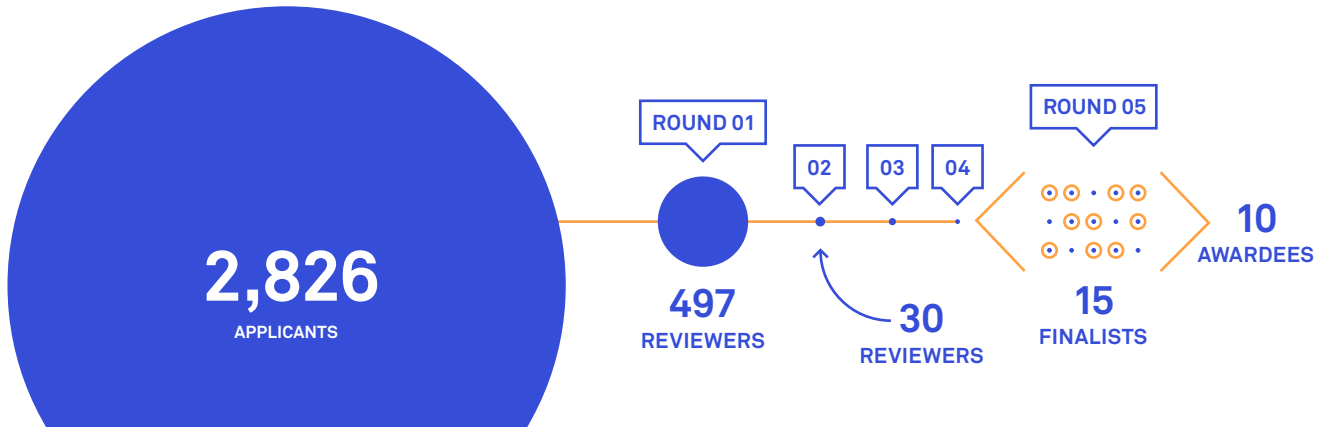
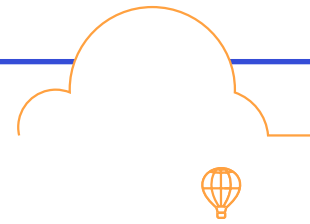


**The J.M.K.
Innovation Prize
Building Pathways
to Collective Power**

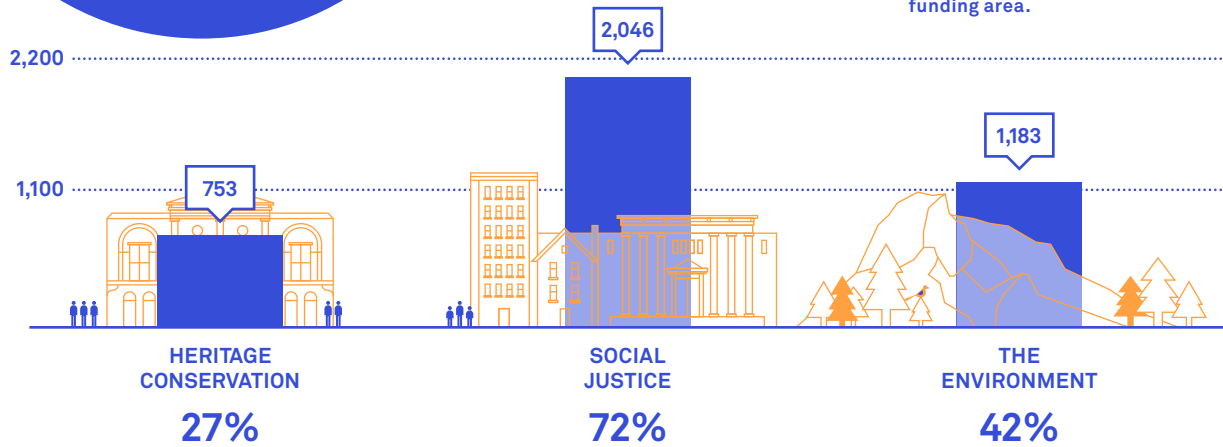
The J.M.K. Innovation Prize: An overview

The number of Prize applicants more than doubled in 2021—a pandemic-era surge of social, environmental, and heritage innovation that drew change-making ideas from across all 50 states, along with U.S. territories and tribal lands.



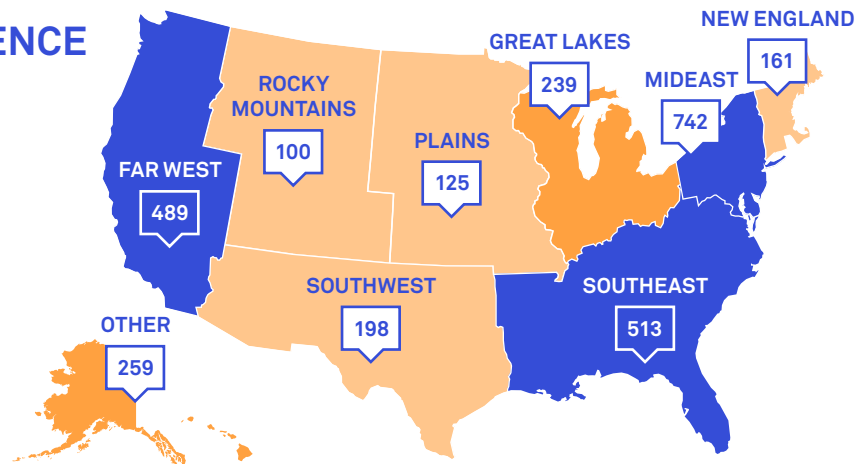
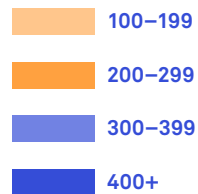
FUNDING AREAS*

*The total exceeds 100%, as some applicants address more than one funding area.



REGION OF RESIDENCE

APPLICATIONS PER REGION



Introduction

Leaning In

Two years ago, soon after we revealed the awardees of the 2019 J.M.K. Innovation Prize, the landscape of philanthropy—indeed, of everything—changed profoundly. The COVID-19 pandemic upended the frame of reference for everyone working in the realm of social innovation. Mission statements, giving areas, and staffing charts were scrambled as foundations and service providers pivoted, then pivoted again to meet social and environmental challenges that multiplied as the pandemic’s toll mounted.

This year, in our fourth biennial Prize cycle, we received 2,826 applications, more than double the previous record. In part, the disruption of traditional grantmaking programs helped drive this surge of interest. Yet the pandemic also threw inequities into stark relief, spurring innovators to address urgent needs such as a lack of preventative health care for vulnerable populations, a shortage of affordable housing, and uneven access to life-sustaining parks and open spaces. At the same time, the other social-justice storyline that dominated the past two years—the Black Lives Matter movement—galvanized Black- and survivor-led organizations to center racial justice as they sought to counter generational cycles of harm.

All these currents have come together in a round of applications marked by outstanding quality and rigor. More than ever, innovators are reaching across disciplines, focus areas, and professional silos, forging multilayered approaches that integrate ideas in service of big, bold solutions. Critically, many of the applicants we’ve highlighted in the pages that follow use community-rooted collaboration as the basis for tools that provide new pathways for historically underrepresented peoples to create collective change.

As in previous rounds of the Prize, we selected ten awardees to receive up to \$175,000 each over three years. Throughout their Prize term, these innovators will have access to peer learning opportunities and the Fund’s resource network to help sustain their journey. Though we could only elevate ten awardees, we’ve found many more worthy of support, and have surfaced insights from the entire pool of applicants in this report. Lastly, our afterword spotlights the inspiring stories of three prior awardees who parried the pandemic by leaning into risk and throwing lifelines to vulnerable communities when the stakes could not have been higher.

