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THE **WORKERS** LAB

SNAPSHOT OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

THE
WORKERS
LAB



The Workers Lab 2021 Snapshot of Accomplishments offers a brief look at the organization's programs and history along with a sampling of our accomplishments over the last year.



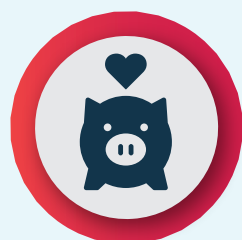


OUR VISION

We envision a society where all workers are safe, healthy, and secure. But right now, not all workers can say that they are. That's partly because many of the systems and structures that are supposed to make and keep workers safe, healthy, and secure weren't created with all workers in mind. So, we need to invest in new ideas for workers in order to achieve our vision.

That's why our **purpose** at The Workers Lab is to give new ideas for and with workers a chance to succeed and flourish. We carry out this purpose through three **core strategies**.

OUR CORE STRATEGIES



Invest

We invest in new ideas for workers in two ways:

- ▶ First, we invest in **new ideas and innovations that others are leading on** through our **Innovation Fund**.
- ▶ Second, we invest in **strategic opportunities** where we **identify challenges and potential new solutions that require a jump start** and where our team of experts can provide unique value. We fast-track these ideas through intensive investment, time-bound activities, and by bringing a unique mix of stakeholders to the table to develop and test solutions driven by workers. We do this through our Design Sprints, as well as Incubated and Special Projects.



Learn

Once we invest, **we then learn** about how that new idea transforms systems and structures to make all workers safe, healthy, and secure.



Inform

We then take that learning, make sense of it, and then use it **to inform leaders** who are making decisions that impact work and workers.



OUR VALUE PROPOSITION

The Workers Lab serves as a vehicle for the entire field of worker advocates to collaborate, explore, and experiment with new ideas for workers.



WE BELIEVE IN



Power for Workers

Workers should be the primary drivers of economics, politics, and culture in our society.



Inclusion of Workers

Labor laws, rights, and protections should include and extend to all workers everywhere in our society.



Innovation for Workers

Innovation should be used to introduce or transform ideas that make all workers safe, healthy, and secure.



Innovation by Workers

Any and all innovation for workers should be driven by workers. Period.



Proximity to Workers

Investments in innovation for workers should meet workers where they are, and acknowledge who they are. That's why our team is a majority first-generation, queer, person of color team, and why our investments are made largely in leaders of color.



TWL BY THE NUMBERS

Since our inception, we've invested **over \$11 million** in innovations that are addressing diverse and complex challenges that workers are facing.

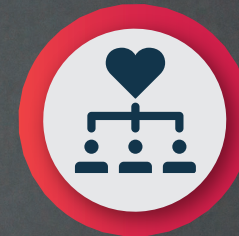
We've also invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in technical assistance, mentoring, as well as staff and strategic support to those innovators as they scale and amplify their projects.

In total, we've invested in **nearly 100 innovations** that are now making a dramatic impact across the country.

OUR INNOVATION FUND



77
INNOVATORS



\$5,737,500
INVESTED DIRECTLY IN INNOVATORS



\$135,500
IN TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, MENTORING,
STRATEGIC SUPPORT FOR INNOVATORS





INVESTMENTS IN STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES

In addition to our direct investments in innovators, The Workers Lab addresses gaps where we identify challenges and potential new solutions that require a jump start and where our team of experts can provide unique value. Our work in this area has included investing in 11 design sprints and timely special projects designed to tackle a range of issues workers face. Our focus is on moving quickly to leverage our understanding of worker challenges, convene our extensive network, and then collaborate to create a solution we can iterate and test with workers.

Timely Investments in Special Projects

- \$315,000 invested in timely opportunities to support innovators with promising ideas that needed an infusion of capital between innovation fund cycles. These include efforts like the New Jersey Future of Work Accelerator, which is building a model for how states can invest directly in worker-led and worker-centered solutions.

