

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You're listening to Work in Progress. I'm Ramona Schindelheim, editor-in-chief of WorkingNation. Work in Progress explores the rapidly changing workplace through conversations with innovators, educators, and decision-makers; people with solutions to today's workforce challenges.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I'm pleased today to be joined by Dr. Angela Jackson of New Profit. She's one of the managing partners. Angela, thank you so much for being with us.

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

Ramona, thank you for having us, especially on this exciting day, where we're finally announcing the 15 solutions for the Future of Work Grand Challenge.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I am so glad we could talk about this today, because we've talked about this in the past, as you were taking in the applications for this. So for those in the audience who don't know what the Grand Challenge is, why don't you tell us kind of broadly what it is? And then we can talk about who's some of the people that have been selected.

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

The Future of Work Grand Challenge is partnered by New Profit in partnership with XPRIZE Foundation, MIT Solve and JFF. And what we're doing is we're giving finalists access to \$6 million in funding to implement solutions that will rapidly re-skill 25,000 workers into higher wage jobs and equip influential workforce boards with vetted tools to help get Americans back to work.

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

And why this is so important is that many times in philanthropy, we actually give grants based on ideas. These grants are going to be given based on outcomes. So it's really going to be down to how many people were trained and how many people were placed in jobs with living wages.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

What were you looking for as you were looking for the organizations, the groups to go forward in this competition?

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

So even before COVID, we had been working on this initiative for two years. And really what we centered it around were working adults, busy people who are in need of upskilling, but who can't take the opportunity cost to take off a year or go back to get a four year degree. So we know going into this, that we were looking for accelerated learning programs and also programs that would allow a learner or a worker to earn while they learn.

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

We know that people, we think a lot about the 56 million US residents who are working minimum wage jobs, less than living wage jobs, that they need opportunities to skill up in a fashion that works for their

complex and busy lives. And so we really wanted these entrepreneurs to be willing to center the experience of these learners, and to create solutions that will work alongside their busy lives.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

We talk a lot about trying to upskill for jobs now, actually and jobs of the future. Are each of the programs that are in your rapid re-skilling, are they earn as you learn?

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

Absolutely. And the way that thinking about it, there's two things. One is like you said, Ramona, the future of work has become the present of work, right? So a lot of things that we thought were going to happen, happened in COVID. Industries went away that we thought were recession-proof.

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

And so what we've tried to do with all of these trainings, is that one is, they're offered free of charge to the job seekers. And we're asking of the entrepreneurs to train for jobs that will not be impacted in the future of work. So thinking in the next three to five years and opportunities where people can leave the short term training and actually get a job with a living wage.

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

And so those are the parameters that we looked at, and we want to make sure that these trainings were geared towards people who don't have a bachelor's degree and have other barriers to employment.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

There are 15 different organizations that will be part of the solution.

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

They're a combination of rapid re-skilling and MIT Solve. And so we're looking at the 15 solutions as a cohort that we're validating at workforce boards. They just came to us from different challenges. There's a couple that I'm just really excited about.

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

The first is this a company that's called ChargerHelp. And what's so interesting about that one is that they are training people to be technicians and to service electric car charging stations. What's so interesting to me about that idea is one is, who knew that that was a job? I didn't. And two, who knew that you could do that type of job and not have a bachelor's degree?

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

So in a 16 week program, they're able to train someone to do this job and they can go and make upwards of \$150 an hour. But the company itself ChargerHelp actually pays their employees up to \$50 an hour, but they're giving them this training that has a great market potential. And so that's one example.

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

Another example that we're really excited about is Generations USA. They're a national nonprofit, and they're actually international in many ways. But they are allowing people to on the job, while they're learning a new trade. And they do everything from building trades, to manufacturing, to data, to technology.

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

While they're getting the technical training, they're also giving them the wraparound supports of that professional training and what some might call soft skills, but are really important professional skills, if you're going to actually obtain a job. They're getting paid while they do it, they're tuning to like the wraparound supports a worker might need, so in terms of transportation and childcare. And they are promised a job on the other end of it.

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

And so as a learner, when you're thinking about that opportunity cost of taking 16 weeks or three months off to learn, you're getting some upside in the beginning, and also you've got this guarantee on the back end.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

And I also see Angela that The Last Mile is one of the non-profits that you're also funding through this. That's an organization that WorkingNation is very familiar with. We've actually done stories on it.

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

Yeah, absolutely. What we love about Last Mile is that they're taking a look at technology and coding from an equity lens. So the fact that they are working with people who are currently incarcerated to teach them this new skill, that could have value on the open marketplace, when these people were incarcerated leave the system, that's doing two things.