The Takeaways

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1

Social justice is reshaping environmental practice.

From its inception, The J.M.K. Innovation Prize has encouraged the cross-pollination of ideas that span disciplines and boundaries—those eureka moments sparked when unconventional approaches align to create outsize impacts. While our past awardees have often honed hybrid strategies, this year’s applicants have unleashed, hands down, a surge of category-busting ingenuity. Indeed, the share of applicants targeting more than one of the Fund’s focus areas doubled this year, while those addressing all three funding areas tripled. At a moment when many social activists are examining the roots of inequity, it’s clear that traditional silos of knowledge are being shaken. “One reason things are looking more interdisciplinary is that the worldview that set colonialism and capitalism in place is being questioned,” noted Brittany Koteles, director of Nuns & Nones, a Prize awardee. “There is room for people to declare new worldviews, and that’s going to take a much more integrated approach.”

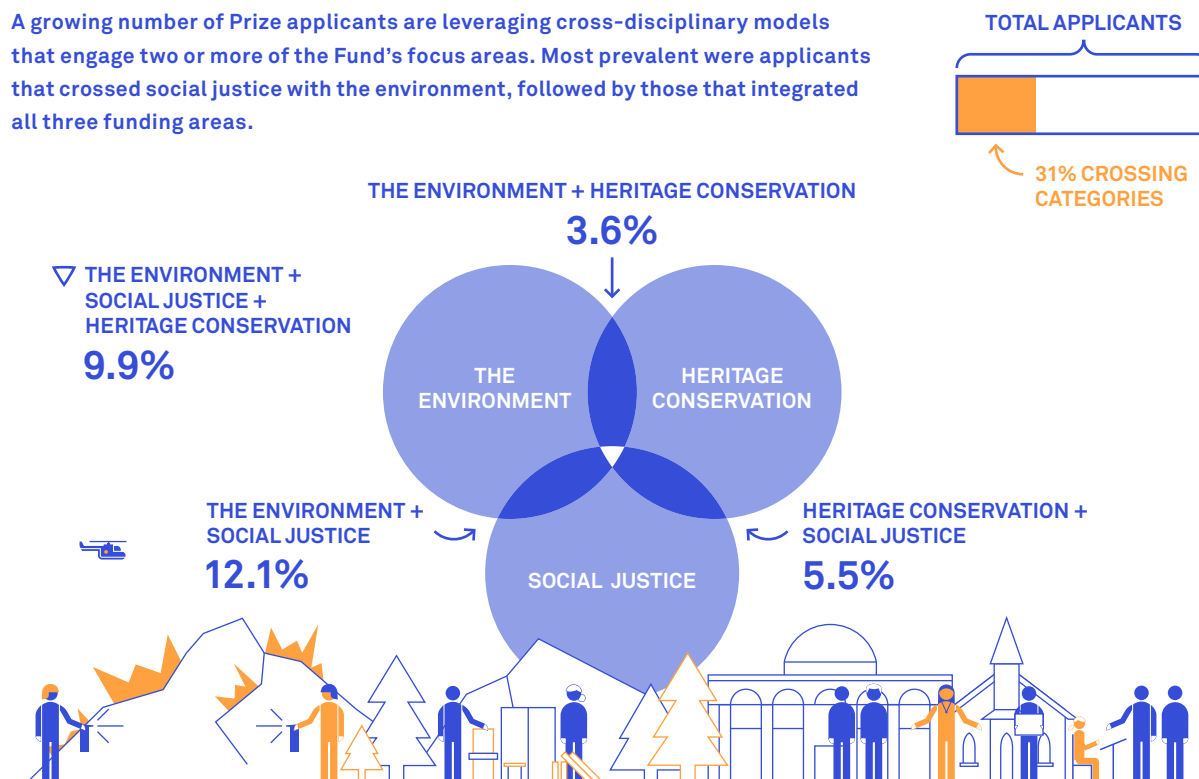
Nowhere has this shift been more notable than in applications focused on the environment. More than one in five applicants to this year’s Prize

identified with the environment and at least one other funding area, with a significant number pairing the environment and social justice. One such awardee, the Forestry and Fire Recruitment Program, responds to California’s wildfire crisis by providing reentry and career support to people formerly serving in inmate fire crews, creating pathways to jobs in wildfire fighting. Others are pursuing more community-centered approaches, such as awardee Cambium Carbon, which regenerates urban forests while creating green jobs. And a strong showing among initiatives that are Indigenous-led or focused on Indigenous land has brought a reparations ethic to efforts that address environmental challenges, while often serving to strengthen democracy and safeguard heritage as well.

For its part, Nuns & Nones seeks to collaborate with religious institutions, many of which are discerning the future of their expansive land holdings as their communities age. If land owned by religious communities were equitably transferred to food sovereignty collectives, for example, it could advance social justice goals that many

A surge of category-spanning ingenuity

A growing number of Prize applicants are leveraging cross-disciplinary models that engage two or more of the Fund's focus areas. Most prevalent were applicants that crossed social justice with the environment, followed by those that integrated all three funding areas.



Catholic sisters have long championed. “By moving land stewardship into regenerative purposes, sisters can transfer thousands of acres directly into the climate justice movement,” Koteles explained, “while supporting the marginalized communities and ecological repair that they’ve been fighting for across decades.”

While meaningfully advancing environmental resilience and social justice, this model could also conserve cultural heritage on a large scale. “There are thousands of heritage-related religious properties across the country that have no current use,” said Mary Anthony, executive director of The 1772 Foundation and a Prize reviewer. “This is something that could be looked at across the board for churches and synagogues and masonic temples that are struggling to find a renewed purpose.”



Nuns & Nones works with Catholic sisters to promote regenerative land stewardship. (Photo: Nuns & Nones)

2

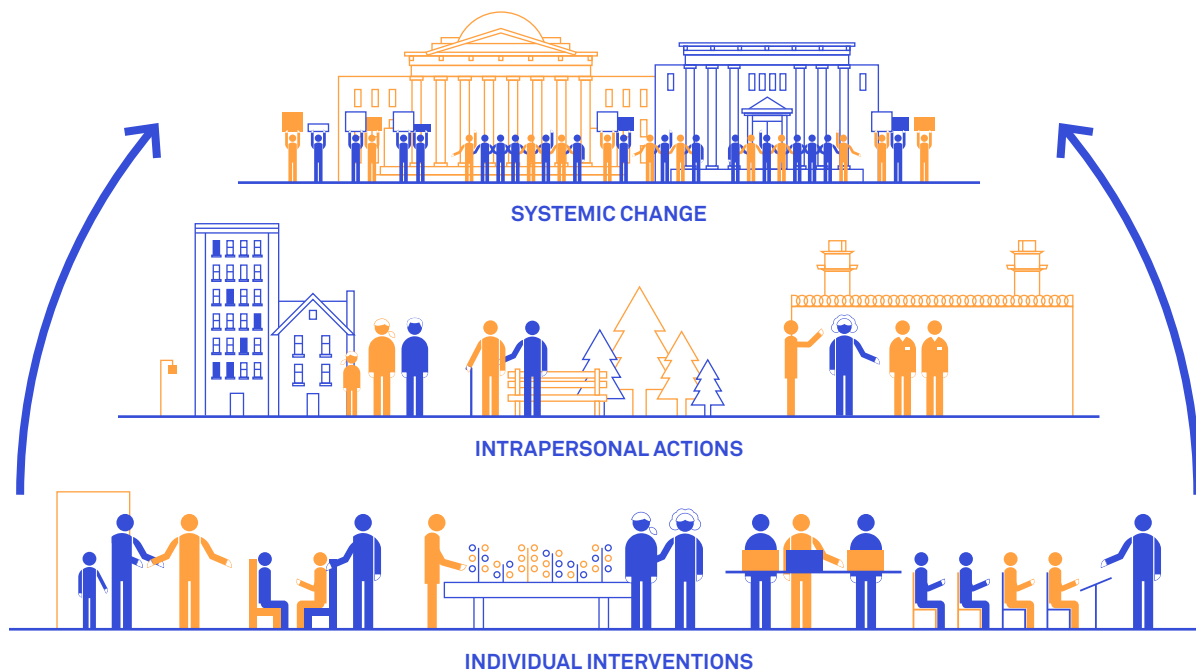
Multilayered new models center race-based trauma.

