

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Overview: Rapid advances in technology and shifting world dynamics are transforming the global economy and nature of jobs. As global migration reaches an all-time high, the digital economy grows, and an increasing number of services move towards automation, the “Future of Work” will prove to be a massive disruption that will serve as both opportunity and challenge to the world economy. The skills required by today’s workers are different and more varied than they were even a decade ago, and future labor markets will demand a modernized and highly-skilled workforce with the ability to swiftly adapt to rapid changes. Meeting employers’ needs will require new approaches, tools, and partnerships—whether through collaborating with educational institutions, establishing workforce efforts built for scale, or piloting and investing in innovations focused on scalable employment solutions.

The Challenge: This track challenges students to develop workforce solutions that provide individuals with the technical knowledge, practical skills and readiness necessary to secure employment and become self-sufficient. Additionally, proposals may be focused on strategies to develop the capacity of individuals, corporations and governments to meet the challenges and demands of the 21st century economy and its workforce.

GLOBAL HEALTH

Overview: Around the world, countries are working to strengthen health systems, increase access to quality care, and end preventable deaths. While there has been marked progress in certain regions and for certain health issues, this progress has not been evenly distributed. Innovations that can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of health systems, while also increasing access for vulnerable populations will be absolutely critical in the push to end preventable deaths in both the US and around the world.

The Challenge: The challenge for this track is to describe an intervention that would alleviate a global health concern, either domestically or internationally. Proposals submitted to this track should (a) demonstrate evidence of a widespread health concern faced by resource-constrained populations, and (b) develop a system, program, or technology that is culturally appropriate within the target communities and designed for low-resource settings.

FOOD & AGRICULTURE

Overview: The production and distribution of food intersect with some of the most critical issues of our time: pervasive hunger and malnutrition as well as obesity, environmental degradation resulting from agricultural activities, labor injustices, and extreme inequities in the distribution of farmland and food access. Many initiatives and efforts have emerged in recent years, as attempts to address these persistent food-related problems, from local to global levels. Yet, challenges persist— and have escalated in some areas— often due to political and economic causes. Achieving food security, justice, health, and sustainability in food systems, and equitable access to nutritious food, requires significant changes, ideas, and problem-solving by people and organizations in a wide variety of disciplines.

The Challenge: The challenge for this track is to encourage the development of innovative solutions or approaches that address complex challenges in food systems. Proposals submitted to this track may focus on areas such as enhancing agricultural production, increasing food security, promoting sustainable farming practices, and/or creating equitable access to nutritious food. Proposals may be aimed at campus-based programs, local/domestic issues, or international efforts.

FINANCIAL INCLUSION

Overview: Roughly 2 billion individuals and tens of millions of enterprises around the world lack access to basic financial services. For the 50% of poor households who are “unbanked,” this represents an incredible economic barrier that prevents them from accessing the credit, savings and insurance services essential to the well-being of their families and businesses. For small and medium enterprises (SMEs) who struggle to secure capital, this creates critical obstacles to their own growth, as well as the economic and employment potential they represent. The global community is increasingly aware of the critical role financial inclusion plays in reducing poverty, promoting economic prosperity and catalyzing enterprise, and has made notable strides in promoting access to finance around the world. However, large scale innovation is still needed to ensure products, services and capital are available, accessible and appropriate to the needs of underrepresented individuals, enterprises and communities.

The Challenge: The challenge for this track is to propose novel products, services, tools or mechanisms that either address unmet needs of the financially underserved, or help extend existing services to populations at the unbanked “last mile.”

ENERGY & RESOURCES

Overview: As resource constraints and climate change impacts on our planet become more severe, individuals and communities will lack access to the tools and products necessary to live sustainably. The buildup of greenhouse gases has resulted in urgent challenges such as rising global temperatures, extreme weather disasters, and accelerated sea level rise. At the same time, humans are generating 1.3 billion tons of solid waste per year, straining natural resources and highlighting the need for robust conservation and recycling efforts. Nevertheless, innovators around the world are increasingly exploring the potential of sustainable energy resources (such as solar, wind, geothermal, hydropower energy, and biofuels), implementing sophisticated waste management strategies, and incorporating circular economy principles into business strategies. As climate change and resource depletion continue to pose a significant risk to humanity at large, there is an urgent need to make these renewable technologies more accessible, affordable, and reliable.