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

One is, it's allowing a person to really reenter society as a contributing member. The second thing that they're helping to do, is reducing the rate of recidivism, which is really important to us as a country. And it shows that if a person who has been incarcerated is able to actually find meaningful employment, that they're less likely by multiples to commit another crime.

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

And we know that many people who are getting out of the juvenile and the justice system, et cetera, that they have not been exposed to technology, that they've had limited access to computers. And so when we talk about the future of work, if they've been incarcerated for 5 or even 10 years, they need to have information about what opportunities exist for them and opportunities to actually train for them.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

A lot of the organizations that you have chosen, they are jobs of the future, they're growing fields like ChargerHelp, which sounds like a fantastic forward-looking program. I also noticed there's an Arts2work here. What kind of program is that?

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

Well, Arts2work is interesting, because what they are doing is allowing people to think about how they can make art. If they have a passion for art, how they can make a living doing it. And if you look at a lot of training programs, you'll see a lot, you'll hear a lot of coding boot camps, or you may hear about apprenticeships and the manufacturing trades.

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

But when we think about the 53 million Americans who are not earning a living wage, that means that everyone's not going to be interested in coding. Everyone might not want an apprenticeship for a building trade. And so how do we really honor job seekers and their diverse interests? And knowing that art truly is a pathway, but again, maybe these job seekers for a variety of reasons, may have not known that that was open to them.

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

And so what we tried to do when we were picking these 15 solutions, was to think about the wide swath and diversity among job seekers and that having different proof of concepts, where people can work in different sectors and maybe some that they never thought about to earn a living wage.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I also noticed that there are a couple of the finalists qualified teams that are from out of the country; from India, from Australia, Ireland. What kind of programs are these and what are you hoping to achieve by picking them?

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

One of the first programs that is based here in the US, Generations USA, that's on our list, it actually started in South Africa and it was a program called Harambee and it was replicated here in the states. And so there were a lot of people around the world who are really trying to solve for the similar problem that we're solving for here in the states. How do you train people who are experiencing low wages at scale for opportunities for them to earn a more living wage, a more life sustaining wage?

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

And so in opening this challenge up to a global audience and saying, "We want ideas from around the world, your best thinking. But we're going to make sure that you actually validate it in a US context," we didn't want to put any boundaries on where that good idea could come from. And so what we've seen is that in some of the emerging markets, that you're seeing more ingenuity around the trainings themselves. You also see more ecosystem plays, right?

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

Because unfortunately, our workforce system here in the US is in need of some modernization. And so you have other countries like New Zealand, who are thinking about workforce development and apprenticeship in very different ways. Thus, they've created models based on those systems that are already working at scale, that could easily be translated to the US context.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

So how do you connect those 15 solutions to the people who need the training and the work?

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

So a couple of things. One is that we did a sort of a dating and matchmaking with the solution teams and the workforce boards. We had representatives from boards who helped us actually select these 15 and we had workers who were on the judging panel that helped us select these 15 in general.

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

What we did from there is working with IBM, we did a design matchmaking process, by which the entrepreneurs and the boards got to meet each other, to have a deeper understanding of one, the solutions and also just the local context, which is important. And then the boards were able to rank which ones they thought would have the most relevance for their particular communities.

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

And we're really excited about this process, because it wasn't one where we were like, "Okay, Hartford, Connecticut, these are the two solutions that you're given." It was one by which the boards were able to say, for example, my ChargerHelp. We have a growing market right here with electric cars. This is something from the government, federal and state, that's a priority to get more electric vehicles on the road, which means that we're going to need more technicians to do that.

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

And so that's how we're able to pair them to say, "Okay, what is the need in that local community? And what is the solution out there that's solving for that need?"

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Part of your solutions here are these piloted workforce boards that you're talking about, correct?

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

That's exactly it.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

And where are those located?

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

We did this, and Ramona, you'll probably appreciate this. When we created this challenge, we wanted to build a proof of concept that you can curate accelerated learning programs centered on worker voice and the needs of workers, like I mentioned, the need for them to earn and learn and to do kind of short burst programs.

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

And so what we did in that with these boards is we also had an understanding that each market might be different. So we wanted to select six very different communities so that we can actually show how this accelerated learning program and approach could work among diverse regions. So we selected Hartford, Connecticut; Wister, Massachusetts; Hampton Roads, Virginia; West Michigan; Dallas, Texas and San Diego, California.

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

And so what we wanted to show through having a diverse context and boards, was what solutions work for which job seekers under which context. And so what works in an urban environment, versus more of a suburban, which works better for more of the middle of the United States versus the coast.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

That is true. Everything is local. We always talk about the solutions are local. The needs of an employer are local. The training is local. So I think that is a fantastic wide swath of the country that you're looking at right there.