The nationwide upwelling of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 shook the social justice world as much as it did the cities of Ferguson, Minneapolis, New York, and beyond. The activism that helped define this soul-searing moment has encouraged innovators to look deeply into the roots of racial trauma as they tackle enduring social challenges. This year, reflecting across-the-board interest in serving communities of color, 39% of all Prize applications addressed the needs of BIPOC populations, while 18% specifically referenced Black Lives Matter. What distinguished applicants to this round was an urge not just to end policing or the legal system as we know it, but to figure out what comes next. “What I saw in these applications were solutions-oriented approaches where innovators are identifying what would actually deliver safety and fairness, and heal our communities,” said Insha Rahman, vice president of advocacy and partnerships at the Vera Institute of Justice. “That’s a level of creativity and ingenuity that was many years in the making, but really went into overdrive this past year.”

Just as for environmental innovators, we found the most compelling ideas to advance racial justice are those that weave together multilayered strategies for maximum impact. For example, the Freedom Community Center in St. Louis, a Prize awardee, integrates restorative justice with personal healing and broad-based advocacy to transform communities. “Unlike many other violence prevention or advocacy organizations, we’re positioned as a fusion of individual, intrapersonal, and systemic intervention,” explained Mike Milton, the Center’s executive director. Milton and his staff—all of whom are violence survivors—know first-hand what it takes to overcome ingrained injustice and build accountability. “It starts with therapy, mentors, practical things like getting a job,” Milton said. But the critical next step is to understand how personal healing can be leveraged to spur system-shifting change. “The work that we do is really about how we turn trauma into power,” he added. “Because we know that the opposite of trauma isn’t healing, it is power—and how we can use that power to divest from systems that continue the generational trauma cycle.”

Neighborhood-rooted restorative justice

The Freedom Community Center puts communities at the heart of a three-tiered healing, harm reduction, and repair process. Where many restorative-justice programs are driven by district attorneys, the Center prioritizes neighborhood-led oversight and accountability.



To keep people out of the criminal legal system, the Center oversees a survivor-centered restorative justice process that includes pre-trial and pre-charge diversion for those accused of doing harm. Notably, the neighborhood-based process is driven by community members rather than district attorneys within the court system. And finally, the Center galvanizes policy and legislative change through the support of campaigns such as Close the Workhouse, which defunded the biggest jail in St. Louis and diverted those funds to rebuilding neighborhoods—a win that for the first time put the city’s system-impacted people of color in charge of their own destiny.



For communities of color in St. Louis, personal transformation is the basis for system-scale change. (Photo: Freedom Community Center)

3

Savvy public engagement opens pathways to power.

In 2019, the Fund made a significant shift in its social justice giving toward ensuring that new Americans, people of color, and disenfranchised communities could fully participate in our democracy. This year, Prize applicants responded with an avalanche of ideas showing how power and pluralism can be cultivated through voter-access, civic-engagement, and place-based initiatives that solve local democracy challenges across divides. What unites these efforts is a sense that solutions must first be nurtured at the local level if they are to spark large-scale change. “We are living through a time of unprecedented attacks on democracy, and now more than ever those local leaders, and those innovative projects, need resources,” said Cristina Tzintzún Ramirez, a Prize reviewer, 2017 awardee, and now the executive director at NextGen America. “Ultimately, it will be ordinary citizens who determine the future and health of American democracy.”

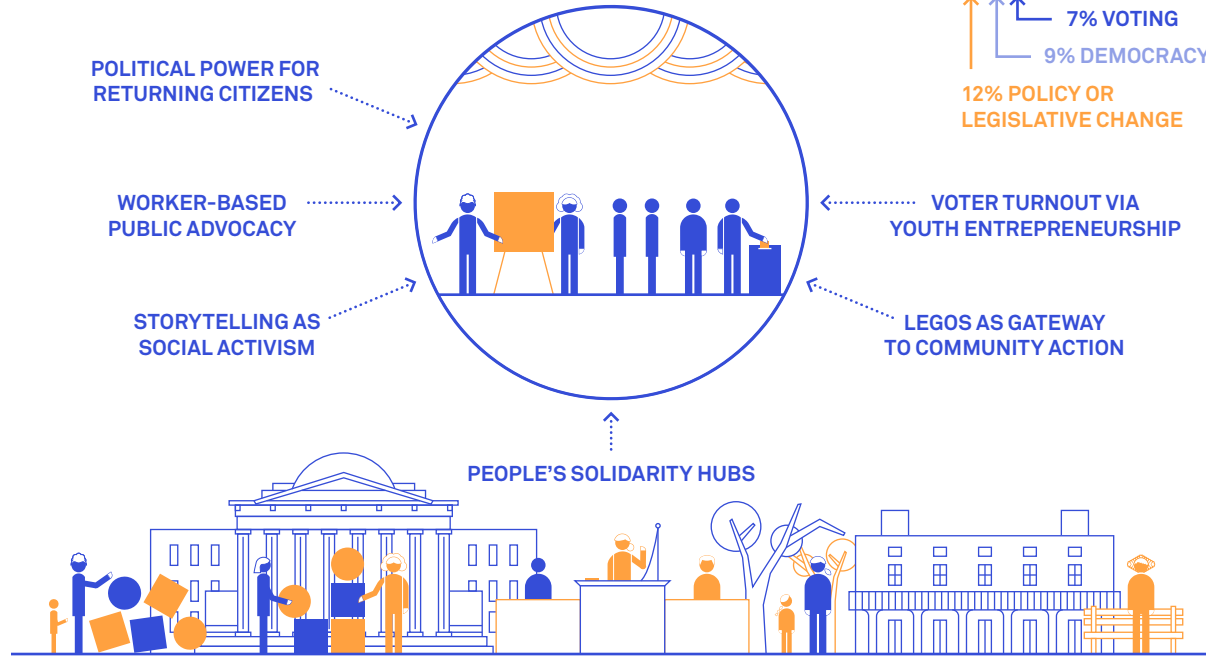
This round’s applications abound in creative ways to seek out and inspire those citizens, from arts-driven bootcamps for future city council leaders to programs that break down barriers for moms

seeking public office. Among the most resonant were those that draw inspiration from the intersectionality of issues facing people left out of the political process. In New Orleans, for example, at least 700,000 Black women are eligible to vote, but fewer than a quarter of them are considered voters. “That’s a large gap, and there was a recognition that traditional voter engagement tactics weren’t working,” said Nia Weeks, founder of Citizen S.H.E., a Prize finalist. By listening to the women around her, Weeks hit upon the power of storytelling as a way to shape political consciousness. “If we create a space where people can restructure narratives, we can chip away at the barriers that prevent us from being civically engaged,” she explained.

