

# Innovators to Watch

AT A GLANCE

Innovative Wraparound Support  
Solutions That Help Workers Succeed

Developed by



MARCH 2024



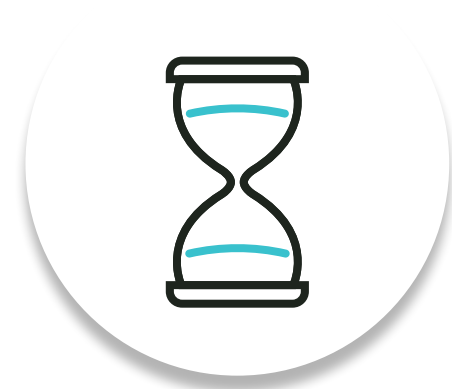
# About Innovators to Watch

Thousands of organizations offer technologies and solutions that help expand workers' opportunities to pursue high-wage jobs in high-growth industries by eliminating disparities in access to basic services that people rely on in their daily lives. After a careful scan of that broad marketplace, we selected nine Innovators to Watch.

These organizations are at the forefront of delivering innovative wraparound support solutions and are already engaged in efforts that advance the market trends we identified. They particularly stand out for their potential to make a significant impact on the success and advancement of workers of all backgrounds, including Black workers, with offerings that range from financial services that help people handle unexpected emergency expenses to a user-friendly scheduling tool and a platform that employers can use to connect employees to child care services.

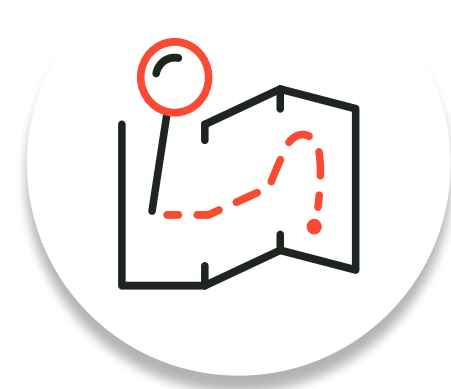
These organizations range in age from 1 to 15 years, and they're all at different stages of development, but their inspiring founders and their teams have all successfully demonstrated the potential for further growth.

Here are just a few of the key characteristics of our Innovators to Watch:



### Age

They range from 1 to 15 years old; the average is 6 years old



### Geography

Seattle, Denver, San Francisco, Boston, Brooklyn, San Diego, Maryland, Northern Virginia, and Columbus, Ohio



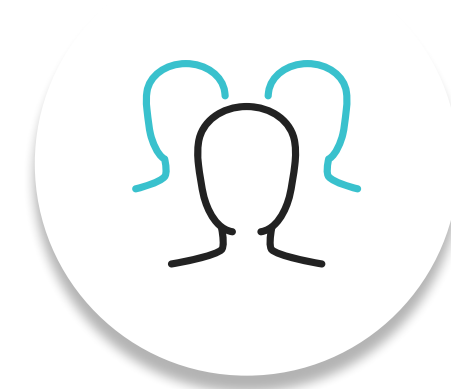
### Structure

Three are nonprofits, and six are for-profit companies



### Funding

They have raised between \$1.4 million and \$12 million



### CEO/Founder Demographics

The leaders of two-thirds of the organizations are people of color and/or women



**City:** Denver, Colorado

**Year founded:** 2009

**Website:** [www.worklifepartnership.org](http://www.worklifepartnership.org)

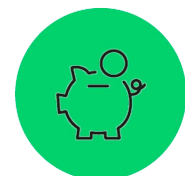
### MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- ▶ 86%: Percentage of clients in 2022 who reported reduced stress after working with WorkLife
- ▶ 2,700+: Number of workers that year that WorkLife helped overcome challenges and take advantage of opportunities in the workplace
- ▶ 73%: Percentage of borrowers in WorkLife's Small Dollar Loan program who are Black or Latine

### MARKET SEGMENT



**Retention: Resource Navigators**



**Retention: Financial Wellness**

## The Business

WorkLife Partnership is a nonprofit that helps organizations' employees navigate the benefits options that are available to them. It has a team of advisors it calls resource navigators who deliver personalized advice to workers and connect them with both employer-provided benefits and various forms of public assistance. WorkLife offers a service called the Small Dollar Loan program through which workers can quickly get loans of up to \$1,000 that they pay back in installments amounting 5% or less of their monthly income over the course of a year.

