

# SBA Administration Infused \$100K into Tucson Innovation Ecosystem



**TUCSON, Arizona**— As further evidence that Tucson's innovation ecosystem is a rising star at the national level, both Startup Tucson and The University of Arizona Center for Innovation (UACI) each secured \$50,000 in prize money from the U.S. Small Business Administration. Tucson secured two out of the three Growth Accelerator Fund Competition prizes awarded in Arizona. Both organizations were awarded the prize for their exceptional focus on making entrepreneurship more inclusive; Startup Tucson targeting rural and Spanish-speaking food entrepreneurs while UACI focusing on increasing the number of women STEM entrepreneurs.

UACI has proposed innovative ideas to support women-led startups researching and developing STEM-related innovations. The \$50,000 will be used to hire female student interns and match them with women-led startups to give them strategic commercialization insight and to support them in advancing technology through federally funded projects such as SBIR awards. UACI already leads the national average of diverse founders, furthermore, this program will ramp up the pipeline for young talent entering the field.

Startup Tucson will use the funds to expand their existing food and agricultural programs to entrepreneurs who are rural and/or Spanish-speaking. The \$50,000 will allow Startup Tucson to deliver the programming outside of Tucson to the surrounding communities and provide for its translation into

Spanish, a need identified throughout the rollout of the food programs developed under their 2020 USDA Farmers Market Promotion grant. An additional focus of the funding will be to increase fiscal resources to agricultural entrepreneurs through SBIR/STTR grant training and adding an AgTech Prize to their annual pitch competition, IdeaFunding (April 2022).

This infusion of federal funding is just one more indication that Tucson's entrepreneurial ecosystem is beginning to differentiate itself from other, perhaps larger metropolitan areas, through their implementation of out-of-the-box innovations and intentional focus on making entrepreneurship accessible to all. For example, Startup Tucson's recent Lab-to-Market Inclusive Ecosystem Prize and UACI's recent contracts with the Department of Energy American Made Challenge all point to Tucson being recognized nationwide as an up-and-coming entrepreneurial hub, with a unique focus on diversity and inclusion.

*"I am proud to announce the winners of the 2021 Growth Accelerator Fund Competition and SBIR Catalyst prize competition. This year's cohort of winners emphasizes our commitment to equity. Our awardees have innovative plans to support underserved entrepreneurs, including women, people of color, and individuals from underrepresented geographic areas," said SBA Administrator Isabella Casillas Guzman.*

*"This funding is allowing us to meet critical needs we have identified working with food entrepreneurs in our Food Forward program. Tucson has such incredible potential as a City of Gastronomy and member of the international Delice Network, but some of the very entrepreneurs that have put us on the map as a food city can't take advantage of our services due to a language or distance barrier. This project will be just one building block of moving toward a unified and supportive food ecosystem," shared Dre Thompson, Executive Vice President of Startup Tucson.*

*“We are very excited that Southern Arizona obtained not one, but two of these prizes. It highlights the fact that our region has what it takes to creatively support innovators. For UACI, this funding will allow us to increase support for women-led startups in the region while providing opportunities for female students at the University of Arizona to understand what it is like to take innovations to the market,” stated Eric Smith, Executive Director of UACI.*