Through multifaceted activities—video interviews, wine talks, art projects, law review articles, and more—Citizen S.H.E. uses storytelling as a springboard to reach the group’s goal of 300,000 Black women who are ongoing civic participants. Most successful to date has been a series highlighting the theme of hair. Black women may disagree about criminal justice reform, Weeks found, but they all have a story about their hair, whether of

Beyond the voting booth

Tried-and-true voter outreach efforts are being boldly reimaged in ways that strengthen democracy. Whether it's advocacy campaigns embedded in storytelling or the use of mariachi bands to build civic action, creative approaches abound.



joy, pride, or discrimination. “We photographed 200 women, told their stories, and did a conference,” she recalled, “all utilizing this standpoint so we can start having deeper conversations and build a base.” The effort burgeoned into a state-spanning movement to pass CROWN Acts ending race-based hair discrimination. Hair thus becomes a kind of “trojan horse” that opens the door to community-rooted political action. “Using that as an entry point,” Weeks said, “we can discuss all of these other things to create an agenda that is collective and inclusive.”



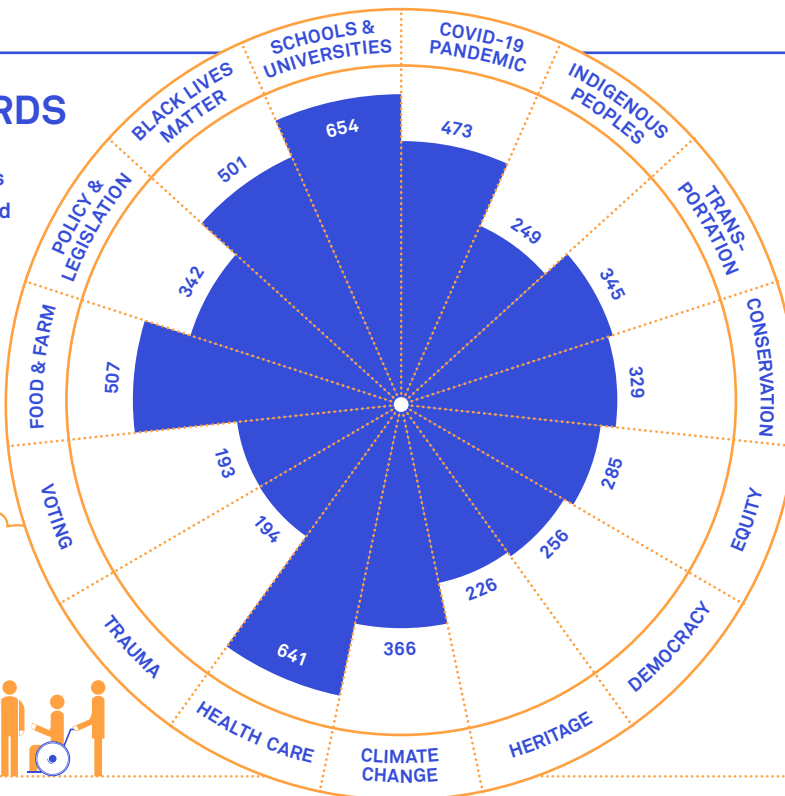
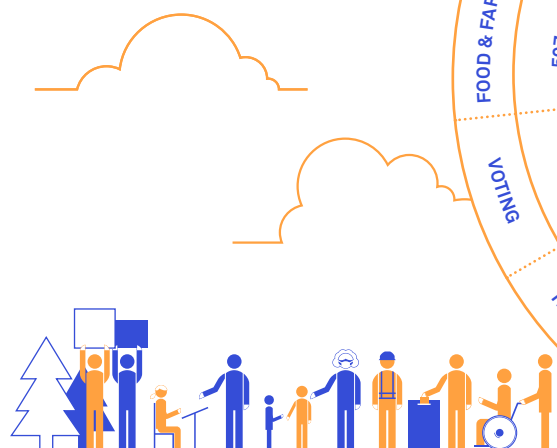
Citizen S.H.E. nurtures civic participation among Black women in New Orleans. (Photo: Citizen S.H.E.)

The J.M.K. Innovation Prize: By the numbers

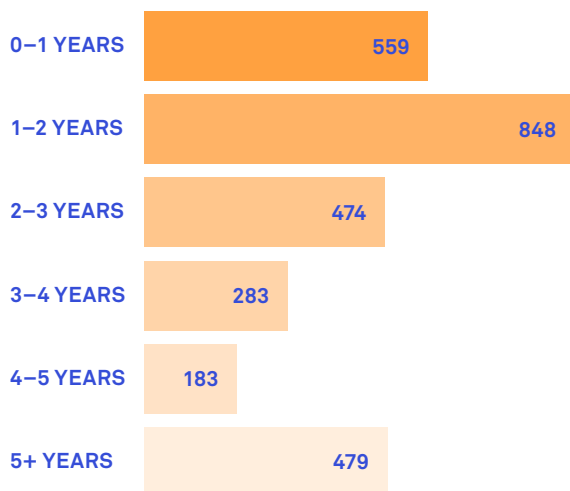
Across this year's 2,826 applications, innovators nurtured novel ideas—fully half of which came from organizations less than two years old—that spanned diverse target populations, geographic scales, and issue areas.

APPLICATION KEYWORDS

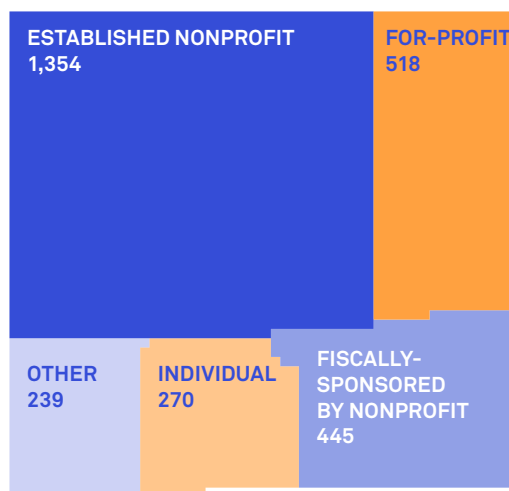
Applicants referenced words or phrases that touched on a range of key social and environmental themes.