## Why WorkLife Partnership?

Unlike the employee assistance programs that many employers provide, WorkLife Partnership places no limit on the number of times employees can use its services, allowing its resource navigators to focus on optimal outcomes for workers and their families. Resource navigators also develop expertise in the types of programs, services, and resources available in a particular area and can recommend options such as mental health professionals whose services are covered by an employer's insurance or apartment buildings that accept pets. Among borrowers in its Small Dollar Loan program, 93% said they were more likely to stay with their employers because they have access to safe lending.

WorkLife can also provide employers with aggregate data on the health of their workforces, and employers can use the information to better align their benefits offerings with worker needs.

## By the Numbers

Leveraged \$435,000 in working capital to provide workers with \$1.4 million in loans.



**City:** San Francisco, California

**Year founded:** 2017

**Website:** <https://www.empowerwork.org>

**MEASURES OF SUCCESS**

- ▶ 360K: People supported to date
- ▶ 92.9%: Percentage who report improved mental health following a conversation
- ▶ 90%: Those who report taking action to improve or address a work situation
- ▶ 400K: Text messages exchanged in 2022
- ▶ 92.9% of people report improved mental health following a conversation

**MARKET SEGMENT**



**Retention: Mental Health**



**Advancement: Coaching**

**The Business**

Empower Work is a nonprofit with a mission of increasing the economic and emotional well-being of workers. It helps people navigate workplace challenges such as transitions to new jobs or instances of bullying, discrimination, or harassment. Trained peer counselors respond to workers via text with information that can help them overcome difficulties they may be facing. Empower Work focuses its support primarily on people who may have less professional social capital than their peers, such as women, members of the LGBTQ community, first-generation college students, and people of color. One-fifth of users identify as Black.

**Why Empower Work?**

Empower Work shares Surgeon General Vivek S. Murthy’s aspiration to turn workplaces into “engines of well-being” and feels that work is central not only to economic security but also to the emotional well-being of people and communities. It serves workers across the United States, in both rural areas and cities. The counseling Empower Work offers via text is designed to promote agency among people who are navigating career inflection points, and this approach benefits Black workers in particular by enabling them to persist in their roles.





**City:** Seattle, Washington

**Year founded:** 2008

**Website:** <https://www.shiftboard.com>

**MEASURES OF SUCCESS**

- ▶ 630M: Shifts scheduled
- ▶ 86%: Increase in employee satisfaction
- ▶ 16%: Decrease in employee turnover
- ▶ 26%: Decline in schedule grievances

**MARKET SEGMENT**



**Retention: Scheduling**

**The Business**

Shiftboard creates schedules that align employers’ staffing needs with shift workers’ desire for flexibility. The online scheduling platform has a “rules engine” to track the variables that go into developing schedules, such as union scheduling rules, coverage needs, labor-cost management, and scheduling efficiency. Employers using Shiftboard’s services are in a range of industries, including energy, manufacturing, health care, and corrections.

**Why Shiftboard?**

Flexibility in scheduling can help workers achieve better work-life balance by enabling them to adjust to unforeseen personal events and handle ongoing responsibilities such as caregiving. Shiftboard’s 2023 State of the Hourly Worker report found that 75% of workers say work-life balance is necessary for job satisfaction. However, employers must ensure that they have enough people on the job to meet productivity goals. Shiftboard can satisfy both parties. Its people analytics tools help companies adequately staff all shifts with schedules that are based on workers’ preferences and availability. In addition, Shiftboard is accessible on mobile devices, so workers can access it at any time, whether they’re on or off the clock. That’s important: The State of the Hourly Worker report found that 81% of workers prefer to have such

access to scheduling tools. Furthermore, Shiftboard builds change management and communication plans to guide employers in implementing the software for multigenerational workforces.



