

Glen Nelson Center

Impact Report—July 2023



Glen Nelson Center and the Next Challenge for Media & Journalism

Donor support powers Minnesota Public Radio's (MPR) and American Public Media's (APM) public service mission, making programs like

Glen Nelson Center at American Public Media possible. Glen Nelson Center was founded in honor of Dr. Glen Nelson, a longtime supporter of Minnesota Public Radio and American Public Media who also served as an MPR trustee and board chair. Dr. Nelson had a steadfast conviction that public media is a vital source of connection, and that innovation is essential to serve new and diverse audiences. Glen Nelson Center generates breakthrough ideas by combining APM's storytelling legacy with the agility and hustle of entrepreneurship. Launched in 2018, Glen Nelson Center identifies, elevates and invests in the best and brightest media ventures led by a diverse group of visionary founders. To date, the center has supported the work of 600+ ventures through investments, competitions and incubator/accelerator programs.

One of the Center's key initiatives, The Next Challenge for Media & Journalism, is a national startup competition promoting groundbreaking media ventures across the country. The Next Challenge is an unparalleled opportunity for media startups to connect with industry leaders and move their ventures forward and for MPR and APM to directly engage with ventures that will revolutionize media over the coming decade. Launched in 2021, the Next Challenge is committed to promoting racial and gender equity in media, embracing the demographic shift occurring in our communities and seeking startups with diverse teams.

Your generosity inspires and enables this innovative programming that creates the future of public media.

IMPACT AND HIGHLIGHTS:

The **Next Challenge** creates innumerable opportunities for startups to strengthen their business plan and connect with media industry mentors, investors and strategic partners throughout the competition. After the initial application process, 32 Division Finalists were assigned industry mentors who offer feedback on their application as they prepare for the finalist rounds. Mentors include MPR | APM staff and trustees, who also benefit by learning from the startups throughout the competition.

[2023 winners were announced in May at an event honoring the applicants and winners.](#) Eight prizes totaling \$130,000 were awarded to early stage media startups.



A **Grand Prize Award**, selected by the Grand Prize Jury, was awarded to two division winners: [Podpal](#) and [Climate Town](#). Climate Town is transforming the way news and information about climate change news is presented in the media, and Podpal is revolutionizing the podcast production process.



Climate Town creates videos that educate and entertain, designed to get more people comfortable talking about climate change without feeling embarrassed or uninformed about it.



Podpal combines the best parts of podcast hosting and distribution with productivity tools designed for podcast workflow.

Additional award categories and 2023 winners include:

- **Future of News Division**—Awarded to a startup pioneering new ways to report the news and provide communities with fact-based insight, analysis and information. The 2023 winner in this division was [Santa Cruz Local](#), a non-partisan, independent online local news website, newsletter and podcast created to produce fair and accurate local journalism that holds power to account.
- **Top Creator Division**—Awarded to a creator-founded startup producing high-quality news, cultural or educational content primarily for social media. The 2023 winner in this division was [Climate Town](#).
- **Power Platform Division**—Awarded to a technology startup developing powerful ways for media content to be shared across the country and around the globe. The 2023 winner in this division was [Podpal](#).
- **Audience Choice Award**—Awarded to the most compelling finalist as voted on by the public. The 2023 winner in this division was [Grice Connect](#).
- **Vision Award**—Awarded to a finalist with a bold vision to reinvent media over the coming decade. The 2023 winner in this division was [Read & Resist](#).
- **Community Service Award**—Awarded to a finalist demonstrating a powerful impact on the community it serves. The 2023 winner in this division was [The Kansas City Defender](#).
- **Future Tech Award**—Awarded to a finalist using emerging technology to advance media in the public interest. The 2023 winner in this division was [Safe Link Network](#).

A complete list of 2023 winners along with previous winners can be [viewed here](https://www.thenextchallenge.com/)



REACH:

379 startups
from **34 U.S. states and territories** initially applied for the competition in 2023, resulting in **32 finalists**.

Eight awards totaling
\$130,000
were granted in 2023.

The applicant pool was very diverse:
50% female/non-binary
61% BIPOC
15% LGBTQ+

\$230,000
in award money
has been distributed in the first two years of the program (\$100,000 in 2022 and \$130,000 in 2023).

All of the
32 finalists
participated in the mentoring program in 2023.

“

Thank you so much for hosting such a powerful and uplifting event. We're truly honored to have been recognized amongst a group of such inspiring organizations.”

– **Ryan A. Sorrell, Founder & Editor-in-Chief, The Kansas City Defender**

“

It was an absolute honor to be a part of the Next Challenge again and I can honestly say it was a complete surprise to win this award. We're in the process of bringing on a few more contributors and, with this award, I am able to extend an offer to seven great candidates instead of three. Gamechanger!”

– **Renee M. Powers, Founder & CEO, Feminist Book Club**

“

The Next Challenge offers APMG an unparalleled opportunity to influence the future of media. By supporting media startups across the country, we not only get a chance to learn from them, but we also ensure that media innovation benefits the public.”

– **Jeff Freeland Nelson, Executive Director, Glen Nelson Center**

“

The Climate Town team is thrilled to be awarded this year's Grand Prize! It means the world to us to be recognized for our passion and commitment to spreading the word on climate issues and gives us a big shot in the arm to receive this sort of recognition from an established and trusted organization like APMG. The prize money is a game changer for our small operation—it will help us relieve a bunch of bottlenecks that have been slowing down our content production process, helping us to do things like bring on an assistant editor and boost our post-production workflows, hire dedicated writers and researchers, as well as launch new projects, including our first podcast.”

– **Ben Boulton, Executive Producer, Climate Town**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

We are grateful to our partners that made the 2023 Next Challenge possible: AT&T, Knight Foundation, Thomson Reuters, Google News Initiative, YouTube and UNMET as well as gifts from Driscoll Foundation, Whaley Foundation and the Jeanne M. Voigt Foundation. Our public media partners for the competition included MPR, WAMU, KERA, WHYY and SCPR/LAist.