LENGTH OF TIME ON IDEA

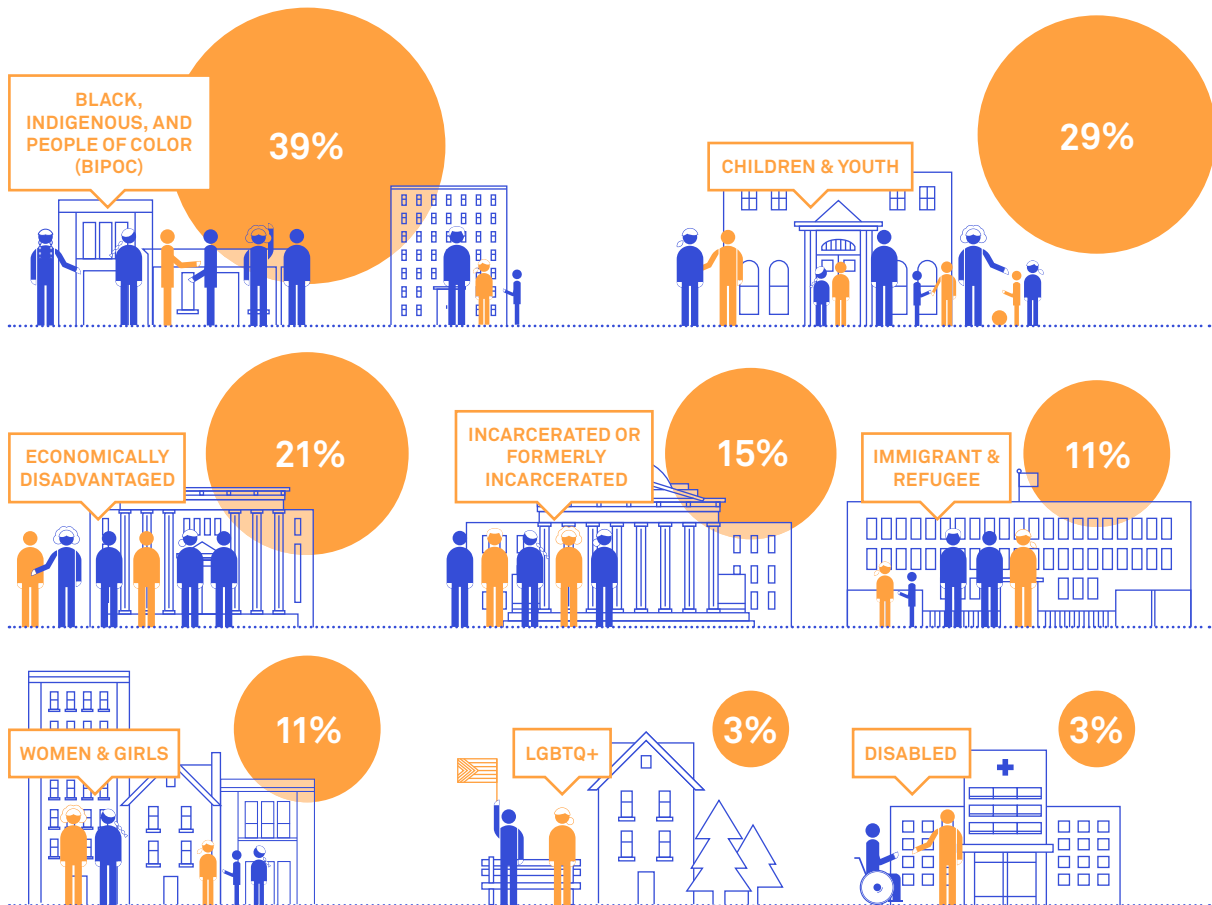


ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE

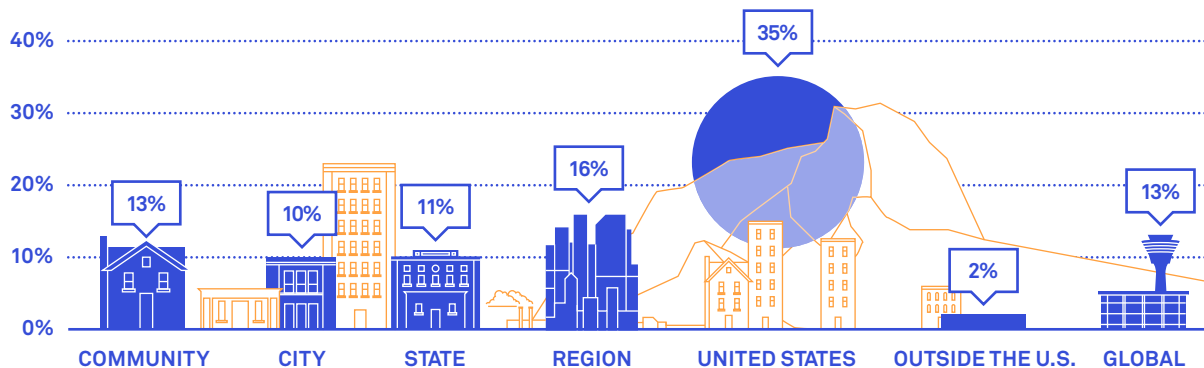


TARGET POPULATION

Percentages indicate the number of applications that reference each target population. The total exceeds 100%, as some applicants seek to impact more than one social or demographic group.



GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE



4

Advancing language justice supercharges resilience.

Across its many dimensions, language justice emerged as a powerfully compelling thread among this round of Prize applicants. Amid growing attention to BIPOC populations and justice-informed social practice, innovators are finding that language justice crosses cultural preservation with an array of social and environmental impacts. “As Indigenous rights become a broader human rights issue, the obviousness of helping people keep their languages alive is clearer to more people,” explained Daniel Bögre Udell, cofounder of Prize awardee Wikitongues. If language contains humanity’s spiritual, cultural, and ecological knowledge, then it can be leveraged to create new pathways to environmental sustainability, heritage preservation, and self-determination. For example, Wikitongues seeks to build a “language revitalization accelerator” that gives marginalized people resources to launch sustainable mother-tongue projects in their communities. Such efforts can spur significant impacts, from boosting education performance and advancing class mobility to stemming substance abuse. Moreover, because cultures have unique expressions reflecting their natural environments, preserving threatened languages directly supports

biodiversity and resource conservation. “When we keep language alive, we literally keep knowledge of the natural world alive,” Bögre Udell said.

Other applicants are using language justice to advance disability rights and bolster democracy. Awardee HEARD centers language and disability justice to support incarcerated and formerly incarcerated deaf/disabled people, who face unique challenges in the criminal legal system. Pervasive lack of access throughout carceral settings deepens social and linguistic isolation for incarcerated deaf/disabled people, who face persistent abuse and neglect. HEARD’s holistic reentry program provides peer support, direct services, and harm reduction education for these historically underserved and multiply marginalized communities. With few accessible resources in American Sign Language or other sign languages that inform deaf/disabled people about how the criminal legal system works, HEARD is developing signs for social justice–related English words that currently have no sign equivalents—such as “mass incarceration” and “abolition”—as part of their efforts to support deaf/disabled people who were recently released.

Language as culture capsule

A community's vocabulary traces and sustains its history. Here is a selection of words reflecting the diversity of Afro-Seminole Creole, a threatened language with roots across Africa, Europe, and the Americas. Today, perhaps two dozen speakers remain in parts of Texas, Oklahoma, and Mexico.



“We’re working with currently and formerly incarcerated individuals to create a reentry library for those who are reentering as deaf, disabled, or deaf/blind, so they have access to important information to succeed in life,” explained Talila “TL” Lewis, HEARD’s cofounder and executive director.

Similarly providing life-critical language support to vulnerable populations, awardee Respond Crisis Translation has mobilized 2,500 language activists who provide trauma-informed interpretation and translation services for anyone experiencing language barriers. “Language is often weaponized intentionally to justify detention and deportation,” noted Respond founder and codirector Ariel Koren. Whether translating migrant detention policies into Mam, K’iche’, and Haitian Creole, or

interpreting pro bono legal hotlines in Punjabi and Bangla, Respond is ending nightmares for asylum-seekers while lifting up language democracy—all while creating jobs for high-demand translators in communities that lack economic opportunities.



Wikitongues documents the Amazonian language Shipibo, spoken by Lima-based textile artist Luz Linda Franco Ahanari. (Photo: Michelle Faviola Ralph-Fortón)

5

Schools can be reborn as civic infrastructure.

