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Seattle companies step up to drive an inclusive recovery

Collaboration promotes diversity & equity with toolkit to help employ people with conviction histories

April 26, 2021 (Seattle, WA)—Two nonprofits and four corporations—with support from JPMorgan Chase—have announced a novel collaboration to enable prosperity in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly for those disproportionately hurt by the economic and health crisis: people of color and people enduring economic inequality.

Their **Inclusive Recovery Project** seeks to broadly build employment opportunities for people with conviction histories (anyone with a record). The goal is to ensure post-pandemic economic recovery plans are equitable. The unemployment rate for formerly incarcerated talent (FIT) was 60 percent in the nation’s last recession.

An astonishing 70 million Americans have a conviction history, according to the U.S. Department of Justice. Studies indicate that by 2030, 100 million – one in three working-age adults – will have been convicted of a crime. The data show that these Americans are more likely to be people of color, and yet numerous policies and practices, including mandatory background checks, consistently deny employment opportunities to individuals with conviction histories even after they have been offered a job.

“Continuing to ignore this population is not only immoral, it’s bad for our economy and bad for our communities,” said Susan Mason, the formerly incarcerated executive director of What’s Next Washington, an organization of formerly incarcerated individuals and allies. “We can’t have racial equity without addressing mass incarceration and policies that exclude people with conviction histories.”

[JPMorgan Chase](#) committed \$300,000 towards the two-year project, which is led by [What’s Next Washington](#) and [The Prosperity Agenda](#), two economic justice-focused nonprofits headquartered in Seattle. As part of the project, [T-Mobile](#), [GAF Materials Corp.](#), [Green Canopy](#), and [Node Eco](#) will pilot recruiting, hiring, and retention tools (the “Toolkit”) developed by What’s Next Washington and The Prosperity Agenda.

“If we have a recovery that’s inclusive, and we think about that from the outset, it will be easier than if it’s an add-on later, which is what usually happens,” said Alicia Atkinson, managing director of The Prosperity Agenda. She underscored how important it is for employers to take steps to ensure that biases, policies, and practices do not inhibit the advancement of workers who have conviction histories and are willing and able to work.

“As the labor market rebounds from the economic shock of COVID-19, it’s essential that we focus on building infrastructure for equitable recovery and inclusive growth that will serve communities for years to come,” said Cat Martin, Corporate Responsibility Program Officer for JPMorgan Chase. “In Seattle, we’re excited to support The Prosperity Agenda and What’s Next Washington to advance workplace opportunities that will lead to a measurable shift in culture, employee retention, and increased organizational support of individuals facing biases due to their involvement with the judicial system.”

Holli Martinez, Vice President, Diversity & Inclusion at T-Mobile, said her company welcomes the opportunity to partner on strengthening T-Mobile’s commitment and helping others achieve their goals.

“As part of T-Mobile’s longstanding commitment to drive greater workplace diversity, we are thrilled to help What’s Next Washington build tools that empower other organizations to do the same,” Martinez said. “Embracing this pool of untapped talent and ensuring processes are in place to support and enable their advancement is a critical step towards building a stronger, more equitable workforce.”

GAF, North America’s largest roofing and waterproofing manufacturer, highlighted the need to tap this talent pool.

“The GAF Roofing Academy is proud to support the Inclusive Recovery Project and its mission to bring employment opportunities to the formerly incarcerated,” said Brian Cornelius, Program Director at GAF. “More than 19,000 employment opportunities for skilled roofers are projected over the next ten years, and we’re committed to ensuring all who want to explore a rewarding career path in roofing have equitable opportunities to do so.”

Don Bunnell, co-founder and CRO at Node Eco, said participating in this project supports equity, which is core to his company’s mission around sustainable housing for all income levels.

“To us, ‘equity’ includes giving people a chance—especially those who have not had the opportunities many of us take for granted,” Bunnell said. “Life is hard enough. Having a conviction history and trying to find work is really tough. With What’s Next Washington’s help, we can become a true second-chance employer, and give these folks the opportunity they deserve.”

The Inclusive Recovery Project continues to seek employer participants and funding. Visit <https://www.whatsnextwashington.org/partnering-for-an-inclusive-workforce> to learn more.



The Prosperity Agenda designs pathways to economic and racial justice rooted in the wisdom, experience, and expertise of families enduring economic inequality. We work with families and staff to imagine, test, and realize programs where people thrive. Together, we illuminate the relationships, mindsets, and practices that shift whole systems. Learn more at www.theprosperityagenda.org.

What's Next Washington is an organization of formerly incarcerated individuals and allies working to help people with conviction histories reintegrate into society and achieve long-term economic stability. WNW believes that every person has a right to a life of dignity, that those closest to a problem are closest to the solution, and that collaboration leads to innovation. JustLeadershipUSA recently recognized Executive Director Susan Mason during [#SecondChanceMonth](https://www.justleadershipusa.com/2023/02/28/second-chance-month/). Learn more at www.whatsnextwashington.org.

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