

Model City in Trying Times

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In a rousing speech to a crowded ballroom in the Roosevelt Hotel on Friday (Oct. 1), New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu discussed why the city has been an incubator for innovation in the years following Hurricane Katrina.



"We're beginning to create the city we want to become," New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu says at a conference on urban innovation sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation and Tulane University. (Photos by Paula Burch-Celentano)

"Everybody did what they had to because we had no other choice," Landrieu told the audience of "New Orleans as the Model City for the 21st Century: New Concepts of Urban Innovation," a [conference](#) hosted by Tulane University and the Rockefeller Foundation.

Facing almost complete destruction, New Orleans chose to reinvent itself, Landrieu said, as opposed to trying to fix what was a dysfunctional city before the storm.

"We are not in the business of fixing what was," Landrieu said. "We're beginning to create the city we want to become."

Calling New Orleans the nation's "most immediate laboratory for innovation," the mayor spoke about revamped education and health care systems and the partnerships formed between public and private entities that made those changes possible, eschewing political quagmires.



Four social entrepreneurs each will receive \$45,000 in an Urban Innovation Challenge explained by Tulane President Scott Cowen at Friday's conference.

"You see the innovation happening here because people are not concerned about philosophy," Landrieu said. "People here are fed up with waiting for someone else to help them do what needs to be done — if we can't find a way, we'll make one, and that's the seed of entrepreneurship here."

Judith Rodin, president of the Rockefeller Foundation, said she sees "an entrepreneurial spirit" thriving in New Orleans that will drive an "innovation economy."

"Every piece of evidence we have seen reinforces the importance of social capital," Rodin said. "Whether the innovation efforts are focused on community development, health care, infrastructure or education reform — these lessons have to be celebrated and replicated. They must continue to inform the ongoing recovery of this wonderful city."

Following Rodin and Landrieu's words, Tulane President Scott Cowen announced the launch of the [Urban Innovation Challenge](#). The program, funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, will award four social entrepreneurs with a \$45,000 stipend each and a

fellowship at Tulane to research, test and develop their ideas.

“We are seeking individuals who are impatient for change and passionate about transforming New Orleans,” Cowen said. “We are so pleased to incubate this program for a year. It will be a great investment in our community, people and ideas.”