

2026 COHORT



Next Level

Growth Exchange



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Next Level

Next Level: Growth Exchange is a no-cost, non-dilutive accelerator designed to help high-growth, early-stage startups scale in the Maryland, Virginia and Washington, DC.

Through a masterclass-driven program, founders gain access to mentorship, industry expertise, and connections with leading employers and investors. The program equips founders with the relationships and strategic guidance needed to grow their ventures and navigate growth.

The curriculum includes:

- Capital Strategy & Preparedness
- Procurement & Partnerships
- Pitching & Investor Readiness
- Hiring & Culture
- Technology & AI
- Legal Considerations

Participants receive direct engagement with the Greater Washington Partnership network, along with access to corporate partners and investors. The program provides:

- Access to financial, social, and technical capital
- Personalized mentorship and industry connections
- Structured support to refine growth strategy
- A culminating pitch competition

This lookbook highlights the eight founders selected for the 2026 Next Level cohort and the ventures they are building. Their companies represent high-growth sectors shaping the region's innovation economy, including:

- Technology
- Life Sciences
- Aerospace & Defense
- Advanced Manufacturing



Sloane Tilley



Business: Aegilys

Established: 2023

Headquarters: Maryland

Industry: Advanced Manufacturing / Defense / Biotechnology

Business Description: Aegilys is building real-time, non-invasive chemical sensors and rugged manufacturing to deliver biomarkers (like cortisol via saliva and sweat) and external threat detection (including aerosolized fentanyl) at the point of need. Prototypes for real-time cortisol measurement are currently in testing with elite Army and Air Force units, supported by substantial DoD funding. The product roadmap includes a portable aerosol detector and mesh-networked systems with ML analytics for layered threat detection, addressing both human-performance and field chemical-threat markets. Core sensor manufacturing is scaled in-house to reduce supply-chain risk and enable lower per-test economics as the technology commercializes.

Unique Value Proposition: We combine molecularly imprinted polymers with engineered microfluidics to enable real-time, point-of-need measurement of biomarkers and environmental threats in complex sample types such as saliva, sweat, and aerosols, delivering laboratory-level chemical selectivity in realistic field conditions. Our U.S.-developed manufacturing strategy uses inkjet-printed electrodes and vertical integration of sensor production to lower per-test cost to under one dollar, reduce reliance on critical minerals, and enable rapid, rugged scale-up for defense and commercial deployments - creating a practical hardware and supply chain moat for austere operational environments and government programs.

Target Market: Department of Defense, dual-use in elite athletics.



Sajith Kumar



Business: Chargerzilla

Established: 2023

Headquarters: Maryland

Industry: EV Charging / Transportation

Business Description: Chargerzilla is addressing critical gaps in the EV charging industry by building the first community-driven AI-powered EV charging ecosystem — uniting drivers, property owners, businesses, municipalities, and charging networks into a single scalable, revenue-generating platform. We empower corporations and small businesses to generate new revenue streams by activating underutilized assets while eliminating charging anxiety for EV drivers. Our solution enables cities, counties, and states to accelerate electrification without the burden of capital investment.

Unique Value Proposition: First community-driven AI-powered EV charging ecosystem — uniting drivers, property owners, businesses, municipalities, and charging networks into a single scalable, revenue-generating platform.

Target Market: Businesses, homeowners, property owners, and EV drivers.



Ruth Abate



Business: Cureiosity

Established: 2025

Headquarters: Virginia

Industry: Health Technology

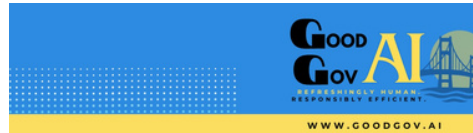
Business Description: Cureiosity is a health technology company that helps patients discover and understand relevant clinical trials by simplifying complex medical data into clear, personalized, and location based results.

Unique Value Proposition: Unlike traditional trial databases, Cureiosity translates complex clinical trial data into simple, personalized matches so patients can act with confidence, not confusion.

Target Market: Patients who want clear, personalized access to clinical trials and trial sponsors who need faster, more targeted participant recruitment.



Johntel Greene



Business: Good Gov AI

Established: 2024

Headquarters: Maryland

Industry: Policy Technology

Business Description: GoodGov.AI empowers policymakers, advocates, and citizens through responsible AI technology and strategic consulting services. We are committed to human-centered policymaking, delivering accurate, reliable information and tools to bridge the gap between communities and their elected officials. By leveling the playing field, we enable everyday people to have a stronger voice in shaping policies that directly impact their lives, while providing professionals with cutting-edge tools for more efficient governance and equitable outcomes for all.