**City:** Falls Church, Virginia

**Year founded:** 2019

**Website:** <https://sunnydayfund.com>

**MEASURES OF SUCCESS**

- ▶ 50%–60%: Range in rates of voluntary participation among employees at Sunny Day Fund client organizations
- ▶ 25%–33%: Range in reduction in employee turnover among participants
- ▶ 92%: Net savings rate (users saving more than they spend)
- ▶ \$2,000+: Average savings balance after 12 months
- ▶ 50%–75%: Range in reduction in 401(k) loans and early withdrawals

**MARKET SEGMENT**



**Retention: Financial Wellness**

**The Business**

Sunny Day Fund offers a savings plan that employers can provide to their workers as a benefit. When workers enroll in the plan, money is deposited directly from their paychecks into portable FDIC-insured emergency savings accounts. These accounts also earn employer-sponsored cash rewards, which boost the amount a worker can save over time. Sunny Day Fund works with employers to encourage workers to save for emergencies and other immediate financial goals. These emergency savings accounts not only improve financial wellness, but also boost workplace productivity by mitigating the stress of financial insecurity, which can escalate in the face of unexpected expenses.

**Why Sunny Day Fund?**

Savings plans like the one Sunny Day Fund offers are important for people who are having trouble building up savings on their own, and according to Bankrate’s 2023 emergency savings report, that’s about half the country: Bankrate found that only 48% of U.S. adults say they have enough emergency savings to cover at least three months’ worth of expenses and 57% are “are uncomfortable with the emergency savings they currently have.”

With Sunny Day Fund accounts, employees make fewer penalized early withdrawals from 401(k) accounts and they gain a stronger sense of financial well-being, which leads to improvements in their mental health by reducing the stress of managing unexpected bills for things such as car repairs or emergency medical procedures. This is especially significant for Black workers, who are two to three times more likely than other workers to take costly 401(k) loans or early withdrawals to pay sudden expenses, which exacerbates the Black-white wealth gap. Moreover, greater financial security improves their ability to access health care, transportation, education, broadband, and other services and resources that enable them to focus on work.

The benefits for employers include lower workforce attrition. An analysis of Sunny Day Fund customers found that the turnover rate among savers in a 700-person organization was 33% lower than the overall turnover rate from January to September 2023.

**By the Numbers**

Sunny Day Fund has raised more than \$4M since its founding

79% of Sunny Day Fund’s investors are persons of color and/or women



**City:** Columbus, Ohio

**Year founded:** 2016

**Website:** <https://sharemobility.com>

**MEASURES OF SUCCESS**

- ▶ 15: States represented among Share Mobility’s employer partners
- ▶ \$5K: Annual potential savings per employee who uses Share Mobility services
- ▶ 4x: Improvement in the rate at which employers are able to fill open jobs when they expand commuter benefits

**MARKET SEGMENT**



**Retention: Transportation**

**The Business**

Share Mobility partners with employers to offer transportation to and from work as an employee benefit. It has a national network of nonprofit partners that specialize in supporting people with criminal records, refugees and other people who have recently arrived in the United States, and members of other communities that may face transportation barriers, and it does business in 11 languages. Share Mobility also works with community organizations to connect employers in manufacturing, logistics, food production, and similar industries with jobseekers. These jobs often are filled by workers living in rural areas or suburban locales without public transportation. Share Mobility works directly with employers to secure funding for the service and schedule rides. It’s also supported by partnerships, government funding, and local ordinances that oblige large employers to provide transportation to make job opportunities more accessible.

**Why Share Mobility?**

According to a 2020 report by the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, low-income Black households spend 30% of their pretax income on transportation. And according to Share Mobility, 17% of frontline workers lack access to a car for a work commute, and many live in areas where public

transportation is limited or unavailable. What’s more, 25% of the U.S. workforce has quit a job because it required an unsustainable commute.

Providing employees with access to transportation services like those offered by Share Mobility can benefit employers in a number of ways. For example, under some commuter benefits laws, employers can reduce the amount they pay in payroll taxes if employees use pretax income to pay for transportation to and from work. And one case study found that a company’s annual employee retention rate grew from 17% to 70% year over year after partnering with Share Mobility.

