

2019

# The J.M.K. Innovation Prize

The J.M.K. Innovation Prize seeks to identify, support, and elevate innovators who are spearheading transformative early-stage projects in the fields of the environment, heritage conservation, and social justice.



## Seeking Catalytic Social Innovation

For more than three generations, The J.M. Kaplan Fund has provided catalytic funding for projects in their early stages of development. Whether a pilot project, a new organization, or a nascent initiative, work supported by the Fund has involved a certain measured risk that ultimately led to large-scale, transformative results. We launched the J.M.K. Innovation Prize in 2015 to leverage this legacy of catalytic grant-making in the field of social innovation. Currently on a biennial schedule, the Prize has to date funded twenty wildly creative solutions to social and environmental challenges, ranging from high-tech efforts to restore imperiled coral reefs, to the nation's first farm labor trust. Each awardee takes a visionary approach to a societal need, working within one or more of the Fund's three program areas:

### 1. The Environment

Protecting natural resources and reducing the impacts of climate change.



### 2. Heritage Conservation

Conserving the places that communities care about most.



### 3. Social Justice

Supporting just alternatives and reforms to the criminal justice and immigration systems.



The J.M.K. Innovation Prize is open to non-profit and mission-driven for-profit organizations that are tackling America's most pressing challenges through social innovation. In 2019, we will award up to ten Prizes, each including a cash award of \$150,000 over three years, plus \$25,000 for project expenses, for a total award of \$175,000. Awardees also receive guidance through the Fund and its resource network, providing tools and training for ascendant change agents.

## Tailored for Early-Stage Social Entrepreneurs

We know there is a scarcity of funding for untested ideas being piloted in the social innovation field. The Prize is designed to fill this gap in innovation philanthropy, supporting ideas that other funders may deem too risky or too small. We also know that early-stage innovators need the freedom to seize opportunities when and where they arise. The Prize's unrestricted funding offers this flexibility, letting awardees deploy resources where they are most needed, whether investing in core projects, hiring staff, or just keeping the lights on.


**"The Prize's pacing and amount of funding allowed for building on the successes and lessons learned from the previous year for maximum impact."**

Alan Lovewell, Bay2Tray, a project of Real Good Fish

We know each organization must follow its own path to achieving a change-making vision. The Prize gives awardees room to evolve at their own pace, with support tailored to their needs as innovators.

**"Many early-stage prizes in the innovation field are focused on speed, scale, and markets at the expense of depth and connection. What we so appreciated about the J.M.K. Innovation Prize is that**

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**we were part of a cohort of people who approach their work from a community-centered perspective, and who are working on longer, more lasting time frames.”**

Michelle Miller & Jess Kutch, Coworker.org

## An Innovation Community

Beyond the cash award, the Innovation Prize provides tools to help turn ideas into action. Over the three-year Prize term, we bring awardees together for two convenings each year. Each of these meetings, spotlighting a different awardee’s organization, offers opportunities for peer learning and mentoring from experts in organizational development, board cultivation, media coaching, leadership training, and more. From West Virginia coal country to Monterey, California, our awardees have shared powerful learning moments, embedded in one another’s work and reflecting on their role as change agents.

**“The convenings provided incredibly valuable spaces where I was able to connect with peers, deepen relationships, and consider the big-picture evolution of the organization.”**

Gina Clayton, Essie Justice Group

Through these gatherings, we seek to cultivate a community of innovators who can build meaningful relationships with one another as well as with the Fund. Indeed, a hallmark of the Prize is the Fund’s readiness to devote its considerable resource network to support awardees throughout their Prize term and beyond. Whether providing guidance on non-profit management or an introduction to a fellow funder, the Fund and its staff are there for awardees—both to celebrate the successes and offer strategic counsel amid the inevitable challenges of a social innovation startup.

**“J.M. Kaplan Fund staff have been cheerleaders and morale-boosters, which is an important if often overlooked role in philanthropy.”**

Brandon Dennison, Coalfield Development Corporation

## Criteria for Selection

Individuals or teams representing non-profit or for-profit organizations are eligible to apply for the 2019 J.M.K. Innovation Prize. The Prize will be awarded to projects or ideas that:

- **represent a game-changing answer to a clearly identified need;**
- **are innovative within one or more of the Fund’s three program areas;**
- **demonstrate the potential to develop an actionable**

**pilot or prototype with Prize funding; and**

- **hold out the promise to benefit multiple individuals, communities, or sectors through a clearly articulated theory of change.**

Some cutting-edge social innovation can be more impactful using market solutions, but may require philanthropic seed capital. We thus welcome mission-driven for-profit organizations to apply for the 2019 Prize, with funding provided in the form of philanthropic grants rather than an equity stake in the company.

## The 2019 Timeline

Application for the 2019 J.M.K. Innovation Prize is a two-step process. A first-round application will be made available on the [JMKFund.org](http://JMKFund.org) website on **January 29** and will be open until **April 30**. Select applicants will be invited to submit a more detailed second-round application in late spring. Finalists will be invited to New York City in the fall to present their ideas to the trustees of The J.M. Kaplan Fund. Awardees will be formally announced in November 2019.

## About The J.M. Kaplan Fund

The J.M. Kaplan Fund champions transformative social, environmental, and cultural causes through inventive grant-making. Established in 1945 by philanthropist and businessman Jacob Merrill Kaplan, the Fund has since its inception been committed to visionary innovation. Over its 74-year history, the Fund has devoted \$250 million to propel fledgling efforts concerning civil liberties, human rights, the arts, and the conservation and enhancement of the built and natural worlds. The J.M.K. Innovation Prize continues the Fund’s legacy of catalytic giving, reaching across America to provide early-stage support for entrepreneurs with twenty-first-century solutions to urgent social and environmental challenges.

Read about our 2015 and 2017 awardees, and sign up for email updates at: [JMKFund.org](http://JMKFund.org)

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