision of physical spaces located in the heart of cities, experiential and restorative places for individuals and groups:

On Being New York
On Being San Francisco
On Being Montgomery

My experience was quite unlike any other convening I've been to. In one place, there was a rich, vibrant, and wholly natural cross-section of humanity — of different persuasions, backgrounds, religious and spiritual affiliations, professions, origins, geography.”

KEITH YAMASHITA, FOUNDER SYPARTNERS

“In my role as a creative leader, I am constantly inspiring others and have no time to weave together the things that inspire me. *On Being* does this for me. I find the curation of people and topics to be unlike any other. *On Being* gives me critical food for thought each week that I cannot find anywhere else.”

IVY ROSS, VP OF GOOGLE HARDWARE DESIGN
(AND GATHERING PARTICIPANT)

What we're holding close: Cultural Imperatives

In everything we do, we are attending to and integrating a web of questions and longings alive in our audience and in the world — mergers of ancient human needs and contemporary callings.

Poetry. Poetry has moved to the heart of what we offer on the radio and in podcasts, in digital spaces, and in gatherings. We have come organically into creative kinship and collaboration with poets and organizations from the Academy of American Poets to the Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Foundation. In April, 2019, City Silence — the organization behind “Mindful Music Moments” — [broadcast daily poetry from *On Being's* archive in elementary and middle schools across the U.S.](#) Poetry is woven throughout the new onbeing.org experience, and we will deepen that presence with more applications in the next creative iteration.

A New Metric. The available approaches for measuring impact are insufficient where human transformation is in play. We are committed to being ambitiously creative and pragmatic in understanding

and amplifying the impact of what we do. This includes extending our reach. But we also want the ability to create feedback loops with the people and projects *On Being* touches so that we can continue to learn from them and factor this learning into our ongoing evolution. We want to connect more people to our content, but we also want to connect the creators of the generative narrative of our time to each other.

We have assembled a holistic, cross-sector team of experts to help us probe what it means to shift hearts and minds and social realities. They are leaders in neuroscience, data ecology, evolutionary biology, and community infrastructure software.

Humanizing our Lives with Technology.

The human condition is displayed at amplified scale on the Internet's digital canvas. And the matter of shaping our lives with technology to human purpose enters into just about every subject of interest to society these days and nearly every *On Being* episode. We're listening to the grappling our audience is doing — and the grappling we're doing ourselves. Since Krista spent three months in Silicon Valley as a Distinguished Visitor

at Stanford University's Haas Center for Public Service, we are newly in fruitful, exciting conversation with purpose-driven practitioners inside the tech industry. We're sharing what we know about the power of applying spiritual and social technologies in digital spaces. We're also in conversation with social media platforms toward helping them evolve best practices in creating human-centric, life-giving digital spaces.

Re-membering relationship across generations. In addition to a new podcast, we will find ways to nurture and model intentional accompaniment between the urgency in the wisdom of youth and the longer sense of time in the wisdom that comes with age. Robust eldering is a critical calling for our age, in which the healing work ahead is so vast, and the need for resilience so critical.

The On Being Impact Lab was an incubator for the How We Gather group from Harvard Divinity School in 2018-19. The Impact Lab will be part of "MSHEM" moving forward, and will support and accompany diverse cross-generational innovators.

“On Being’s programs and events nourish and embolden our communities to live and be together differently in the world. It is a treasure trove and a learning resource to many who identify as ‘elders-in-the-making,’ ‘upstart public theologians,’ or ‘chaplains by another name.’ For those on the fringes of religious institutions, or dancing in-between them, On Being provides doorways to spiritual traditions and elders in a way few others do, illuminating their power and relevancy to our lives, engaging in a dialogue rooted in the realities of our modern world, and elevating the voices and work of people we can admire and seek guidance from.”

SARAH JANE BRADLEY

Alt*Div and Open Masters
Nuns and Nones

“It’s hard to express how much it has meant to the world of poets and poetry that *On Being* has made this such a cornerstone of its work. No quest for meaning could be complete without the sometimes guidance of our poets, who take the material of the everyday and remind us just how much words matter. *On Being* ensures that they are heard.”

JEN BENKA

President and Executive Director
The Academy of American Poets

Placemaking. As we spend more of our lives in digital realms, the ground beneath our feet grows more meaningful — not less so. And we are reckoning with the history of the places we inhabit with a new grief and openness. Inspired by friends in Australia and Canada (and nascent energies in the U.S.), we undertook a Native land acknowledgement project for the *On Being* studios on Loring Park in Minneapolis. [The On Being Project is located on Dakota Land.](#)

The practice of acknowledgement will have a place in our public events, our podcasts, and on our website moving forward. We will continue to let it guide us to new discernment and practices.

Finally, within our growing and increasingly diverse organization, we are also committed to modeling what we transmit outward. Young leaders inside The On Being Project are leading our internal “placemaking” initiative to evolve our growing and increasingly diverse organization beyond diversity, equity, and tolerance, and into the complex and life-giving work of integrity and wholeness.

We believe that collaborative creativity and discovery will be a key to living into the generative possibilities of this moment — not just in the halls of the academy or scientific laboratories, but in the everyday living laboratories of all of our vocations, our friendships, and our minds.

The On Being Project
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