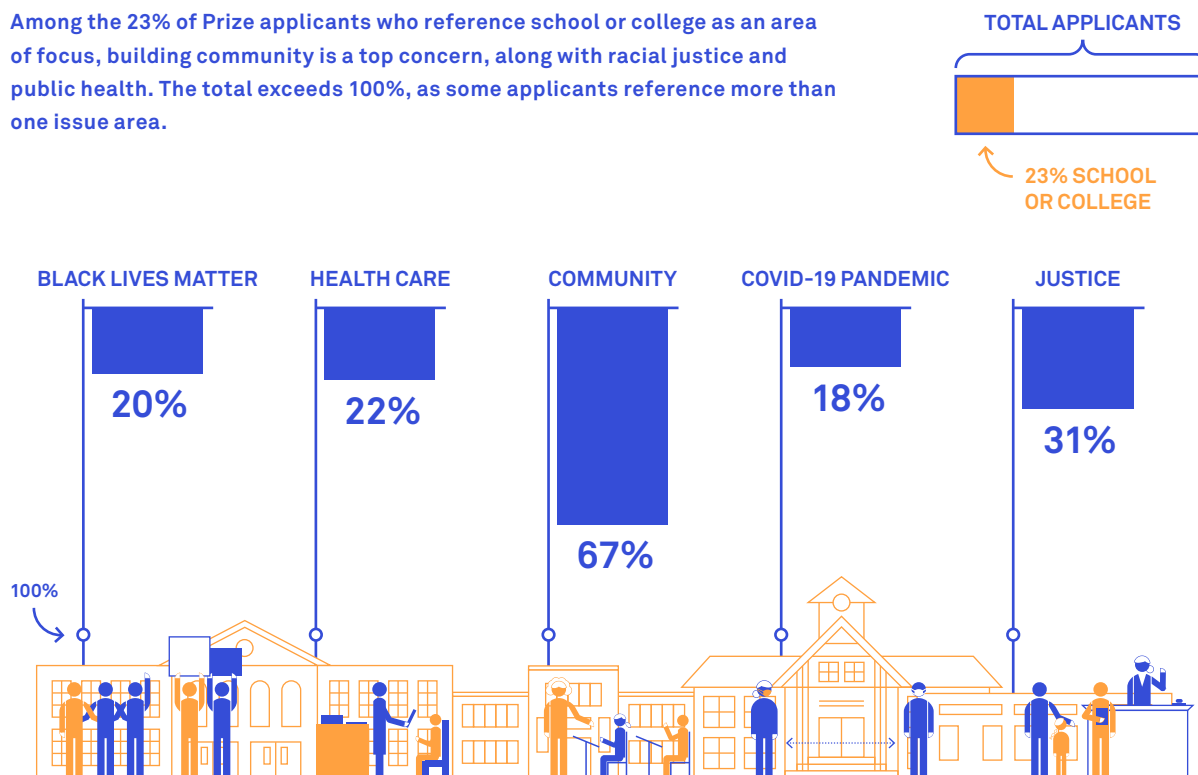
As educational institutions respond to rising calls for social justice from the communities they serve—with K-12 schools particularly roiled by debates over racism and equity—applicants to this round of the Prize are exploring ways that schools of all sorts can be reborn as centers of neighborhood power. Overall, 23% of applications reference schools and universities as an area of focus, while 28% reference education. Some are turning high schools into community-minded sustainability hubs, using project-based curricula that send students on missions to curb climate change by building gardens or banning single-use plastics. Others are addressing economic mobility in communities of color through a dual-generation approach that pairs education for children and career training for adults, rethinking the linkage between school and community success. And a Black-led collective of classroom educators is building a school-based racial justice movement to help students propel real-world change.

Innovators like these show how educators and activists can leverage the sizable assets of school, college, and university systems to attain social

justice goals. “You’d be surprised at how many resources are sitting unused at college campuses,” said Diya Abdo, founder and director of Every Campus A Refuge (ECAR), a Prize awardee. From vacant apartments to fleets of bicycles, underutilized university assets are ripe for repurposing, along with ample services at the ready: “We’re a small city that has everything you need to host a refugee family,” Abdo explained. “There’s housing, classes, wedding venues, clinics, and cafeterias—all in the same place.” Initially launched at Guilford College, a small Quaker institution in North Carolina, ECAR is a model initiative built around the needs, agency, and dignity of new arrivals. In hosting refugees on campus, the program takes a “whole person” approach that foregrounds mental and physical health, economic mobility, and more to ensure that they thrive. Language departments pair hosted families with student language learners; campus meal plans are made available; and refugee artists enjoy access to studios and galleries. When they’re financially ready—typically after about five months—they’re assisted with rent and utilities to secure a home of their choosing.

The campus as community nexus

Among the 23% of Prize applicants who reference school or college as an area of focus, building community is a top concern, along with racial justice and public health. The total exceeds 100%, as some applicants reference more than one issue area.



To date, ECAR has hosted more than a hundred refugees, with eight campuses now embracing the program. The potential is vast: if just 10% of America’s universities hosted one family of average size, that would provide supportive integration to 20,000 refugees over a short few years. At the same time, ECAR persuasively meets student demands that their own institutions be held accountable for systemic injustices. “At small liberal arts institutions, there is an existential crisis,” Abdo said. “How are we relevant? And how do we interest students? ECAR is a way to show that we are reconceptualizing what a campus can be.”



Campus communities abound in resources to welcome and support refugees. (Photo: Kat Miller)

6

Black women are catalyzing large-scale change.

Reclaiming an entire city block—house by restored house—is not easy work in West Baltimore, or anywhere else. But that’s exactly what Black Women Build – Baltimore, a Prize awardee, has set out to do, using a combination of homeownership and construction skills-building as a platform for transformation that centers Black women. In a city rich with cultural assets and yet challenged by a history of racial exclusion, restoring houses counts as social justice, and then some. “In an area of town that was ground zero for redlining, this is important work,” said Shelley Halstead, the organization’s founder and executive director. “We show that these houses can and will be better used as homes instead of empty lots after demolition.”

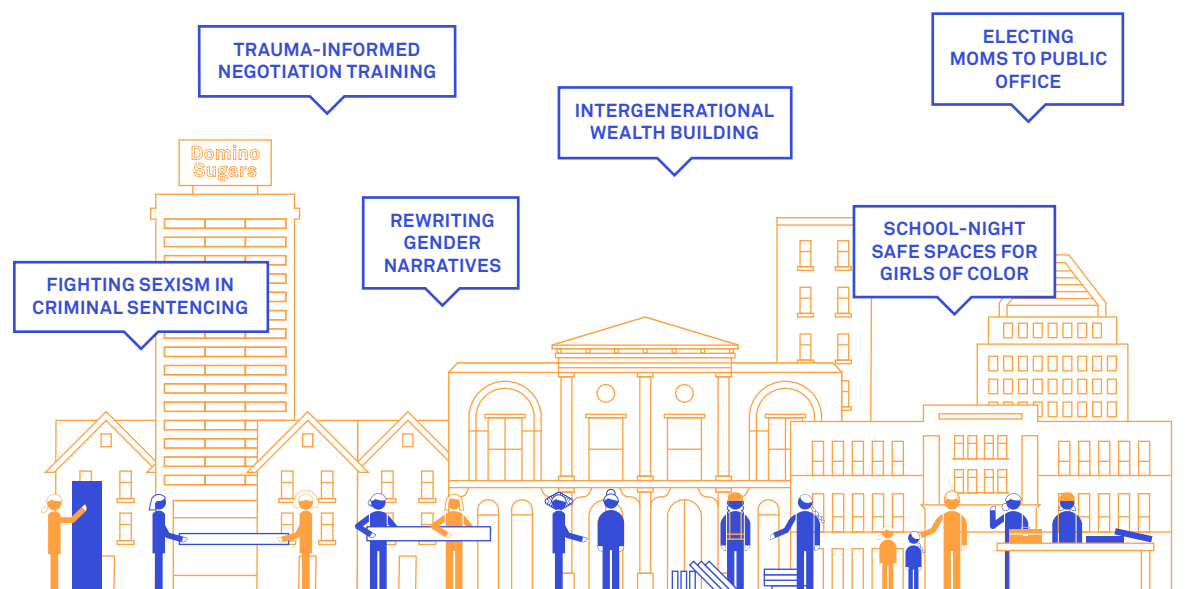
By helping women become owners of the properties they’ve renovated, Black Women Build’s model supports their financial success while forging new connections on a civic scale. Restoring homes in clusters, and working with cohorts of Black women who learn valuable construction trades, the project connects personal growth with urban-scale impact. “It’s construction with an ethos around community,” Halstead explained. “You have that physical