Safety Net Experiments

EMERGENCY CASH FOR WORKERS

- \$350,000 delivered through The Workers Strength Fund design sprint to 350 workers
- \$2,776,776 delivered through The Workers Fund: COVID-19 Response to 12,468 workers impacted by the pandemic
- \$1,134,159 invested in the incubation of Canary, which includes fiscal sponsorship of experiments with 10 employers providing emergency cash

WORKER-INFORMED TECH SOLUTION TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO SAFETY NET BENEFITS

- \$790,914 invested in R&D, testing, implementation, as well as partnerships with workers, worker organizations, and states



OUR INNOVATION FUND

Workers know best how to transform systems and structures to make all workers more safe, healthy, and secure. Our Innovation Fund seeks out innovators with new ideas in these areas. Innovation Fund winners are awarded up to \$150,000 in flexible dollars to test their new ideas, learn from them, and share them with other leaders who are making decisions that impact work and workers. Our goal is to help fast track or ignite these innovators' projects. In addition to receiving needed funds, awardees receive mentorship, training, and other forms of organizational support where The Workers Lab can add value.





OUR INNOVATORS

The Workers Lab recognizes that innovations for workers should come from workers themselves, and we also know that there are a wide variety of workers, which is why our innovators hail from all corners of the country and represent workers of color, women workers, immigrant workers, and those who are often marginalized by outdated systems, institutions, policies, and technologies.

Past award recipients range from start-ups, such as B Lab and Coworker.org; to worker rights organizations, such as the Coalition of Immokalee Workers and National Domestic Workers Alliance; to cooperatives, such as the CLEAN Carwash Worker Center and the Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation.

EXAMPLES OF OUR INNOVATORS





OUR INVESTMENTS IN STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES

The Workers Lab excels at filling gaps where we identify challenges and potential new solutions that require a jump start and where our team of experts can provide unique value. We fast-track these ideas through intensive investment, time-bound activities, and by bringing a unique mix of stakeholders to the table to develop and test solutions driven by workers. We ignite these solutions through our Design Sprints, as well as Incubated and Special Projects.





EXAMPLE 1: UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF EMERGENCY CASH FOR WORKERS AND BEST PRACTICES FOR ADMINISTERING IT

In recent years, our team has taken the lead in deeply investigating the impact that emergency cash can have on workers and the best practices for administering it. So far, this effort has included:

- ▶ Conducting the largest experiment in the country of cash transfers to workers to cover emergencies through our Worker Strength Fund, which dispersed payments of \$1,000 to 350 workers.
- ▶ Utilizing the learnings and infrastructure from the Workers Strength Fund to create The Workers Fund: COVID-19 Rapid Response, which delivered \$2,776,776 in emergency cash to more than 12,468 workers who had lost 50% of their income due to the pandemic.
- ▶ Incubating a new social enterprise called Canary that designed, built, and tested a new program that's prepared to offer emergency grants to employees at scale.



Having a way for workers to draw down on cash in an emergency matters, so we started by asking: “What if workers had \$1,000 available - no strings attached - when they needed it for unexpected expenses?” Through our Workers Strength Fund, workers could request a cash grant of up to \$1,000 and receive it within 24 to 48 hours. We assembled a team of experts to guide the process, developed a prototype, completed three rounds of rapid prototyping, and conducted pre- and full-scale pilot tests. An independent analysis of this project by Commonwealth found that emergency cash increased stability, helped workers get back to work, and had a sustained positive psychological impact.

Prepared with this knowledge, when we saw millions of workers in dire need in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, our team was able to immediately utilize the infrastructure we developed for the Workers Strength Fund to deliver relief. To date, about \$2,776,776 million has been provided to 12,468 workers, allowing them to put food on the table and meet basic needs for themselves and their families.



Additionally, in 2021, we started to look more deeply at the impacts emergency cash programs can have on the organizations that provide them. Through a grant provided by the Open Society Foundation, The Workers Lab brought in our partners at Canary, an emergency relief platform, to study six organizations that distributed emergency cash during the first year of the pandemic. The organizations ranged from national groups including One Fair Wage, the National Domestic Workers Alliance, and UpTogether (formerly Family Independence Initiative) as well as local community-based organizations like Adelante Alabama Worker Center, Twin Cities Hospitality Fund, Massachusetts Immigrant Collaborative, and Texas's Workers Defense Project. After talking to these groups, we learned that emergency cash can be a powerful tool for base building. As a next step, we'll be partnering with the Workers Defense Project to integrate the findings from our retrospective study to distribute another emergency grant fund later this year. This will enable us to continue evaluating what strategies work to build worker power alongside providing cash grants. We look forward to sharing and promoting these findings in early 2022.



