



Silicon Valley Technocrats Intend To Settle The Moon

I would dare anyone to look at these moon-crazy Technocrats from Silicon Valley and China, and try to justify labeling them as Communists, Socialists or Marxists. It just doesn't fit. They are Technocrats! □ TN Editor

The moon is all the rage these days. [China wants](#) to send people there. So too does the United States and NASA. In fact, just about every country with a space program has some sort of lunar ambition that they hope will play out over the next few years.

Now, there's a new entrant in this new space race, a nonprofit organization called the Open Lunar Foundation. Based in San Francisco, it's a group made up of tech executives and engineers—many of them with former ties to NASA—who have serious ambitions to create a lunar settlement.

The driving ethos behind the foundation is to start a development that would not be beholden to a particular country or billionaire. Instead, as the group's name suggests, Open Lunar wants to create technology for exploring and living on the moon as a type of collaborative effort.

"Our highest ambition is catalyzing and enabling a peaceful and

cooperative lunar settlement,” said Chelsea Robinson, the director of policy and governance for Open Lunar. “At this time when there are so many commercial and government actors advancing their efforts on the moon, we are excited to demonstrate a civic approach to participation.”

Open Lunar began a few years ago as something of a thought exercise. A group of friends in Silicon Valley were taking stock of the dramatic improvements in aerospace technology along with the falling cost of rocket launches, thanks to companies like Elon Musk’s Space Exploration Technologies Corp. and [Peter Beck’s Rocket Lab](#). The friends came to the realization that it might soon be possible to create a small lunar settlement for about \$2 billion to \$3 billion. It’s a hefty sum, but a very achievable one in an era that abounds with wealthy space enthusiasts. And so, the friends decided to explore the idea of going to the moon in earnest.

“The picture that emerged out of those meetings was that you could create a permanent, economically self-sustaining presence on the moon that could be done for the single-digit billions,” said Steve Jurvetson, a venture capitalist, who provided the initial Open Lunar funding. “I got excited by that idea and the compelling nature of the people involved.”

Some of the most prominent members of the group include the astronaut Chris Hadfield, who has spent time on the International Space Station; Will Marshall and Robbie Schingler, co-founders of the satellite maker Planet Labs Inc.; Simon “Pete” Worden, the former director of NASA’s Ames Research Center; and Jurvetson, who has invested in both SpaceX and Planet Labs. Hadfield is listed as a director of Open Lunar in nonprofit filings, while the others are advisors to the foundation. These individuals, along with dozens of other people, have spent the last 18 months meeting in private to figure out what sort of early missions would make the most sense. Working ideas include smaller, cheaper missions to put various probes and robotic systems on the lunar surface rather than one, massive mission.

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It was Robinson, a longtime nonprofit organizer, and Jessy Kate Schingler, a software engineer who most recently worked at a rocket startup, that turned the brainstorming into a formal organization. Schingler took on the role of director of policy and governance. Now, the foundation’s small team has been hiring full-time hardware and software engineers for Open Lunar and putting the rest of the executive structure in place.

“Lunar activity is exploding,” Jessy Kate Schingler said. “There are governments and companies intensely focused on going, but there is no third pillar representing the possibility of doing things differently. If we don’t roll up our sleeves and get involved, then by definition the future of human settlement in space will reflect the status quo of those currently in power. To see things done differently on the moon, we had to start experimenting now.”

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