foundation of the house, and then you’re building the foundation of community with women who have worked together side-by-side.” While conserving heritage in a local historic district, the effort also addresses a nationwide shortage of skilled construction workers—something that can be replicated in areas with distressed housing and opportunity for jobs. Meanwhile, Halstead has embarked on a nearby project to create live/work artist spaces and a café, leveraging proximity to Baltimore’s Black Arts District and its growing ecosystem for Black creatives. By focusing on built resources, Black Women Build makes the presence of place central to social-justice solutions. “It’s critical to acknowledge that the built fabric of a place can be part of the innovation,” said Justin Garrett Moore, program officer at the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and a Prize reviewer. “This project uses historic preservation tools in a direct and intentional way to address social and economic harm—in this case to improve the lives and outcomes of Black women.”

Indeed, as with Citizen S.H.E.’s campaign to mobilize Black women in New Orleans (see Takeaway 3),

A women-centered civic toolbox

Applicants proposed diverse strategies for lifting up women and girls of color while building community-wide grassroots power, including tools to end systemic poverty, fight gender-based discrimination, support system-involved women, and more.



Black Women Build is part of a group of Prize applicants who are using inventive approaches to lift up women of color. To cite just a few examples: Formerly incarcerated women are receiving trauma-informed negotiation training that reduces violence and grows community stability. Democracy advocates like the Vote Mama Foundation are dismantling barriers to moms running for office. And an intersectional movement is using personal narratives to fight gender-based discrimination in criminal sentencing. Taken together, these innovators show how supporting the collective leadership and advocacy of women of color can unlock community-wide change.



In Baltimore, construction skills are a foundation for building Black women's social and economic power.

(Photo: Tonika Garibaldi)

7

Labor activists have reframed the future of work.

The J.M. Kaplan Fund traces its roots to one of America’s pioneering agricultural cooperatives, which Jacob Merrill Kaplan forged when he bought the Welch Grape Juice Company and converted it, in 1956, to a farmer-owned co-op that spanned eleven states and one thousand grape growers. In Kaplan’s words, cooperative ownership represented “a pooling of interests for the common good”—a phrase that remains a lodestar for the Fund’s work today. It’s fitting, then, that this round of the Prize found innovators marshaling new modes of organizing and labor empowerment, along with creative economic models that stake out a more just future of work.

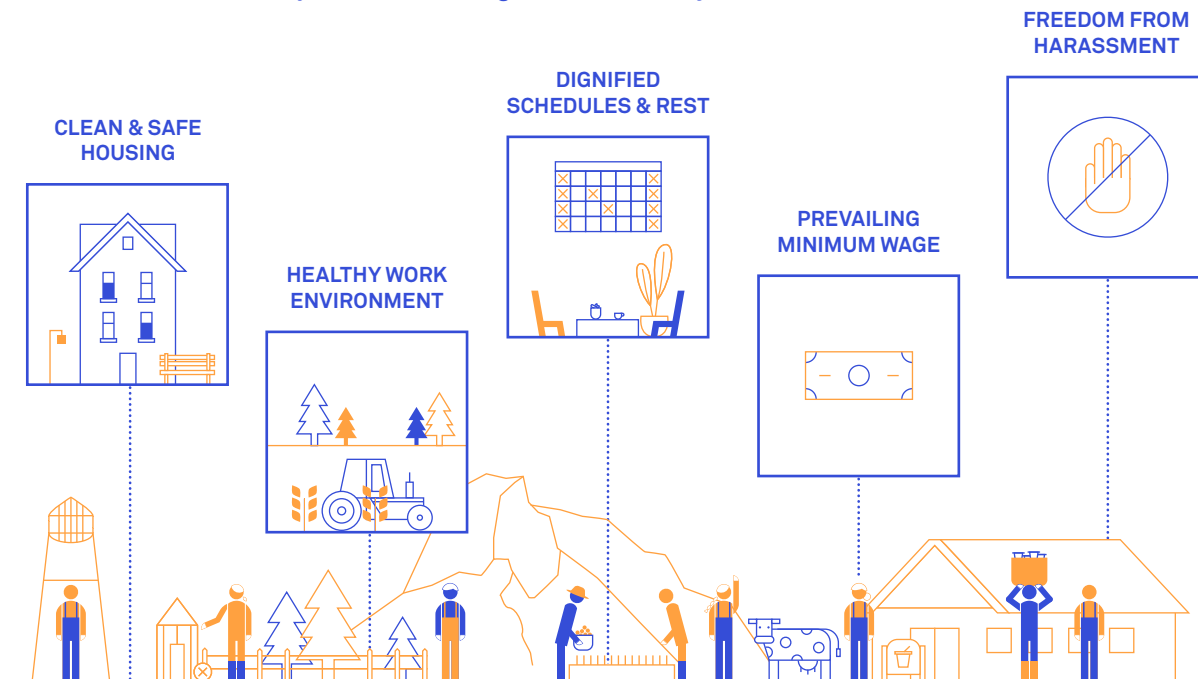
In Ohio, awardee Co-op Dayton is proving that collective worker power can transform communities through a “cooperative ecosystem.” As in other cities across the Midwest, majority Black neighborhoods in segregated Dayton have suffered from disinvestment and dwindling access to goods and services such as grocery stores and health care. In response, Co-op Dayton’s incubator program nurtures worker-owned enterprises through assistance with access to capital, business development,

and advocacy tools that can boost neighborhood resilience. The upshot is a coordinated worker movement that creates jobs, renovates buildings, and—through a culture of ownership—reconnects people to civic power.

Bringing worker-focused innovation to a rural, border state, Prize finalist Milk with Dignity echoes J.M. Kaplan’s interest in uplifting farmworkers—in this case, addressing injustice in the Vermont dairy industry. As in other rural places, undocumented workers amount to a captive labor force in Vermont, reluctant to speak out about abusive practices. Seeking a solution, Milk with Dignity was formed by worker-led group Migrant Justice with advice and support from the Coalition of Immokalee Workers in Florida. In this model, large buyers of dairy products use their leverage to ensure dignified conditions at the farms that supply them. Each buyer agrees to a Code of Conduct, and pays a premium that helps cash-strapped farmers upgrade housing, for example, or correct hazardous work conditions. Having brought Ben & Jerry’s into the program in 2017, Milk with Dignity now covers about 20% of Vermont’s dairy industry,

Cultivating social responsibility

Milk with Dignity’s innovative model brings together farmers and industry leaders to address labor abuses in the dairy industry—offering a template for how workers can collectively advance human rights and economic justice.



or more than 50 farms. “We take a supply-chain approach,” explained Thelma Gómez, a Migrant Justice organizer and a former Vermont dairy worker. “When we sign an agreement with a company at the top of the supply chain, that brings their farms into the program.” Having nurtured close relationships with farmworkers, the team is now working to bring new buyers on board, and eyeing even greater aspirations. “The long-term vision is, this becomes the industry standard,” said Gómez. “Wherever you find a dairy farm, that farm is going to be abiding by Milk with Dignity.” Through this vision of collective action, Gómez and her colleagues are transforming an industry characterized by human rights violations into one where dignified conditions are the norm.