LEARN MORE ABOUT EMERGENCY CASH

1. [THE WORKERS LAB'S CASE STUDY "MAKING SENSE OF EMERGENCY CASH"](#)
2. [THE WORKERS LAB ARTICLE: "THE BENEFITS OF EMERGENCY CASH"](#)
3. [THE WORKERS LAB ARTICLE: "A LOOK BACK AT EMERGENCY CASH DISTRIBUTED IN THE FIRST YEAR OF THE PANDEMIC"](#)



EXAMPLE 2: BUILDING A WORKER-INFORMED TECH SOLUTION TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO SAFETY NET BENEFITS

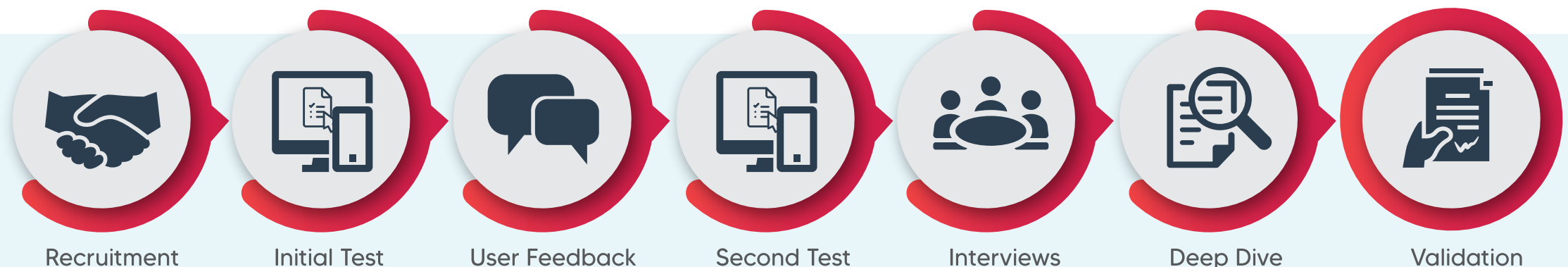
During the pandemic, gig and contract workers, which includes everyone from Uber drivers and farm workers to freelance workers and domestic workers, needed the government’s support more than ever. Lawmakers passed historic legislation that enabled these workers to qualify for unemployment benefits for the first time, but we quickly saw that states were struggling to process the new benefits for these workers, who also are more likely to be people of color. Our country’s unemployment system wasn’t designed with them in mind and didn’t anticipate having to confirm income that comes from multiple sources for multiple jobs within the same day.

We started by asking: “What if gig workers didn’t have to patch together tax forms, screenshots, and spreadsheets or jump through hurdles to fill out state unemployment insurance applications?” We teamed up with our trusted partner Steady to help them develop and test a tech solution that solves the challenge of verifying income from gig work and paves the way for government leaders to more easily deliver timely and accurate benefits to gig workers.

One of the great things about our solution was the invaluable support of partners like Philadelphia Legal Assistance and inputs from workers from the Philadelphia Drivers Union. Our partners used, tested, and informed the development of the technology so that it addressed their problems, rather than creating new ones. [More on this design sprint can be found here.](#)

As we were partnering with workers on improving the tech solution, we also spoke with state governments to set the stage to pilot it with them. Since the fall of 2020 we’ve had conversations with leaders in more than half of the nation’s states. We learned about the difficulties they faced in implementing pandemic unemployment programs, about how the solution could support their processes, and about its potential to provide better access to government services far beyond the pandemic. We also learned how much unemployment systems vary across states – everything from the quality of application portals to the clarity of information provided to workers to the type of information that workers must report. For us, this reinforced the need for solutions like ours that are informed by workers and that provide a level of clarity and reliability that is often missing today.