**By the Numbers**

\$12M: Amount raised in series A round in 2022

\$100M to \$500M: Share Mobility’s estimated revenue range







**City:** Brooklyn, New York

**Year founded:** 2016

**Website:** <https://www.projectbasta.com>

**MEASURES OF SUCCESS**

- ▶ 2,800: First-generation college students served in 2022
- ▶ 81%: Students who secure employment within 12 months of completing Basta's fellowship
- ▶ 90%: Students who remained in those jobs after one year
- ▶ 6,900%: Growth in learners served in the past four years
- ▶ 96%: Percentage of Basta fellows who are persons of color

**MARKET SEGMENT**



Recruitment: Talent Intelligence Platform

**The Business**

A nonprofit organization, Basta runs a fellowship program that prepares first-generation college graduates for high-wage corporate careers with employers like Bloomberg, Snapchat, and Citigroup. Often, first-generation college graduates end up in jobs that offer limited earning potential and don't align with their interests and capabilities. In Basta's flagship 10-week fellowship, participants have opportunities to build social capital and refine their career road maps with the help of one-on-one coaching. After completing the program, fellows generally land jobs that offer good pay and benefits. In an effort to reach more students, Basta recently expanded the program to include a year of unlimited access to virtual content via an online platform called Discovery.

**Why Basta?**

Basta's programs, which feature proprietary content and networks, prepare young people for the contemporary job market and put them in a position to overcome barriers to opportunity. Moreover, Basta takes a systems-level approach to dismantling occupational segregation by partnering with stakeholders throughout the learn and work ecosystem, including institutions of higher education and nonprofits that serve young people.

It also confronts inequitable hiring practices on both the supply and demand sides by addressing not only student preparedness but also employer recruiting and hiring behaviors.

Basta uses a custom-built career navigation tool powered by the Seekr artificial intelligence platform. This tool helps young people chart a course to employment while also collecting a rich trove of data about participants in Basta programs. This data includes information about the professional experiences participants have been exposed to, the professional social capital they've built, and their career drivers—all of which enables Basta and its education and workforce partners to provide more effective career guidance to Basta fellows.





**City:** Boston, Massachusetts  
**Year founded:** 2020  
**Website:** <https://adept-id.com>

**MEASURES OF SUCCESS**

- ▶ 600+: Candidates hired by customers
- ▶ 15K: Career transitions indirectly supported
- ▶ 30K: Skills that go beyond traditional hiring indicators (such as data and modeling)

**MARKET SEGMENT**



Recruitment: Talent Intelligence Platform

**The Business**

A public-benefit B corporation, AdeptID offers AI-driven technology that’s designed to integrate with talent applications used by workforce organizations and employers to enable those systems to do a better job of matching jobseekers to employment opportunities. With a focus on people in frontline hourly positions, AdeptID’s solution uses machine learning and predictive analytics to match people to jobs based on an analysis of skills they have that are transferable between industries. This model enables employers to take a more personalized, inclusive, and equitable approach to recruiting and hiring because it connects them with talented workers who are in industries unrelated to their own or whose demographic backgrounds don’t match those of the people in their usual talent pipelines. It also helps workers identify opportunities in sectors they may not have considered.

AdeptID’s mission is to make opportunities for economic advancement more accessible for all people, regardless of their academic achievements or previous work experiences. It partners with equity-focused clients such as OneTen, Multiverse, and YearUp in an effort to help employers diversify their workforces by connecting with talent pipelines that they may have previously overlooked.

AdeptID’s system collects a wealth of information about job applicants, providing employers with valuable insights about the skills and capabilities of workers from a wide range of backgrounds.

**Why AdeptID?**

AdeptID’s tech-driven system supports skills-first hiring, making it easier for employers to diversify workforces and stimulate economic growth by opening opportunities to populations facing barriers. The technology helps employers understand candidates with different backgrounds than usual hires. It analyzes unfavorable resume elements like employment gaps to identify skills gained. AdeptID is transparent in its API coding to avoid perpetuating societal biases as it learns worker demographics. By helping employers see talents hidden by traditional hiring criteria, AdeptID could benefit Black workers.