A first-of-its-kind partnership helps protect immigrant workers in the Vermont dairy industry. (Photo: Terry Allen)

Beyond the Awards

Pandemic Pivot

When the world ground to a halt in early 2020, amid a global crisis that sundered lives and jobs, many in the philanthropic and not-for-profit sectors were bedeviled by a sense that missions would need to be rewired to meet new social needs. Among awardees of The J.M.K. Innovation Prize, that proved fiercely true as innovators faced not just the uncertain future of their own organizations, but the very survival of the communities they serve. Here, three awardees from prior rounds of the Prize share their experiences, showing how amid its manifold impacts, the COVID-19 pandemic ignited new opportunities and tested innovators in ways that only redoubled their resolve.

For The Industrial Commons, a 2017 awardee based in western North Carolina, a worldwide shortage of personal protective equipment offered a critical opportunity for the region's textile, furniture, and related manufacturers. Working with a network of values-aligned companies through its Carolina Textile District initiative, the group seized the moment for the benefit of all. "Everything we do is from a need," said Sara Chester, co-executive director of The Industrial Commons. Or in this case, two needs: a surging demand for protective gear, and a desire by local textile producers to get idle machines humming while supporting public-health efforts. More than 80 partners ultimately joined a coordinated project to produce

and distribute face masks and gowns across North Carolina. Since 2019, the initiative has sewn more than 500,000 pieces of protective equipment, while saving nearly 100 jobs and unlocking still other opportunities, including a large state contract that funded purchases by school systems, hospitals, and community colleges. With Kaplan support, 14,000 masks were also sent directly to social-justice and democracy-building groups across the country. Membership in the Carolina Textile District has now more than doubled to 25, and this year the group won another state contract to produce 100,000 clear masks for preschool teachers, daycare workers, and others. "Having these collective contracts is something that the District has dreamed about for years, but we were never poised to make it happen," Chester explained. "When you have a moment like the pandemic, you either step away from risk or you lean into it. Because we have that entrepreneurial mindset, our inclination was to lean into solving the problem."

Such was the thinking of South Dakota Voices for Peace (SDVFP), a 2019 awardee thrust into COVID-19 response when an outbreak shuttered a large pork-processing plant in Sioux Falls. Fear spread among the plant's overwhelmingly immigrant workforce, which counted few English speakers and scant resources to navigate the shut-down—a challenge deepened by South Dakota

law, which bans local government from translating English materials into other languages. Enter SDVFP executive director Taneeza Islam, who mobilized a rapid-response translation team and helped launch a coalition to assist the area’s multilingual community. The most immediate need was clear: a relief fund to serve immigrants, refugees, and others ineligible for government pandemic assistance. Starting with \$50,000 in seed funding from Wells Fargo, the effort raised \$1.2 million over five months and sent direct relief to nearly 1,700 households. “It was an amazing show of what coalitions can do when we come together across sectors,” Islam said. There were other benefits, too: having built trust through its direct relief work, SDVFP advised schools on the transition to remote learning, and has received funding to spearhead multilingual vaccination outreach. “It has really catapulted the work that we had always envisioned for our organization, which is community outreach,” Islam added. “That work will continue to build power in our communities.” In part due to this experience, Islam has been inspired to run for mayor of Sioux Falls, announcing her candidacy in 2021 and aiming to shape even greater change on a civic scale.

On-the-ground collaboration was key for 2019 awardee ImmSchools, which strives to ensure that schools are safe, inclusive spaces for undocumented and mixed-status students and families. To support frontline communities during the pandemic, they expanded their services to include direct relief, yet only after reaching out to fifty immigrant or undocumented families to assess their needs. “As an immigrant-led organization, we felt we couldn’t just come up with a solution,” said Viridiana Carrizales, ImmSchools cofounder and CEO. “The conversations we had with families went beyond supporting their students with virtual learning. They needed support with basic needs like food and housing,” she explained. ImmSchools



The Carolina Textile District has produced more than half a million masks and gowns to help fight the pandemic.
(Photo: Jimi Combs)

raised \$300,000 in three months to help keep families in their homes, with the lights on and food in the pantry—and a sense that they hadn’t been forgotten. “Everyone was talking about stimulus checks and unemployment, and nobody was talking about our undocumented community that couldn’t access those things,” Carrizales said. ImmSchools has now earmarked part of its budget for a resilience fund that will continue direct support for families in need. Since its launch in 2018, the organization has adopted a community-driven and holistic approach in which families most closely impacted by injustices are driving forward positive change. The pandemic gave ImmSchools the opportunity to fully step into their mission and uplift the power and voices of undocumented families and students in a time of crisis.

Altogether, the events of the past two years demonstrate that innovators can serve vulnerable populations through a combination of trust-building, creative alliances, and a relish for risk-taking where others fear to tread.

The Awardees

Black Women Build – Baltimore

SHELLEY HALSTEAD

Maryland

blackwomenbuild.org

Cambium Carbon

BEN CHRISTENSEN, MARISA REPKA

District of Columbia *(Operating nationwide)*

cambiumcarbon.com

Co-op Dayton

LELA KLEIN, AMAHA SELASSIE

Ohio

coopdayton.org

Every Campus A Refuge

DIYA ABDO

North Carolina *(Operating nationwide)*

everycampusarefuge.net

Forestry and Fire Recruitment Program

SARA SINDIJA, BRANDON SMITH

California

forestryfirerp.org

Freedom Community Center

MIKE MILTON

Missouri

freedomstl.org

HEARD

ESPERANZA DILLARD, TALILA “TL” LEWIS

Nationwide

behearddc.org

Nuns & Nones

BRITTANY KOTELES

Wisconsin *(Operating nationwide)*

nunsandnones.org

Respond Crisis Translation

ARIEL KOREN, FERNANDA DE OLIVEIRA SILVA

California *(Operating globally)*

respondcrisistranslation.org

Wikitongues

DANIEL BÖGRE UDELL, KRISTEN TCHERNESHOFF

New York *(Operating globally)*

wikitongues.org

About The J.M. Kaplan Fund

The J.M. Kaplan Fund champions transformative social, environmental, and cultural causes through inventive grantmaking. Established in 1945 by philanthropist and businessman Jacob Merrill Kaplan, the Fund has since its inception been committed to visionary innovation.

Over more than three generations of family stewardship, the Fund has devoted \$280 million to propel fledgling efforts concerning civil liberties, human rights, the arts, and the conservation and enhancement of the built and natural worlds.

Today, the Fund is active across the United States and beyond, operating grant programs focusing on the environment, heritage conservation, and social justice. To continue its legacy of catalytic giving, in 2015 the Fund launched The J.M.K. Innovation Prize, 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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Rachel Herzing

Seth Horstmeyer

Sean Johnson

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Insha Rahman

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