

2025

The J.M.K. Innovation Prize

The J.M.K. Innovation Prize seeks to identify and support bold problem-solvers leading transformative, early-stage projects in the fields of heritage conservation, the environment, and social justice.



Empowering Innovators to Shape Our Future

With the consequences of climate change, cultural loss, and systemic injustice at our doorstep, the urgency for social-impact organizations and community leaders to act has never been greater. Our convergent crises demand not only resilience but also creativity, ambition, and new models of change-making. At the J.M. Kaplan Fund, we believe in the power of innovators to reshape our future – and we know that this work is already underway in unexpected places and through nascent projects across the country. We created the J.M.K. Innovation Prize to help transform these bold, early-stage ideas into lasting impact.

Since 2015, over five biennial cycles, the J.M.K. Innovation Prize has supported 50 wildly creative cultural, environmental, and social initiatives. Past awardees include efforts as varied as building a “revitalization accelerator” to preserve threatened languages, transforming mining runoff and fallen trees into new economic engines, and organizing a collective of birth workers to confront health inequities. Leveraging a legacy of catalytic grant-making at the J.M. Kaplan Fund, the Prize seeks out visionary nonprofit and mission-driven for-profit organizations that work within, across, or in a manner related to one or more of the Fund’s three program areas (listed at right).

In 2025, we will award up to 10 Prizes, each including a cash award of \$150,000 over three years and \$25,000 in technical assistance funds. Awardees will also receive guidance through the Fund’s resource network, accessing hands-on training and support to help turn their ideas into sustainable growth and impact.

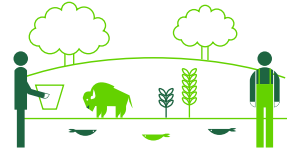
1. Heritage Conservation

Protecting the places and traditions that communities care about most.



2. The Environment

Advancing climate solutions for a more resilient, vibrant planet.



3. Social Justice

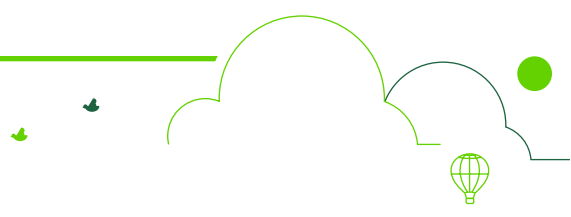
Working with communities to build a more welcoming and just society.



Designed for Bold, New Ideas

We know that there is precious little funding for untested ideas in the social innovation field. We designed the Prize to fill this gap, nurturing projects that other funders may deem too risky or unproven. Anticipating the challenges of a startup organization, awardees receive both unrestricted funding and consultative support from our staff and partners. A flexible bank of technical assistance funds also allows awardees to deploy resources when and where they’re needed most – whether that’s replacing broken equipment or paying an unexpected vendor invoice.

Above all, we know each organization must follow its own path. With its three-year term, the Prize gives awardees room to evolve at their own pace, with support tailored to their needs as innovators.



Convenings & Community

Over the last decade, we've seen firsthand how connections formed through the Prize can spark new innovations and help turn ideas to action. Over the three-year term, we bring awardees together for annual convenings that spotlight a fellow organization, foster peer learning, and offer mentoring from experts in organizational and leadership development. From Coastal California to rural Appalachia, our awardees have shared in powerful conversations and learning by being embedded in one another's work and reflecting on their role as change agents.

Throughout their Prize term and beyond, awardees also benefit from the Fund's considerable resource network. Whether providing guidance on nonprofit 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 stresses of running a startup.

“We've received several federal grants that were very strict, and the unrestricted nature of the J.M.K. Innovation Prize allowed our organization to flourish, particularly considering our focus on social-enterprise models.”

Molly Hemstreet & Sara Chester, The Industrial Commons

“Beyond providing catalytic funding for our organization, the J.M. Kaplan Fund team invested in us as individuals. We're so grateful for the support, thought partnership, and community that the Prize offered us.”

Marisa Repka & Ben Christensen, Cambium Carbon

“The J.M. Kaplan team is a family, and they made us feel like long lost brothers and sisters. Every interaction was genuine and heartfelt. I never felt like I was checking a box in anything I did for the Prize.”

Diya Abdo, Every Campus a Refuge

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 devoted more than \$300 million to date 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.

The Prize Process

Our application process is open to individuals or teams representing nonprofit or mission-driven for-profit organizations within the United States. The Prize will be awarded to projects or ideas that:

- Represent a game-changing answer to a clearly identified need;
- Innovate 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.

Most Prize awardees are organizations or fiscally sponsored projects that have been active for less than five years and operate with annual budgets of less than \$500,000. While the Prize welcomes bold ideas of all kinds, we encourage applicants to carefully consider whether their work aligns with the Prize's focus on early-stage, impactful innovation.

The first-round application will be available on the [JMKFund.org](https://www.jmkfund.org) website from February 11–April 25, 2025. Select applicants will be invited to submit a more detailed second-round application in the late spring. Finalists will present their ideas to the trustees of the J.M. Kaplan Fund in the fall, with awardees formally announced in November 2025.

Read about our previous awardees and sign up for email updates: [JMKFund.org](https://www.jmkfund.org)

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