**By the Numbers**

Raised \$5M in the past 3 years

# TOOTRIS

**City:** San Diego, California

**Year founded:** 2020

**Website:** <https://tootris.com>

## MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- ▶ 200,000+: Child care providers in the Tootris network
- ▶ 100+: Employer, government, and agency relationships
- ▶ 1.4M: Tootris users in the last 12 months
- ▶ 250: News stories about Tootris

## MARKET SEGMENT



Retention: Caregiving

## The Business

Offering a technology platform that working parents can use to access a nationwide network of child care providers, Tootris gives employers a way to provide a child care benefit to workers. Tootris gives child care providers free access to its platform, enabling them to grow their businesses by connecting with the startup’s network of employers and parents. The platform includes user-friendly software tools that providers can use to automate administrative tasks like managing enrollment. Tootris partners with large employers, nonprofits, and government agencies to administer child care benefit , and it shares regularly updated data with industry stakeholders on child care needs sorted by region and demographics. Additionally, through its Childcare Micro-Enterprise Empowerment (CMEE) program, Tootris provides support to aspiring child care providers in the form of subsidies for startup costs, licensing assistance, and curriculum suggestions.

## Why Tootris?

Across the country, working parents and employers face an urgent need for child care. At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, 16,000 child care providers shut down, and with most schools closed, the lack of child care options forced many parents, particularly women, to leave the workforce. For their part, employers collectively lose \$23 billion annually

because of decreased productivity and increased turnover among employees who have difficulty accessing child care. Tootris addresses those issues by making child care more accessible to parents and by making it easier for employers to provide child care benefits. This type of service is particularly beneficial to Black workers, for whom lack of access to child care is just one more barrier that limits their ability to bring all of their energy and expertise to their jobs. And through its CMEE program, Tootris is positioned to have a broader systemic impact by catalyzing the opening of child care programs in Black communities and other areas that are underserved by existing systems and institutions.

## By the Numbers

Received \$1.4M contract from the California Department of Social Services

\$8M+ in recurring monthly revenue in the sales pipeline





**City:** Silver Spring, Maryland

**Year Founded:** 2022

**Website:** <https://www.escalateusa.com>

**MARKET SEGMENT**



**Retention: Resource Navigators**



**Advancement: Learning & Skill Development**

**The Business**

Escalate provides mobile-enabled training to frontline workers at large organizations. Accessing the company’s platform via mobile app, small cohorts of frontline employees receive eight to 10 hours a week of asynchronous online training in which they learn new skills that can lead to new opportunities in fields such as IT. The system also offers automated support that can connect learners with wraparound services and other resources and help them access coaches and social workers. And to help workers build networks, Escalate’s system facilitates collaboration and communication among members of cohorts. The company’s goals include helping employers build internal pools of candidates qualified for midlevel jobs and helping workers double their salaries after one year of training. It aims to train 1,000 to 2,000 people in 2024.

**Why Escalate?**

Escalate says its mission is to maximize talent and minimize turnover. Research shows that a lack of career growth opportunities is consistently the No. 1 reason for turnover among frontline employees. With its personalized mobile training solution, Escalate has the potential to address that challenge by providing entry-level employees with a user-friendly way to build the skills they need to succeed and

move into higher-paying jobs. That can improve employee engagement, increase retention, and reduce the turnover-related costs that employers incur when they have to replace employees who leave. Escalate’s asynchronous mobile-first training model allows workers to fit learning into their personal and professional schedules. The platform monitors workers’ progress, and it can use AI tools to offer support when necessary. It has built-in capability to connect learners with child care, transportation, and health care services, and human interventions are available for more personalized follow-up assistance. These features all help improve the employee experience and increase the likelihood that workers will stay with their employers.

**By the Numbers**

Raised \$1.4M in pre-seed funding



Building a Future  
That Works  
**For Everyone**