Unique Value Proposition: Our unique value proposition is that we are developing a new way to do local policymaking that removes barriers, to train government relations professionals, and to open doors to more people to engage with their elected officials for better policy outcomes by leveraging AI.

Target Market: Advocates and Legislative Staff.



Andrew Shoka



Business: Hardshell

Established: 2025

Headquarters: Virginia

Industry: Cybersecurity

Business Description: Hardshell is a data-centric AI security platform that protects sensitive datasets before they enter AI/ML systems. We detect and mitigate risks like data poisoning, data leakage, and model inversion that traditional security tools miss, enabling organizations in defense, healthcare, and finance to adopt AI safely.

Unique Value Proposition: AI systems trained on sensitive data are vulnerable to attacks that happen at the data layer, before a model is ever deployed. Data poisoning can corrupt model behavior, and membership inference can extract confidential information from trained models. Current security tools focus on protecting models after deployment. We secure the data upstream, where most AI risk originates, which remains a underdeveloped segment from both a technology and market perspective.

Target Market: On the commercial side, we target regulated industries with strong data security requirements (healthcare, financial services, industrials, etc). On the federal side, we target intelligence and defense customers focusing on deployment of AI/ML models within mission-critical systems.



Naroa Gimenez-Camino

Business: ORAIN Biotechnologies

Established: 2023

Headquarters: Washington, D.C.

Industry: Life Sciences



Business Description: ORAIN Biotechnologies uses JERO, a proprietary cloud-based AI platform that analyzes biology and tissue imaging data to discover biomarkers that predict which patients will respond to therapies. Unlike traditional approaches, JERO uses annotation-free AI to uncover complex cellular patterns without manual labeling, enabling biomarker discovery from small clinical datasets. By helping biotech and pharmaceutical companies identify predictive biomarkers earlier, ORAIN aims to improve clinical trial success and accelerate precision medicine.

Unique Value Proposition: ORAIN's unique value proposition is its annotation-free AI platform, JERO, which can discover predictive spatial biomarkers from small clinical datasets without manual labeling or prior hypotheses. This allows biotech and pharmaceutical companies to uncover treatment-response biomarkers faster and earlier in drug development, improving patient selection and increasing clinical trial success rates.

Target Market: Our primary customers are biotech and pharmaceutical companies developing oncology therapies that need biomarkers to predict patient response in clinical trials. We also work with academic medical centers and translational research groups that generate spatial biology datasets but lack advanced AI tools to analyze them.



Neil Sorkin



Business: Redhelm Labs

Established: 2023

Headquarters: Maryland

Industry: Aerospace/ Defense

Business Description: Redhelm Labs engineers advanced optical power transmission and receiver systems that enable safe, scalable wireless energy delivery for defense and industrial platforms.

Unique Value Proposition: We enable safe, scalable wireless energy delivery using eyesafe laser architectures and high-efficiency receiver systems that reduce deployment risk while extending mission endurance for unmanned and remote platforms.

Target Market: Department of Defense, defense contractors, government research organizations developing unmanned and autonomous systems, and industrial customers with a need for wire-free sensor installation.



Zhen Zhang



Business: Unitra

Established: 2026

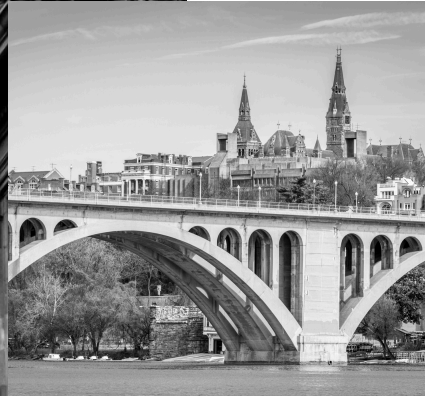
Headquarters: Virginia

Industry: Electronic Sports

Business Description: Unitra is a real-time voice translation app that lets gamers speak different languages and understand each other instantly.

Unique Value Proposition: Privacy + Real-time + Affordability — all in one. Unlike competitors, Unitra processes speech locally on your device so your voice never hits the cloud, while still delivering sub-1.5 second translation fast enough for live gaming conversations — at a fraction of the cost.

Target Market: International gamers, streamers, and content creators who want to engage with global audiences in real-time.



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