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

Ramona, I'd also share, we had a great partner in MC. That gave us real time data analytics. So when we knew those six communities, we could also look at who was actually hiring today in Hartford, Connecticut? What are the sectors? And which are the job listings today that don't require a bachelor's degree, but are for positions that are what we call future proof that aren't estimated to be automated in the next three to five years?

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

So we're able to give that information to the entrepreneurs and innovators too, so they could really think deeply about how their solution could really be a fit in these particular communities.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

What is the next step for these solutions? Is there a timeframe that you're working with them in?

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

Absolutely. So we're going to start the validation period at the beginning of April. And then over the next six months, each solution will be tasked with identifying 500 job seekers that they can train and place in these living wage jobs.

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

And we put some barriers around it. We know that there's a lot of people who are unemployed in this moment, but we really wanted to center our efforts, this philanthropic efforts, on the people who have the most barriers to employment. So the other parameter that we put in is that the job seeker couldn't have made a living wage last year. And two, that they need to have other barriers to employment, and that they don't have a bachelor's degree. Because it's our fundamental belief that if we can solve the equation for this group, that it will benefit everyone, whether you have a degree or not.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

What is the success, they're going to identify 500 people? Are they going to train them and over the course of that same period?

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

Yep. So the goal is that once they've identified the 500 who are interested in their training, they will do the training and that training needs to happen over 120 days. And then there'll be another 120 days where they will get the wraparound supports and look at job placement.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

At the end of that 240 days, what do you envision? What would you like the next step to be?

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

So after that first phase, we'll go into this exponential. So if we can prove that we've done it for 500, the next step is saying, "Can we do that for 5,000? Can we do that in a separate sector?" So they're just doing training in one sector, how can they expand their offering to show proof of concept that they can do this accelerated training in several different sectors?

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

And then really our North star is around policy change and recommendations. I think we all can agree that our workforce system is not working for the people who are at the margins. And so what we hope to offer from this challenge and what I like to say this experiment, is some practical recommendations, not only to the 538 plus workforce boards that are out there, in terms of a playbook on how they can metabolize technology and innovation, but also thinking about our federal government and state government. When they're looking at the reauthorization of WEOA and different workforce policies, that we can share what we learned based on this experiment, that was really laser focused, not only about training, but also attuning to placement in good jobs with living wages.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You sound very optimistic. Are you optimistic that we can make these changes?

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

I am very optimistic. And I'll tell you, if we can't make these changes in this moment, when we have historic unemployment rates, when the system has been exposed, in terms of who's essential workers and who's not, and who's earning a living wage and who's not, who's capable of having the luxury to shelter at home, and who's not able to afford it, then I say, when else could we do this? And I think there's a forcing mechanism because of that. You've got the appetite and you've got the willingness. And I've been really encouraged just by the group of partners that we've assembled.

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

We're excited to have WorkingNation as a partner. We're excited that Strada Education Network, Walmart.org are our lead investors, but we've got a dozen other investors, who've come together and put aside their individual agendas, to think about how can we work collectively to incentivize this type of accelerated learning that is centered on the people who are most marginalized and make it an outcomes based challenge.

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

So it's not good enough to train someone. I tell people that all day. No one goes to a training program just to be trained. The job seekers that we talk to, they're going to that training program so that they

can get a job and hopefully, a job with higher wages. And so we need to learn as a system, how we deliver on that promise.

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

And what makes me excited is that with this ecosystem effort, with workforce boards, that's government entities, with innovators, entrepreneurs, and then private sector investors, that having those people at the seat of the table, again, if we can't solve it, who else could? And I think whether we succeed or fail, there's going to be a lot of learnings along the way. And we've been committed to being transparent about those, about what works and what doesn't work. We have Brandeis University as a research partner.

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

And so we want to share what we've learned along the way and that's why this conversation is so important, because we're putting a stick in the ground and we are sharing what our goals are. And then I look forward to coming back in six months and saying, "Okay, how did that work? What did we learn? Where did we fail? Where did we miss the mark? What will we do differently?"

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

Because that's where the richness comes in and being very transparent about this process. Even more than the outcomes, the process, because we want other boards and communities to adopt this process. So that means that we're going to have to let people in on the inside base wall and bring them along.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Well, WorkingNation is proud to be a partner with this effort as well. We think the mission is critical. As you said, if we don't do it now, when are we going to do it? So, Angela, thank you so much for leading the effort and thank you for being here today.

Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner:

Ramona, thank you.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I've been speaking with Dr. Angela Jackson, New Profit managing partner. I'm Ramona Schindelheim, editor-in-chief of WorkingNation. Thank you for listening.