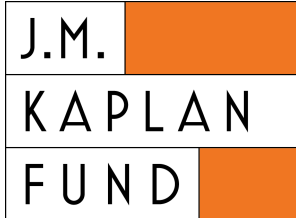


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J.M.K. Innovation Prize Awarded to 10 Social and Environmental Projects with Transformative Potential

Field of 3,200+ Applications and Support from 500+ Volunteer Reviewers Demonstrate a Nation Eager to Drive Change

New York City, November 30, 2023 – [The J.M. Kaplan Fund](#) today announced the results of its nationwide search for the most promising early-stage projects in the fields of the environment, heritage conservation, and social justice. After a collaborative review of 3,209 applications—by far the most submissions since the Prize launched in 2015—the Fund awarded its biennial [J.M.K. Innovation Prize](#) to 10 organizations with the potential to make a significant, lasting impact on America’s most pressing challenges. The 2023 awardees are making strides in critical areas such as reforming the police and justice system, advocating for refugees and undocumented immigrants, and dismantling systemic barriers faced by people of color and people with disabilities.

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JMKFUND.ORG

The 2023 Prize awardees are:

- **The Appellate Project**, Juvaria Khan
- **Empowerment Avenue**, Rahsaan Thomas
- **Fish in the Fields**, Deborah Moskowitz and Chance Cutrano
- **I Be Black Girl**, Ashlei Spivey
- **Material Innovation Center**, Shanon Miller and Stephanie Phillips
- **Moby**, Yoni Ronn
- **New Blue**, Kristin Daley
- **New Disabled South**, Dom Kelly
- **¡Reclamo!**, Rodrigo Camarena
- **Voices for Advancement Until Language Transformation (VAULT)**, Daniella Runyambo

Each awardee will receive a cash award of \$150,000 over three years, plus \$25,000 in technical assistance funds, for a total award of \$175,000. Awardees also join a resource network designed to support them through the challenges of a startup organization, participating in twice-yearly convenings and benefitting from peer learning, mentoring, and strategic counsel throughout their Prize term and beyond.

“This year's J.M.K. Innovation Prize recipients exemplify the ingenuity and drive necessary to confront some of our nation's most entrenched social and environmental challenges,” said **Peter W. Davidson**, Chairman of The J.M. Kaplan Fund Board of Trustees. “They represent the vanguard of social entrepreneurship and daring work being done in all 50 states, and we are thrilled to foster collaboration among these leaders and to support them on their journeys over the coming years.”

The J.M.K. Innovation Prize is awarded biennially to 10 innovators with potentially game-changing ideas to address pressing needs within the Fund's program areas: supporting vulnerable communities, mitigating climate impacts, and preserving the places communities care about most. The Prize's unrestricted funding is designed specifically to support untested pilot projects or nascent efforts, which involve a certain amount of measured risk but may ultimately lead to large-scale transformative results.

The 2023 Prize awardees were selected through an extensive evaluation process that included 538 first-round reviewers—committed volunteers who carefully assessed each application—followed by a second-round review by 30 subject matter experts.

“As a past recipient and now as a reviewer, I've experienced firsthand The J.M. Kaplan Fund's unique commitment to uplifting its awardees,” said **Dominique Morgan**, 2019 J.M.K. Innovation Prize awardee and current Director of Fund for Trans Generations at Borealis Philanthropy. “This year's cohort is poised to reshape our world with that support—they represent not just novel ideas but social and environmental justice in action.”

Since its launch in 2015, The J.M.K. Innovation Prize has provided 50 social and environmental change initiatives with valuable tools, training, and capacity-building resources, in addition to crucial funding. From this early-stage support, past awardees have grown their ideas into category-leading organizations, with recent highlights including winning \$62.8 million in the U.S. EDA's Build Back Better Regional Challenge (Brandon Dennison, 2015), a White House Fellowship (Victoria Herrman, 2017), and securing critical policy wins on behalf of 500,000 members seeking asylum across the United States (Swapna Reddy and Elizabeth Willis, 2017).

The J.M. Kaplan Fund put out its fifth call for applications for the Prize in January 2023 and by April received a record 3,209 applications, representing all 50 states as well as numerous territories and Tribal nations. With so many deserving innovators working amid converging social and environmental hardships, the Fund analyzed those proposals with an eye to forces driving creativity and potential gaps in the philanthropic landscape.

The report on this year's Prize, [*Resilient Leadership in Times of Unrelenting Change*](#), sheds light on these findings and related social trends. Along with in-depth analysis of their record-breaking number of applications, it highlights innovators drawing on ancient practices and inherited wisdom, leaders making change within the justice system, and women of color confronting bias and inequity in healthcare.

Beyond celebrating the 10 awardees, the Prize offers an opportunity to shine a spotlight on the entire pool of 3,209 applicants and the diversity and exciting potential of early-stage projects across the country. Fellow funders interested in discovering innovators who may be working on projects relevant to their communities or priority issues are invited to [contact The J.M. Kaplan Fund for the opportunity to dive into this set of proposals](#).

