

FINNOVATION LAB SELECTS SECOND COHORT OF SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS FOR FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

Nine Entrepreneurs Chosen for Nine-Month Program Aimed at Growing and Scaling Bold Business Ideas for Sustainable, Systems-Levels Change

MINNEAPOLIS, August 6, 2019 – [FINNOVATION Lab](#), the social business catalyst known for helping local entrepreneurs launch and scale their ventures, selected nine early-stage social entrepreneurs to make up a second cohort within the FINNOVATION Fellowship Program. The nine-month incubator kicks off this September and will support the fellows as they foster their business ideas in pursuit of lasting social impact.

The selected fellows will receive a grant of \$50,000 to cover living expenses in addition to a health insurance stipend, one-on-one mentorship, and tailored curriculum with an emphasis on leadership development and business planning and strategy. Dedicated workspace and business resources are available to the fellows in the FINNOVATION Lab space within the FINNEGANS House (817 5th Ave S. Minneapolis 55404).

The nine fellows, up from five in the first cohort, were selected from a highly competitive pool of applicants who submitted ideas for mission-driven businesses that produce sustainable, systems-level change. Applicants were exceedingly diverse across race, gender, and education compared to the 2018 pool: 57% identified as people of color, 63% female or non-binary, 18% LGBTQ+, and 38% as the first in their family to attend college. After narrowing down to 20 finalists, a panel of innovation leaders judged and scored applicant pitch presentations, looking for top contenders who demonstrated entrepreneurial spirit, leadership, resilience and passion, and business plans that showed potential for financial stability, growth, social impact, and innovation.

“Our first cohort exceeded all expectations. We saw a group of early-stage entrepreneurs, each building incredibly diverse businesses, accomplish individual goals to build something meaningful,” said Connie Rutledge, Managing Director at FINNOVATION Lab. “What we didn’t fully anticipate was the camaraderie and the team spirit within the group. When selecting our second cohort, we chose individuals with a wide range of skills and experiences, knowing they’d all bring something unique to the table.”

The second cohort of fellows includes:

- **Lyndsey Calvin:** [Ascension Medical Devices](#) is revolutionizing post-operative care for transgender women who undergo gender affirming vaginoplasty procedures through a newly developed vaginal stent.
- **Nestor Gomez Jimenez:** [Litty Solar](#) brings transactive blockchain technologies to solar panel installation, aiming to speed up the adoption of renewable energy while creating accessible employment opportunities in underserved communities.
- **La’Shante Grigsby:** Ju+Co Café, a social enterprise café, connects, employs, and inspires women of color through youth development, personalized coaching, and economic opportunities.
- **Judd Grutman:** [Vonzella](#) aims to provide mission-driven insurance products to underserved and uninsured communities, starting with bail insurance for defendants navigating the bail process.
- **Shannon TL Kearns:** [Uprising Theatre Company](#) partners with local organizations working on social justice issues to turn emotional engagement into concrete action.
- **Mohamed Malim:** [Epimonia](#) supports the education and advancement of refugees, creating employment opportunities for refugees and donating 50% of profits to non-profit partners.

- **Katie Myhre:** [RED Market](#) is an online marketplace connecting sustainable farmers with wholesalers, helping farmers deliver local products and build interdependent relationships with buyers.
- **Jules Porter:** [Seraph 7 Studios](#) develops console video games with diverse heroes and storylines and offers an applied STEAM work-study program and summer camp.
- **Alysha Price:** [The Price Dynamic](#) uses empowerment, motivational techniques, and meditation practices to support co-parenting for those working to restructure their families.

FINNOVATION Lab is the brainchild of [FINNEGANS Brew Co.](#) Founder Jacquie Berglund, an established social entrepreneur in her own right. She launched the FINNOVATION Lab following four business pillars: Leadership Development, Causes and Context of Social Problem, Human-Centered Design, and Business Planning.

“This Fellowship Program is further solidifying Minnesota as a leader in social innovation,” said Berglund. “It was hard to make our final selections because so many of our applicants were strong contenders. It’s inspiring and only makes us want to keep supporting and encouraging these types of mission-driven ideas.”

Programming for the second cohort of the Fellowship Program will run through mid-June. It is made possible through generous support from the [Bush Foundation](#), known for its commitment to innovation and creative problem solving.

More information about the FINNOVATION Lab and the Fellowship Program is available at [Finn-Lab.com](#).

About FINNOVATION Lab

FINNOVATION Lab’s mission is to create a space for intentional and constant cross-pollination of social entrepreneurship concepts, ideas and networks. Through original programming and partnerships with organizations such as the Neighborhood Development Center, the organization empowers and provides system change leaders with venture service support and access to capital increasing and accelerating their impact. For more information, visit [Finn-Lab.com](#).

