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J.M.K. Innovation Prizes Go to 10 Transformative Early-Stage Initiatives

J.M. Kaplan Fund Reports on Innovation Trends from 1,300+ Submitted Ideas and Opens Funder Access to Trove of Proposals



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New York City – [The J.M. Kaplan Fund](#) announced today the results of its nationwide search to identify ten exceptionally catalytic social and environmental change initiatives, issued a report on innovation trends based on the ideas submitted from all 50 states, and invited philanthropic leaders into its trove of proposals.

“These ten J.M.K. Innovation Prize winners are incredible standouts, and they are just a fraction of the inspiring ideas we heard from more than 1,300 leaders in the fields of social justice, heritage conservation and the environment,” said **Peter Davidson**, Chairman of The J.M. Kaplan Fund Board of Trustees. “We are grateful to the 485 first-round reviewers who volunteered to evaluate all of the applications, and the 30 subject-matter experts, funders and social innovation leaders who served as round-two reviewers, who contributed key insights during the selection process.”

With the Fund’s [new report](#) analyzing innovation trends ascertained through the process and its open call to funders to view the proposals of innovators in their own communities and program areas, The J.M. Kaplan Fund aims to shine a spotlight on innovation in parts of America that don’t get enough resources.

[The J.M.K. Innovation Prize](#) is awarded biennially to ten non-profit and mission-driven for-profit organizations tackling America’s most pressing challenges through social innovation – defined as those pilot projects, new organizations or nascent initiatives that involve a certain amount of measured risk but which may ultimately lead to large-scale, transformative results. Each awardee receives up to \$175,000 over three years and participates in a learning collaborative of fellow innovators to support their journey as change agents.

“Innovators are hard at work across America, and we can’t wait to share their pathbreaking ideas,” said **Amy L. Freitag**, Executive Director of The J.M. Kaplan Fund. “Since we launched The J.M.K. Innovation Prize in 2015, we have been able to provide 30 early-stage initiatives with crucial financial and capacity-building resources and shine a spotlight on innovators beyond our awardees who may have huge potential.”

The ten 2019 J.M.K. Innovation Prize awardees are:

Immigration Innovators

ImmSchools

Viridiana Carrizales &
Vanessa Luna

Texas & New York

(expanding nationwide)

Immschools.org

ImmSchools is an immigrant led nonprofit organization that partners with K-12 educators to transform schools into safe and welcoming spaces for undocumented students and families.

South Dakota Voices for Peace

Taneeza Islam

South Dakota

sdvfpeace.org

South Dakota Voices for Peace is building a replicable rural model to sustain an immigration services ecosystem while fighting Islamophobia, anti-immigrant legislation, and anti-refugee bigotry in rural states.

VIISTA

Michele Pistone

Pennsylvania

(expanding nationwide)

villanova.edu/VIISTA.html

Villanova University Interdisciplinary Immigration Studies Training for Advocates (VIISTA) is establishing the first university-based comprehensive, online, scalable and affordable immigration-focused education and training program that will create a nationwide pipeline of advocates committed to securing justice for immigrants.

Criminal Justice Innovators

The Hood Incubator

Ebele Ifedigbo

California

hoodincubator.org

Focusing on community organizing, policy advocacy and economic development, The Hood Incubator leverages marijuana legalization to provide redress and build economic power for Black communities harmed by the drug war, infusing racial equity into the nascent legal cannabis industry in the process.

Black and Pink

Dominique Morgan

Nebraska

blackandpink.org

Responding to a criminal justice system that targets vulnerable populations like sexual minorities and people of color, Black and Pink piloted a reentry program for formerly incarcerated LGBTQ people to rebuild their power and center their capabilities on the path forward.

The First 72+

Kelly Orians & Ben Smith

Louisiana

first72plus.org

Through the leadership and wisdom of formerly incarcerated people, The First 72+ stops the cycle of incarceration through free transitional housing, case management and peer advocacy, reentry legal services, small business development, and zero interest loans that support people returning from prison.

Environment Innovators

Our Climate Voices

Aletta Brady

Minnesota

(operating nationwide)

ourclimatevoices.org

Our Climate Voices is a climate justice organization humanizing the climate disaster through written, audio, and visual storytelling. Following each story, it shares concrete actions people can take to support community-based and systemic solutions to the climate crisis, connecting people and growing the leadership of people and communities who are impacted by the climate crisis.