Meet the 2023 J.M.K. Innovation Prize Awardees:

The Appellate Project

Juvaria Khan

Washington, D.C. (Operating nationally)

theappellateproject.org

The Appellate Project (TAP) is focused on increasing diversity in our court system by equipping law students of color, particularly those most vulnerable to systemic racism, to overcome barriers to building a career in courts of appeal. Along with providing impactful resources, from legal writing workshops to mentorship, TAP engages ally attorneys and judges in its programming to foster students' visibility among those who recruit and hire future appellate attorneys.

Empowerment Avenue

Rahsaan Thomas

California (Operating nationally)

empowermentave.org

Empowerment Avenue seeks to break down barriers for aspiring creative professionals within prisons by playing an intermediary role between incarcerated artists and writers and the publishers, editors, and galleries that might be interested in featuring their work. By ensuring that incarcerated artists and writers are recognized, credited, and fairly compensated for their work, Empowerment Avenue contributes to a narrative shift that hastens the reform of the carceral system.

Fish in the Fields

Deborah Moskowitz and Chance Cutrano

California (Operating nationally)

rri.org/fish-in-the-fields

Fish in the Fields is working to address a triple threat of issues—climate change, biodiversity loss, and industrial food systems—through a unique pathway: rice and fish. To reduce methane emissions from rice production, their pilot program introduces fish to fallow rice fields in the winter. This innovative approach also creates an additional revenue stream for rural farmers—the sale of fish for feed—while reducing the demand on fish from our oceans.

I Be Black Girl

Ashlei Spivey

Nebraska

ibeblackgirl.com

I Be Black Girl seeks to create a community of living wage-earning birth workers and doulas who support Black people with the capacity for pregnancy throughout their birthing journeys. By increasing access to doula care and embedding a healing program that allows these workers to recover from their own traumatic medical experiences, this initiative seeks to reverse negative trends in Black maternal health outcomes.

Material Innovation Center

Shanon Miller and Stephanie Phillips

Texas

sareuse.com/mic

The Material Innovation Center (MIC) is reducing the amount of construction and demolition debris that ends up in landfills by salvaging and reusing valuable waste, while supporting skilled tradespeople. Organized under the City of San Antonio Office of Historic Preservation, MIC works with local reuse stores, contractors, and donors to take in excess and reclaimed materials and redistribute them for free to support affordable housing preservation and production efforts.

Moby

Yoni Ronn

New York (Operating nationally)

mobyfilter.com

Moby is dedicated to combating the growing threat of microplastics to human health and the environment. Their proprietary system traps microfibers released by laundering synthetic fabrics, making them available to be upcycled and repurposed. Moby is building strategic partnerships to deploy their solutions on a national scale and stem the flow of microplastics into our environment, oceans, and food supply.

New Blue

Kristin Daley

New Jersey (Operating nationally)

newblue.org

New Blue employs a fellowship model to help transform alienating and harmful policing practices from within. Selected from applicants across the country, police officers participate in a one-year incubator in which they seek input from their communities to identify a specific practice or policy in their department that they believe is at odds with community safety and well-being. Then, with support from New Blue leadership, dedicated researchers, and subject matter experts, they develop solutions, steps for implementation, and impact measurement plans.

New Disabled South

Dom Kelly

Georgia (Operating regionally)

newdisabledsouth.org

New Disabled South is the first and only regional organization spearheading issue advocacy, community organizing, and coalition-building focused on disabled populations. Providing a political home for disabled people in the South, this organization leverages both traditional and novel engagement methods to reach disabled people who are often ignored by other civic groups and empower them to become mobilized around key issues.

¡Reclamo!

Rodrigo Camarena

New York

reclamoapp.org

¡Reclamo! (“Reclaim!” in Spanish) is the first digital legal tool designed to automate and simplify the wage theft filing process for undocumented immigrant workers. Addressing a national epidemic that accounts for \$50 billion in annual losses, the project stands to empower workers who are most vulnerable to employer exploitation and retaliation, with support from assessing their risk for wage theft to initiating the recovery process.

Voices for Advancement Until Language Transformation (VAULT)

Daniella Runyambo

North Carolina

refugeecommunitypartnership.org

Voices for Advancement Until Language Transformation is pioneering a novel, community-led approach to improve healthcare access and address systemic language barriers for refugee and migrant patients. Currently housed within the Refugee Community Partnership in North Carolina, VAULT collaborates with patients to document their language access experiences, aids in filing Title

VI violations, and assigns a dedicated “Language Navigator” to assist them in English-dominant environments.

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 four generations of family engagement, the Fund has devoted more than \$300 million to propel fledgling efforts focused on human rights, civil liberties, equality and justice, the arts and literacy, 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 21st-century solutions to urgent social and environmental challenges. Learn more at JMKFund.org.

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