

## **Tulane to launch \$10 million startup fund for women- and minority-led businesses**

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Portfolio companies selected to participate in the program will receive consulting, mentoring, guidance and partnership opportunities from the Innovation Institute's extensive network of resources to grow and scale in Louisiana, said Kimberly Gramm, David and Marion Mussafer Chief Innovation and Entrepreneurship Officer at Tulane. Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano.

The [Tulane University Innovation Institute](#) was awarded \$5 million from the state of Louisiana as part of [a newly announced statewide program](#) to support entrepreneurs

and small business owners throughout the region.

Tulane University will match the award with another \$5 million, enabling the Innovation Institute to launch [a new \\$10 million startup fund](#) dedicated to creating opportunities for women- and minority-led ventures in Louisiana — entrepreneurs who have traditionally faced barriers accessing capital, markets and networks essential to growing their businesses.

“Inspiring and supporting innovation, new businesses and startups are critical in bringing life-changing advancements and discoveries to the world, while also transforming the economy of New Orleans and the region,” said Tulane University President Michael A. Fitts. “This program will help support the power and potential of underserved entrepreneurs, ensuring the widest participation in venture creation, economic development and sustainability.”

The fund will prioritize investment in Louisiana-based minority, underserved and/or very small businesses that are technology or technology-enabled companies. The fund will use equity and equity-like financial instruments to invest in these companies over five years.

Portfolio companies will receive consulting, mentoring, guidance and partnership opportunities from the Innovation Institute’s extensive network of resources throughout the university and beyond to grow and scale.

“By enveloping these ventures in the Tulane ecosystem and providing comprehensive wrap-around support, we are confident that we’ll be able to foster the entrepreneurial success of underrepresented founders, which will add value and create new opportunities for the broader community,” said Kimberly Gramm, the David and Marion Mussafer Chief Innovation and Entrepreneurship Officer at Tulane. “Our goal at the Innovation Institute is to ensure that new companies and technologies can launch, grow, remain and thrive here as they improve lives in New Orleans, across the state and throughout the world.”

Gramm expects to begin accepting applications for funding from the new program in early 2023. Entrepreneurs [can visit the following link](#) to register interest and receive updates about the program.

The state funding award is part of the U.S. Treasury’s \$10 billion [State Small Business Credit Initiative](#) (SSBCI). The 2021 American Rescue Act reauthorized an

expanded SSBCI, which was originally established in 2010, to increase access to capital and promote entrepreneurship, especially in traditionally underserved communities as they emerge from the pandemic.

Tulane University's [Greater New Orleans Startup Report](#) has identified the lack of access to investment funding for Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) ventures and women-owned businesses as a critical problem for entrepreneurs in the New Orleans region. The report, prepared annually by the [Albert Lepage Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation](#) at Tulane's [A. B. Freeman School of Business](#), shows that startups with BIPOC founders face significant differences in obtaining loans and investment funding. The Lepage team also found that while women receive traditional bank loans at similar rates as men, they lag greatly behind men in angel investment, convertible debt and venture capital.

Tulane University's Innovation Institute [was launched earlier this year](#) to bring Tulane research, as well as the discoveries and breakthroughs of other institutions and individuals from the surrounding community and region, to market faster. In addition to the Fund, the Robert L. Priddy Innovation Lab at the Institute will launch a proof-of-concept and early-stage startup gap funding for aspiring entrepreneurs and promising technologies as well as mentorship, training and administrative support. The Institute will help student, faculty, and community innovators further develop their ideas, launch startups, and attract the industry, investment, and talent that will fuel innovation in Louisiana, and the Gulf South, and strengthen the area's economy.

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