One Water One Health

Rolf Halden

Arizona

(expanding nationwide)

onewateronehealth.org

One Water One Health harnesses the trillion-dollar infrastructure of U.S. wastewater treatment plants in a new way to first identify and then eliminate harmful chemicals that pose a threat to the U.S. environment, its wildlife, and its people.

True Pigments

Michelle Shively & Paul Patton

Ohio & the Greater Appalachian Region

[http://ruralaction.org/
truepigments](http://ruralaction.org>truepigments)

Using an innovative technology, True Pigments brings acid mine drainage impacted streams back to life by removing iron oxide and processing it into pigment, a valuable commodity that can be sold to pay for the process, create jobs in rural communities, and fund additional watershed restoration projects.

Heritage Conservation Innovators

The Campaign for Historic Trades

Nicholas Redding

Maryland

(expanding nationwide)

www.historictrades.org

Preservation Maryland's Campaign for Historic Trades is training a diverse new generation of tradespeople to help restore and revitalize America's communities, and, through an innovative partnership with the National Park Service, scaling a powerful apprenticeship program to a nationwide audience.

Innovation Trends in the Fund's 2019 Report:

The J.M. Kaplan Fund put out the call for applications to the Prize in January 2019, and by April received a record 1,354 applications from all 50 states. With so many applications arriving from early-stage initiatives – 44% of all proposals described projects less than two years old – the Fund has highlighted key takeaways from its analysis of those proposals and the creativity occurring across the nation.

The report on this year's Prize — [Growing Grassroots Resilience](#) — details these overarching findings:

- **Social justice is increasingly led by directly-impacted people.** Citing numerous examples across program areas, the report concludes that social enterprises are tapping the power of directly-impacted people to advance solutions that are trauma-informed and rooted in community.
- **Public health initiatives are being reframed as social medicine.** Across the Fund's program areas of social justice, the environment and heritage conservation, more than 1 in 5 applicants referenced health or healthcare, pointing to a convergence of cross-disciplinary innovators who are linking health, place and community empowerment.
- **Government is not the enemy of innovation.** Many applicants are enlisting public institutions as partners in social innovation, with a significant percentage of applications referencing government as well as policy or legislative efforts, emphasizing the role government can play in catalyzing new solutions to social challenges.
- **Indian Country is a crucible for catalytic change.** With many particularly innovative ideas coming from tribal communities, their leaders are demonstrating that social justice can be advanced through issue areas such as food, housing, environmental health and heritage.

And these program-specific findings:

- **Gentrification is becoming a key focus for heritage innovation.** By embracing new ownership strategies that protect affordable housing stock, build social fabric and create economic engines, preservation innovators are taking on gentrification to sustain and expand enclaves of culture.
- **Climate reformers are putting people first.** Some of the most powerful environmental initiatives are those that link climate change to social justice, leveraging more holistic solutions to create climate-resilient communities.
- **Waste can be reimagined as a source of community value.** Among places scarred by environmental injustice, innovators are digging deeply into the waste stream to restore ecologies and rebuild economies.

The report also presents a brief discussion of how The J.M. Kaplan Fund utilizes the learning provided by applicants in its funding strategies outside of the Prize program, as well as reflections from reviewers and funders who have connected to new ideas and potential grantees through the Prize process.

Open Call to Connect with Innovators:

For the first time, The J.M. Kaplan Fund is opening up its database of applications to funders across the nation and around the world, inviting them to tap into the innovative ideas and individuals that may spring from their own communities or be related to their program interests. There are 1,300+ innovative ideas from this round that have considerable merit, and the Fund is eager to help connect them with resources and opportunities.

Funders interested in receiving additional information about innovators in their communities and program areas should contact: Justin Goldbach, Program Director, The J.M.K. Innovation Prize, jmkinnovationprize@jmkfund.org.

In the coming months, The J.M. Kaplan Fund will also be holding a series of webinars for funders interested in learning about innovations in each program area. Funders interested in joining those conversations should also contact Justin Goldbach.

About The J.M. Kaplan Fund

Established in 1945 by philanthropist and businessman Jacob Merrill Kaplan, the Fund has since its inception been committed to visionary innovation. Over its 72-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.

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