

Miami, Palm Beach groups among Knight Cities Challenge winners

HIGHLIGHTS

A gym for The Underline, a pop-up park along Biscayne and a Miami civic users group to test technology were among the winners of Knight Cities Challenge grants

37 winners from across the country shared \$5 million in funding from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation



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Projects to help create a gym under The Underline, a pop-up park along Biscayne Boulevard and a user testing group for local government technology all received funding as part of the Knight Cities Challenge.

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation on Tuesday announced the 37 winners of the second annual Knight Cities Challenge, a national call for ideas to make the 26 communities where Knight invests more vibrant places to live and work. Three of the winners are from Miami-Dade and one is from Palm Beach County.

Open to innovators of all types, the Knight Cities Challenge asked applicants to answer the question: What's your best idea to make cities more successful? More than 4,500 applicants from across the country applied and 16 South Florida finalists were announced in January. Submissions came from many nonprofit and government organizations, as well as design experts, urban planning organizations and individuals.

“At its core, the Knight Cities Challenge is about discovering and connecting civic innovators, creative interventionists who inspire positive change,” said Knight Foundation President Alberto Ibarguen. “The winners reflect this goal. Their ideas have the potential to create stronger communities and spaces that spur learning, engagement and growth.”

In Miami, The Underline project, a proposed 10-mile linear park under the Miami-Dade Metrorail from Brickell to Dadeland, received \$250,000. Submitted by Meg Daly and the Brickell Backyard Friends of the Underline, the plan for the Knight Cities funding is to create a sports field and gym as part of the Underline to provide quality-of-life incentives to young adults. The Underline also recently received a \$2 million grant in the state budget, bringing total funding to about \$7 million. That’s enough to begin construction on the first phase of the project, which could start next year, Daly said in March.

Also receiving Knight Cities funding is the “Biscayne Green” project. Submitted by Fabian de la Espriella of the Miami Downtown Development Authority, the \$145,000 in funding will be used toward creating a pop-up park and urban forest along Biscayne Boulevard in order to create momentum and enthusiasm for the Biscayne Green, a proposal to redesign Biscayne Boulevard to include a pedestrian promenade.

Code for Miami, a volunteer organization that works on civic technology programs, received \$100,000 to develop a Miami civic user testing group. According to Rebekah Monson, the testing group will begin by collaborating with the county team now revamping MiamiDade.gov to provide real-world feedback throughout the development process. Monson said the project was inspired by a successful Chicago project, and she hopes the user group can be used by other government groups and municipalities in the future. The user testing group will identify user experience issues more quickly, while making websites and apps more accessible.

In Palm Beach County, a project called The Sunset Rises Again by the West Palm Beach Community Redevelopment Agency received \$171,650. It aims to create a new cultural hub in the Northwest Historic District on the site of a former jazz club and surrounding land.

Winners shared \$5 million as part of a three-year \$15 million grant program. Last year, the Miami Science Barge received Knight Cities funding. The barge, a project spearheaded by CappSci and set to open this spring at Museum Park, is a teaching laboratory and exhibition space for the marine sciences, sustainable living and the impact of climate change.

For more information on this year’s national winners, go to knightcities.org.



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