The Challenge: The challenge for this track is to encourage the adoption of clean energy and/or resource alternatives that are sustainable and have the potential for broad impact. Proposals may focus on the design, development or delivery of green energy solutions that can be domestic or international in scope. All proposals should clearly demonstrate the relationship between the proposed intervention and its impact on the environment. Solutions may focus on several areas, including but not limited to: (1) clean, renewable energy technology; (2) land/watershed management; (3) climate change adaptation; (4) habitat restoration and/or maintenance; (5) Resource reduction/waste prevention.

EDUCATION & LITERACY

Overview: Access to quality education and literacy improves quality of life and creates more resilient communities. Approximately 57 million primary school-age children do not attend school. Over four out of five of these children live in rural areas. The cost of higher education is rapidly increasing with the price tag of a college degree in the US being 13 times higher than it was 40 years ago. There is a large and growing shortage of teachers. About 10% of the global population experience undernourishment which, for students decreases academic skill development in math, science and language, and increases the risk of a student dropping out. About half of the school buildings in the US are in disrepair and unfit for students, staff and teachers. Solutions must address these and more underlying factors in order to work effectively towards universal access to education and literacy.

The Challenge: The challenge for this track is to create innovative solutions that address the underlying barriers to quality education and literacy. Proposals may focus on the design, development or delivery of education and literacy solutions that can be domestic or international in scope. All proposals should clearly demonstrate the relationship between the proposed intervention and its impact on education and literacy.

CITIES & COMMUNITIES

The Overview: Communities in the U.S. and around the world are entering a new era of transformational change. Residents and the surrounding environments are increasingly connected by smart technologies, leading to new opportunities for innovation, improved services, and enhanced quality of life for all. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have the power to enable governments, companies, universities, civil society organizations, and communities. These communities can collaboratively address some of the 21st century's most pressing challenges—including urban planning, education quality, social services, and public safety. Yet, in our increasingly connected world, technology also can have negative effects as digital and social media further divide communities by creating “echo chambers” and “social bubbles.” Thus, there is an urgent need for the development of tools and platforms to promote collective problem-solving and strengthen the social and economic fabric of societies.

The Challenge: The challenge for this track is to describe a novel solution that leverages the capacity of technology to engage and enhance the wellbeing of communities, campuses, and cities. These innovations should stimulate new thinking to address key physical, social, or economic challenges facing geographic locales ranging from university settings to global metropolises. Solutions may focus on a wide range of areas, including but not limited to: improving the living conditions of urban environments, promoting civic engagement, sharing knowledge and information, making transportation options more accessible, and empowering individuals to improve their own well-being.

ART & SOCIAL CHANGE

The Overview: Many artists today are deeply committed to creating work that addresses pressing social issues and changes the way we perceive the world. While some artists use traditional forms of art to make work that comments on, responds to, or advocates for the need for change, others are exploring new forms of “social practice” that engages communities in an interactive exchange. For example, an artwork might take the form of a store, a garden, a meal, a website, a street performance, a story exchange, or an urban planning project. Socially engaged art can ignite outrage and demands for change, and/or provide a platform for reflection, collaboration, and building community. Art expressions can focus on the residents of a single city block, or reach out to a global audience.

The Challenge: The challenge for this track is to develop an innovative art project that meaningfully engages with issues of advocacy, justice, and community-building. The initiative may use any art form — visual/ conceptual art, photography, new media, video, dance, theater/performance art, music, creative writing, or other forms. Art must be central to the project, and the proposal must reflect an informed understanding of the particular art form(s) being used, as well as of the communities being served.