



Impact Investing in Silicon Valley September 21st, 2017



The Silicon Valley impact community arrived in full force at ONE WORLD Training & Investments' third biannual "Impact Investing in Silicon Valley" event and demo day convening impact investors, social entrepreneurs, experts, and folks looking to learn more about the impact ecosystem. With over one hundred attendees, the event featuring two panel discussions between prominent thought-leaders in the impact space and pitches from nine innovative social enterprises proved to be both educational and inspiring.



The first panel discussion featured [Lisa Kleissner](#), co-founder of the [The Tonic Institute](#), [Marc Van Den Berg](#), a partner at [DBL Partners](#), and [Mark Wolfson](#), Managing Partner at [Jasper Ridge Partners](#). The panel explored the current state of the impact investing ecosystem and what the industry as a whole needs in order to grow. Kleissner, a trailblazer in the impact investing space offered a unique perspective on historical growth and current trends in impact investing.

Her illustration of the industry's evolution, led to a discussion on hot topics like defining impact investment success, appropriate expectations for returns from impact investments, and the need for "maturity" in each sector of the impact-based economy.

Each of the panelists agreed on the huge potential—for both impact and monetary growth—of the impact investing field; however, some worry was expressed about a lack of “maturity” or “early discipline” in the industry among its mostly millennial players. Wolfson explains that there is a significant need for professional training and education in social enterprise and impact investing to equalize the current “heart over head” ideology that dominates the field. He goes on to say, “I am so excited about the potential for this field, but I am worried that a lack of early discipline will give rise to a premature death of this industry.” Nonetheless, each of the panelists agreed that there can be a very bright future for the impact economy with significant growth for women in the field (both C-level professionals and investors), corporate governance for both impact-based and traditional companies, and research leading to appropriate measurements of both impact and investment success.

Growth in the impact ecosystem was certainly represented by the quality and diversity of social enterprises at “Impact Investing in Silicon Valley”. Nine co-founders of early-stage companies competing in industries ranging from food and agriculture ([Folia Water](#), [Renewal Mill](#), and [New Wave Foods](#)), to health ([InPress Technologies](#)), energy ([Sylvatex](#)), education ([Nimble](#)), and technology ([iPar](#), [LaborVoices](#), [My90](#)) pitched at the event, showcasing an exciting snapshot of the creativity and potential of new players in the impact ecosystem.



The final panel discussion moderated by Lisa Kleissner explored how investors and wealth managers have been able to align capital with values. [Kristen Hull](#), Founder and CEO of [Nia Global Solutions](#) and [Nia Impact Advisors](#), and [Mariam Riviera](#), managing partner at her venture capital firm, [Ulu Ventures](#) were accompanied by [Tim Brady](#), partner at [Y](#)

[Combinator](#) and founder of educational startup accelerator Imagine K12, and [Andrew Beebe](#), a partner at [Obvious Ventures](#) discussed their motivations to invest with social and environmental considerations and advised best practices for impact investors to make an impact while generating returns. Hull and Riviera—both female leaders in the impact investing and venture capital spaces—commented on the lack of female and minority representation within the venture capital and entrepreneurial communities.

However, with four female and three minority co-founders representing their social enterprises in our demo day and a highly diverse audience, the dismal statistics representing a lack of diversity in the financial industry were shattered.

“We have to tackle Wall Street,” Hull says, “and particularly women and people of color have to be involved in that [effort]...so how can we choose the companies that are being the most impactful? What are the companies needed to create the world we want to live in, and how can we invest in those [companies]...that’s really just smart investing: to choose inclusive, diverse teams that are working on the world for tomorrow.”

Inspirational advice was in no shortage amongst the expert-led panels, setting a genuine, yet symbiotic and informational tone for the remainder of the event.



The official sessions ended with awards to entrepreneurs in three categories: Best Overall Impact Investment, Most Innovative Solution and Most Qualified Team. After careful deliberation and consensus between judges [Cameron Turner](#), Fund Manager of [Oxford Angel Fund](#), [Catherine Crystal Foster](#), Executive Director of [The Westly Foundation](#), [Dan Kalafatas](#), Founder and Chairman of [3Degrees](#), [David Cooper](#), General Partner at [Nourish Ventures](#), and [Mylea Charvat](#), founder and CEO of [Savonix](#), Folia Water was awarded Best Impact Investment, New Wave Foods was awarded Most Innovative Solution, and Most Qualified Team was awarded to [Sylvatex](#).

With a beautiful sunset as a backdrop and a feeling of inspiration buzzing in the atmosphere, “Impact Investing in Silicon Valley” ended with a closing reception. The reception gave attendees the chance to share common values and strengthen connections, as well as learn more about the presenting companies directly from the founders.

“Today’s event was really thought provoking...and it was great to hear from some of the people who have been at ground zero of impact investing [since day one],” says [Foster](#) of the Westly Foundation, “a setting like today [welcomes] folks to have a much more intimate and reflective conversation about impact investing.”

For anyone eager to find out more about impact investing in the Bay Area and the work of ONE WORLD Training & Investments, further [events](#) are scheduled throughout the year and can be found on our [website](#).