

Next Level Accelerator

Impact Snapshot



Our Masterclass Model

Over the course of the twelve-week accelerator, founders participated in masterclasses led by experienced executives, investors, and regional innovation leaders, gaining direct access to individuals who understand what it takes to build, finance, commercialize, and scale a high-growth company.

The 2026 program was intentionally aligned with the Greater Washington Partnership's Region Rising economic growth roadmap and focused on early-stage companies operating in several of the region's highest-growth industries, including technology, life sciences, aerospace and defense, and advanced manufacturing.

In addition to the masterclass curriculum, founders participated in a networking lunch with venture capital leaders, curated introductions, peer exchange, and a culminating pitch competition.

The 2026 cohort included:



Chargerzilla
Stay Charged!

CUREIOSITY



Hardshell



UNITRA.AI

2026 Cohort Overview

- Seven entrepreneurs representing seven businesses graduated.
- Businesses based in: District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia
- 86% of 2026 participants reported feeling better prepared to pitch and showcase their businesses to investors, customers, partners, and other key audiences.
- 86% gained meaningful business insights and connections through the program's networking lunch with venture capital leaders.
- 71% reported feeling better prepared to identify and recruit talent that can help grow their businesses.

Industries Represented:



**Artificial intelligence
and policy technology**



Aerospace and defense



**Health technology and
clinical research**



Cybersecurity



**Life sciences and
biotechnology**



**Electric-vehicle infrastructure
and transportation technology**



**Real-time translation, gaming,
and enterprise technology**

Total Next Level Impact – By the Numbers



45 entrepreneurs across Washington, DC, Maryland, and Virginia represented across three cohorts.



67% of entrepreneurs have been considered, shortlisted, or awarded a contract or RFP opportunity.



210+ business-building relationships facilitated.



80% identified new revenue, market, or expansion opportunities or reported a better ability to market their business.



Pitch Competition Spotlight



Winner: Andrew Shoka, Hardshell

The 2026 Next Level: Growth Exchange Pitch Competition awarded a \$25,000 non-dilutive prize to Andrew Shoka, founder of Hardshell.

Hardshell is building a data-layer assurance engine for enterprise artificial intelligence platforms. The company helps organizations protect sensitive datasets before they enter AI and machine-learning systems, identifying risks such as data poisoning, data leakage, and model-inversion attacks that traditional security tools may miss.

By securing information upstream—before models are trained or deployed—Hardshell enables organizations operating in highly regulated and mission-critical industries to adopt artificial intelligence more securely and confidently. Its initial markets include defense, healthcare, financial services, and other industries with significant data-security requirements.



Impact – By the Numbers



38 entrepreneurs based in Washington DC, Maryland, and Virginia.



90% report better ability to market their business



167+ business-building relationships facilitated



55% feel more prepared to fundraise



77% have been short-listed for RFPs or contracting opportunities



81% feel better prepared to navigate RFPs or contract opportunities with prospective buyers



65% held or plan to hold follow-up discussions with procurement leads

2025 Cohort Overview



23 entrepreneurs representing 20 businesses graduated



Sectors: Consulting, IT, Healthcare, Real Estate & Construction, Energy, Food & Beverage



Businesses based in: 26% DC, 52% Maryland, 22% Virginia



Average Revenue: \$1.7 Million



Average Employee Count: 10



Pitch Competition Spotlight

Winner: Hyacinth Tucker, The Laundry Basket

Our first-ever pitch competition awarded \$25,000 to Hyacinth Tucker, founder and CEO of The Laundry Basket. The Laundry Basket is a premier laundry and dry cleaning service dedicated to providing convenient, high quality garment care with pickup and delivery options. Their mission is to make laundry effortless for individuals, families, and businesses while promoting sustainability. Through cutting-edge technology, they streamline operations for laundromats and dry cleaners, empowering them to grow while maintaining exceptional service standards.

The event was made possible by board partner Ann Ramakumaran, Founder and CEO of Ampcus Inc., and exemplifies the type of investment and mentorship that sets this program apart.



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Next Level is supported by



The Differentiator: Our Masterclass Model

At the heart of Next Level is a masterclass model that does more than educate, it connects. Over the course of the program, senior executives from the region's largest employers taught curated sessions that provided the cohort of entrepreneurs with rare, direct access to decision-makers who influence procurement and corporate partnerships, share insights into how their company operates, and provide connections that can lead to business scale and growth.

Each masterclass offered:

- A deep dive into the company's approach to a series of business topics, including sales, legal, marketing, and business strategy.
- Practical, real-world examples from the region's largest and most impactful companies.
- Facilitated connections between entrepreneurs and board partner representatives.

This is more than just technical assistance, it's a front-row seat to how successful companies operate and grow. This model reflects our belief that when we can facilitate connections between large companies and entrepreneurs, small and local businesses gain the tools, relationships, and visibility to scale. Additionally, the cohort received business instruction on the fundamentals of business from New Majority Ventures.

Backed by a Powerful Network

Thanks to the leadership of our Greater Washington Partnership board companies, Next Level brings employer power to the table in service of inclusive economic growth. Participating employers included:

Akin

amazon

AMPCUS
collaboration redefined

CareFirst
BlueCross BlueShield

CLARK
CONSTRUCTION

Deloitte.

exelonSM

HOWARD
UNIVERSITY

JBG SMITH

JPMorganChase

Truist

MedStar Health

MONUMENTAL



Total Entrepreneurial Impact of Next Level

(Over two cohorts)



38 entrepreneurs based in Washington DC, Maryland, and Virginia.



90% report better ability to market their business



4.3/5 rated by participants (Over half of the cohorts had a 5/5 rating)



77.8% are planning to pursue certification (second cohort only)



167+ business-building relationships facilitated



55% feel more prepared to fundraise



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