

Youth design agency earns top prize at PitchNOLA

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Young Creative Agency, founded by Alberta Wright, above, took the top prize of \$5,000 at PitchNOLA 2016. The prize will help the agency, which trains and employs youths from diverse socio-economic backgrounds in graphic design and the creative economy, expand its work. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

If you've ever seen the reality show "Shark Tank," you know the format: Budding entrepreneurs pitch their ideas to a panel of investors with thousands of dollars in funding resting in the balance.

But for participants in PitchNOLA 2016: Community Solutions, which took place Thursday night (Jan. 28) in the Woldenberg Art Center's Freeman Auditorium at Tulane University, the motivation wasn't a desire for profits. It was the desire to make a difference.

PitchNOLA is [Propeller: A Force for Social Innovation](#)'s annual elevator pitch competition for ventures aimed at solving some of the city's most pressing challenges. Co-hosted by two Tulane centers — the Albert Lepage Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, and the [Phyllis M. Taylor Center for Social Innovation and Design Thinking](#), the competition gave 10 local entrepreneurs the ability to pitch their ideas for a chance at more than \$10,000 in funding.

[Young Creative Agency](#), which trains and employs youths from diverse socio-economic backgrounds in graphic design and the creative economy, won this year's top prize of \$5,000.

“The thing that jumped out at me [about Young Creative Agency] is that this is the direction the city is going,” said Peter Ricchiuti, professor of practice at the [A. B. Freeman School of Business](#) and one of this year's judges. “We're not necessarily oilmen anymore. We've become a city of creatives, so I think they're really barking up the right tree.”

[Fund 17](#), a nonprofit that supports underserved entrepreneurs and was founded by Haley Burns when she was a Tulane student, earned second-place honors and a \$3,000 prize, and the Food Justice Collective, a farmers co-op organized by youth of color, won the third place prize of \$2,000 as well as the \$500 Audience Favorite award.

Also serving as judges this year were Carmen Jones, vice president of programs with the Greater New Orleans Foundation, and Leslie Jacobs, CEO of the New Orleans Startup Fund.

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Peter Ricchiuti, PitchNOLA judge