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From the Phoenix Business Journal:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/phoenix/news/2017/07/31/national-education-startup-workshop-held-in.html>

National education startup workshop held in Phoenix to forge new relationships, partnerships with local companies

Jul 31, 2017, 8:38pm MST Updated: Aug 1, 2017, 1:43pm MST

Washington, D.C.-based Village Capital brought 12 education startups from across the country to Phoenix to meet local companies, mentors and city and business leaders for possible partnerships.

The four-day workshop was held at the Phoenix-based social entrepreneur incubator Seed Spot from July 25 to 28. The local workshop, which focused on workforce development, is part of a series of three workshops held in various cities across the country, said Marissa Lowman, Village Capital's education practice lead.

"Village Capital finds, trains and invests in entrepreneurs that may not traditionally get funding, such as entrepreneurs from smaller cities and founded by minorities and women," Lowman said. "We chose Phoenix because of its leading universities, thriving startup ecosystem and the high number of local companies that our startups could partner with."

For example, Jason Green, co-founder of SkillSmart, a D.C.-based software-as-a-service startup designed to improve hiring outcomes, talked to the Phoenix economic development department and **Arizona State University** on future partnerships.

"I am quite impressed with the work being done locally," said Green, who was visiting Phoenix for the first time. "I didn't have to convince people here of the importance of workforce ability, which has been difficult in other cities. We're mainly here to build partnerships, relationships and maybe open an office here one day."

Nathan Doctor, CEO and co-founder of Qualified.io, a San Francisco-based software startup that trains and assesses software engineers for companies, had a good conversation with Scottsdale-based ed-tech company **Parchment**.



PROVIDED BY VILLAGE CAPITAL

Village Capital's targeted stakeholder advisory meetings with startups and mentors. Background: Upswing co-founders meeting with Jessica Alonzo, career services coordinator with Arizona College; Paul Porch, campus college chair with University of Phoenix; and Amy Smith, dean of school of education with Capella University. Foreground: Unleesh co-founders meeting with Leah Aitken, human resources director with Sauce Pizza & Wine and Beth McMullen, vice president of logistics transformation for Avnet.

“We had good synergy with **Parchment**, which had used a competitor of ours but no longer does. We talked about how to improve their hiring process and train current developers with new technology,” Doctor said. “People are super friendly here. It seems like a great community.”

At the end of the third workshop, which will be held in Denver in mid September, two startups will receive investment from Village Capital. The winning companies will be chosen by the attending startups through a peer ranking, Lowman said.

“The workshops are held in different cities to show them what different communities have to offer and as a way to build new relationships,” she said. “We are very impressed with how engaged the community is here. Everyone wanted to help out.”

The **AT&T-sponsored** workshop was the first big event for Seed Spot in its new space in Phoenix’s Warehouse District. Village Capital and Seed Spot have partnered over the past six months as Seed Spot launched in D.C., said John Johnson, Seed Spot’s community development manager.

“We were happy to support them by providing a space for them to hold their workshop in Phoenix,” Johnson said. “This workshop did so much for the Phoenix community from what I observed. All of the ventures participating in the workshop were from other parts of the country, providing a new set of businesses for our community leaders to engage with. There were more than 30 leaders from the community, including Mayor Greg Stanton, who visited the space to provide support and guidance to the businesses. I believe this event gave the Phoenix community a glimpse into how Seed Spot’s expansion has already and will continue to bring positive connections to Phoenix.”

Paul Parent, a product marketing director with Gilbert-based financial aid software company **CampusLogic**, was part of a local group that offered ways to help Village Capital through company connections and letting them know what’s going on in the ed-tech community.

“I wanted to pay it forward, create connections and hope good things will happen,” said Parent, a volunteer with EdTechAZ, a website that promotes the Arizona ed-tech ecosystem. “I’m hoping for future partnerships, company expansions and just basic knowledge sharing. I’m excited they brought this here.”

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