



**Sara Razavi**  
**CEO, Working Solutions**  
**OFN Board Candidate Statement**

**About Me**

I am CEO of Working Solutions, a certified nonprofit CDFI based in the San Francisco Bay Area, and proud member of the Opportunity Finance Network. Working Solutions is a start-up and early-stage microlender. We are the First to Believe in small businesses, but our vision is that we won't be the last. We were founded in 1999 on the idea that under-resourced communities, and specifically under-resourced entrepreneurs, need our help. In increments of \$5,000 to \$50,000, we make a difference for entrepreneurs who believe in local, who believe in community, and who believe in their dreams.

I was born in Iran, and when we immigrated to the United States, my family didn't quite feel included in the mainstream. After many closed doors, my mother started two microbusinesses: one of the businesses was a small bookstore specializing in Middle Eastern and South Asian languages, which she co-owned with my aunt. That bookstore survived 17 years, funded by family, friends, and credit cards. Between them they had two masters degrees, were fluent in English, but because of cultural barriers and gender and racial biases they still never felt wholly comfortable getting capital outside of their known network.

I do this work every day because I believe it is what makes America a promise for the many who are committed to its potential. Prior to social finance I was in social services for over 10 years working with under-represented children, youth, and families. I went to business school because I felt there was more we could do and that's where I discovered social impact lending.

Our team is deeply committed not only to carry out Working Solutions' mission of being the first to believe and providing high-touch 1:1 consulting, but also to do that for more people. Scale is important to us, because we know there are many entrepreneurs who need an extra hand.

At Working Solutions we believe in entrepreneurs, at a scale that is trying to keep pace with the need—and I believe that this is a necessary commitment for the industry at large in order to build together to rightfully meet the size of the need, in service of a better and more diverse future; a future where all individuals, no matter what their backgrounds or their past obstacles, are empowered with the credit choices they need to realize their dreams.

**Why I'm Interested in Serving on the OFN Board**

1) Increase CDFI Visibility:

- I believe deeply in the role of CDFIs in lending to communities that have been systematically left out and that is why I am committed to promoting the work of not just my own CDFI, but the industry more broadly.

- In my current role I have raised awareness not just for Working Solutions, but for our industry as a whole, and I aim to continue to represent the CDFI industry at large. Because if we aim to make an even greater impact, which in this growing time of disparity we absolutely have to, then more people must know about us.

## 2) Advocate for Effective Microlending:

- My first introduction to OFN was six years ago, three months after joining Working Solutions. At the time Working Solutions was a five staff organization, powered mainly by pro bono support. We were micro ourselves, doing great, but at a very micro work. I had no idea the scope and breath of the CDFI industry we were a part of, until I went to my first OFN conference.
- It was OFN that gave me perspective and helped me dream of what our organization could become, so now, I want to help other smaller CDFI's grow to respond effectively to the growing need of our communities.
- Over the last six years Working Solutions has grown 213% in loan deployment. Six years ago we did less than 50 loans a year, this year we're on track to deploy, not 50, but 100 and 50 loans, and our goal is to keep up the pace to 400 microloans each year by 2024.
- But we're not growing for growth alone. We have a very real need in our communities. What we are doing here, believing in people, at a scale that is trying to keep pace with the need, shouldn't be considered innovative; it should be considered for what it is, necessary. A necessary commitment so we can build together beyond injustice, in service of a better collective, more diverse future.

## 3) Broaden the geographic representation for national impact

- A huge value of OFN is its national scope, especially with Lisa Mensah's leadership, OFN's role as a national level advocate for socially minded finance is becoming more defined than ever.
- And the board should reflect the diversity of our CDFI's including regions and product offerings. I look forward to representing microlenders and specifically deepening the board's representation of West Coast organizations.

Thank you very much for your consideration. If selected, I would be honored to join the OFN board, and I would look forward to working with you to ensure that all our communities have access to safe and affordable capital.

Sincerely,



Sara Razavi  
CEO