OUR METHODOLOGY FOR ENGAGING WORKERS



OUR LEARNING HUB



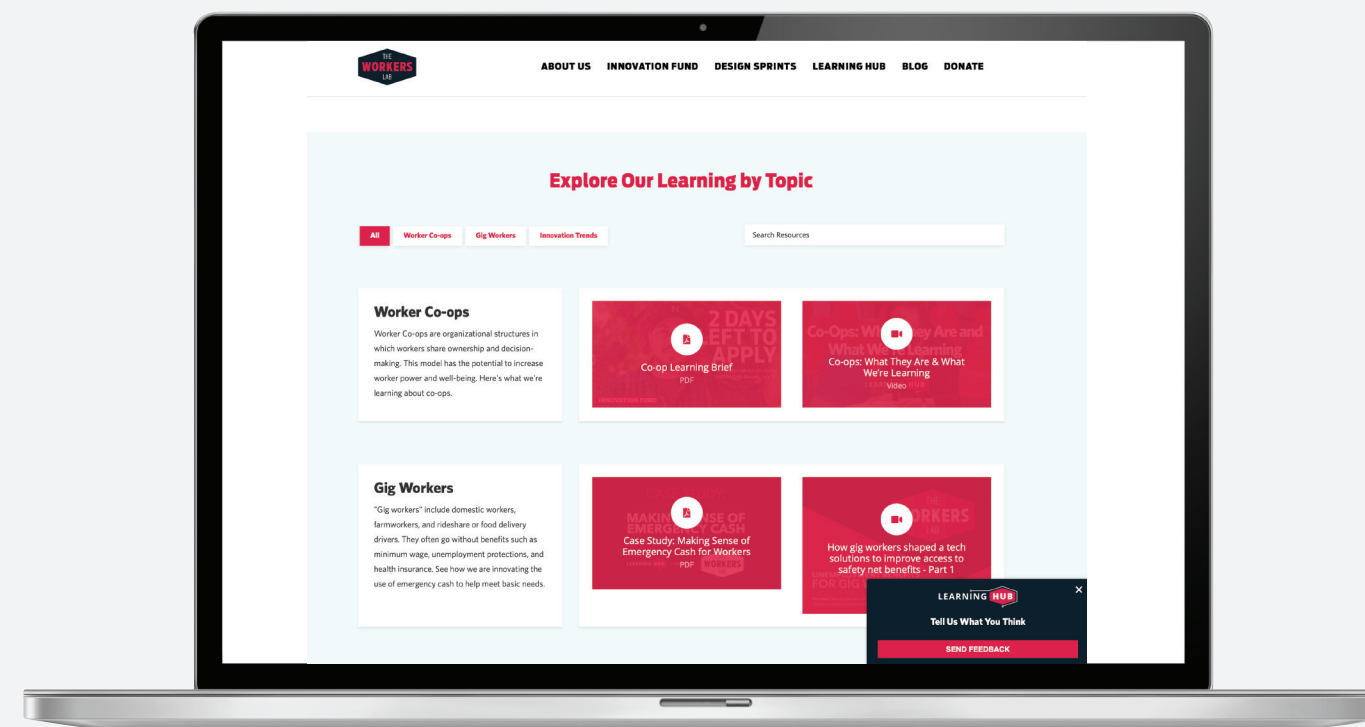


OUR LEARNING HUB

Learning is at the core of what we do. Our Learning Hub curates and houses what we've learned, offers resources, and showcases innovators who are giving life to the most promising new ideas aimed at increasing power for workers. It convenes, connects, offers mentorship, and provides opportunities for innovators to learn from one another.

In 2021, we overhauled this section of our website based on a survey of more than 500 innovators from across the country about the types of information they would find useful and their preferences in receiving that information. The results of that survey mean our site now prioritizes professional mentorship and skills-building information, insights from previous winners of The Innovation Fund, and information about social entrepreneurship.

Next year we are going to build in more active learning tactics, gig worker-focused learning roundtables, and The Workers Lab Podcast focused on stories for and with workers, while continuing to source the Learning Hub with ecosystem reports, case studies, announcements, and blogs. Additionally, in 2022, we will be launching a partnership with the Aspen Institute.





MEET OUR LEADERSHIP TEAM



TWL LEADERSHIP



Adrian Haro

Chief Executive Officer



Betsy Edasery

Managing Director



Eddy Morales

Director of External Affairs



Lyle Del Mar Canceko

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Director of Finance and Operations



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