

HBCU Founders Initiative Recognizes Top Startup Talent with \$25K in Awards at Third Annual Better Futures Competition

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WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, June 5, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Last week, the Microsoft Innovation & Policy Center transformed into an entrepreneurship launchpad, where [The HBCU Founders Initiative](#) (HBCUFI) hosted its third annual [Better Futures](#) pitch competition, awarding \$25,000 in non-dilutive funding to four groundbreaking startups led by students and alumni from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).



HBCUFI and Better Futures Winners

From brain-computer interfaces and AI-backed disaster relief to plant-based pastries and energy-optimizing software, the 12 semi-finalists proved that the future isn't just bright—it's being built right now on HBCU campuses. In the last three years, HBCUFI has awarded \$75,000 to Better Futures winners.

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“When we launched HBCUFI, we envisioned a world where entrepreneurial innovation at HBCUs would not die on a vine, due to a clear lack of resources. The Better Futures competition is not only a showcase of entrepreneurial talent but also a testament to the impact of HBCU innovation on society,” said Marlon Evans, President of The HBCU Founders Initiative. “As HBCUFI continues to

develop, Better Futures will return in 2026 more committed than ever to rewriting the playbook for inclusive innovation.”

At the competition, 6 finalists hit the stage to compete for \$25,000 in funding. A packed room of investors, tech executives, and HBCU alumni gathered to witness ideas that tackle real-world issues.

“HBCUFI gave me the confirmation that I am capable of having a great idea and that I can create my future. For a long time, I faced rejection after rejection, whether it was from investment opportunities or job applications,” First place winner, Joey Taylor, founder of Mycelium, said. “This competition was a make-or-break moment. If I hadn’t won, I would’ve been forced to let go of my company. The prize funding is crucial for advancing our brain-computer interface technology, covering patent fees, and securing the necessary tools to establish a solid foundation for our company.”

The top-placing startups, in order, were:

1st Place: Joey Taylor, Oakwood University, Class of 2024

Startup: Mycelium, a cutting-edge brain-computer interface (BCI) that integrates AI and neural signal processing to enable seamless interaction between the human mind and digital systems.

2nd Place: Hannah LaCon, Hampton University, Class of 2023

Startup: RadonLock Innovations is developing cost-efficient, energy-saving solutions for radon mitigation and monitoring, creating accessible pathways to healthier living environments.

3rd Place: Eno Oduok, Prairie View A&M University, Class of 2025

Startup: el powr, an AI-backed energy management software platform that enables commercial buildings and school systems to optimize energy consumption, lower costs, and reduce carbon emissions in a centralized hub.

People’s Choice: Kennedy Abanihe, University of Arkansas Pine Bluff, Class of 2026



Marlon Evans, President of HBCUFI



Joey Taylor, Founder of Mycelium

Startup: MyDiabetiCare, a digital health platform that supports individuals with diabetes to manage their condition through comprehensive tools that help prevent complications and avoid costly surgeries.

The 2025 Better Futures cohort hailed from Hampton University, Texas Southern University, Morgan State University, North Carolina A&T State University, Prairie View A&M University, Jackson State University, Spelman College, Morehouse College, Bowie State University, University of Arkansas Pine Bluff, Philander Smith University, and Oakwood University.

Participating founders include:

Robert Wilson, North Carolina A&T State University, Class of 2020

Startup: Parking Pin, a platform revolutionizing university parking with accessible, affordable, hardware-free solutions—empowering campuses to make data-driven decisions that alleviate traffic and improve the commuter experience.

Veralyn Bingham, Spelman College, Class of 2025

Startup: Musa, a social networking app that connects artists and musicians through smart matching algorithms, offering curated opportunities like gigs and open mics to help them grow their networks and advance their music careers.

Ari'Anna Elizabeth Redmond, Bowie State University, Class of 2025

Startup: Tony's Kitchen and Bakery, a food tech company that uses safe alternatives to replace animal products and allergens in everyday baked goods without diminishing the taste.

Peter Iwuh, Morgan State University, Class of 2022

Startup: Tykoon Sports, an AI-driven software and sports marketing agency helping student-athletes maximize their NIL opportunities through tailored solutions in marketing, brand partnerships, and apparel distribution.

Founder: James-Owolabi Olaoluwa David, Philander Smith University, Class of 2027

Startup: MedEdge, an AI-based health solution designed to reduce medical errors by offering real-time prescription suggestions, patient condition alerts, and predictive analytics to help healthcare providers prevent diseases.

Caleb Justin Dixon, Morehouse College, Class of 2025

Startup: GiveUp, an edtech platform that connects financially burdened college students with donors through an intuitive matching program to provide support for tuition, books, or housing.

Joel Murchison, Jackson State University, Class of 2025

Startup: RapidRelief, an AI-driven platform that connects insurance providers and government agencies with individuals affected by natural disasters to streamline support and response.

Founder: Andre Buchanan, Texas Southern University, Class of 2021

Startup: Athletech, an AI-backed coaching platform making professional training affordable and accessible for athletes at all skill levels.

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About the HBCU Founders Initiative

Launched by Nex Cubed, the HBCU Founders Initiative (HBCUFI) is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization that aims to decrease the wealth gap by supporting HBCU students and alumni throughout their entrepreneurial journey, encouraging them to pursue the launch of tech-fueled ventures across HBCU campuses. From the ideation stage to the investment stage and beyond, HBCUFI offers programs, financial and technical resources, and a vast network of advisors who are committed to supporting HBCU founders pursuing entrepreneurship. To date, over 1,400 students and alumni from 80+ HBCUs have participated in the HBCUFI programming. Participants in our programming have raised over \$2M for their startups.

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