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DESIGNxRI and mayor Smiley launch 2024 Design Catalyst Program

September 15, 2023 - Rhode Island



Shown (from left) are: Sarah McBain, Real Jobs RI program coordinator; Daniela Fairchild, chief strategy officer, Rhode Island Commerce; mayor Brett Smiley; Rue Sakayama, director of external relations, DESIGNxRI; and Liz Welch, founder, Anyhow Studio, Design Catalyst 2021 alum.

Providence, RI Mayor Brett Smiley joined DESIGNxRI co-directors Rue Sakayama and Berit Lavender, along with Daniela Fairchild from RI Commerce, Sarah McBain from RJRI, and Design Catalyst Program graduate Liz Welch to announce the eighth annual Design Catalyst Program and the inaugural launch of the program’s state-wide expansion. The Design Catalyst Program has been

a success, supporting 81 Providence based businesses over the past eight years. Combining the expertise of teachers, dedicated support from business mentors, and financial investment based on milestones and achievements, the Providence Design Catalyst Program generated crucial momentum to ensure business growth. This year the program will expand to support small creative businesses anywhere in the state of Rhode Island, made possible in part by funding from RI Commerce. This expanded cohort of creative design businesses will receive a total of \$178,000 in grant funding capital in amounts between \$7,500 and \$15,000 per awardee.

“Providence artists and entrepreneurs bolster the economy, spur tourism, create local jobs and are at the core of what makes our city the Creative Capital,” said mayor Smiley. “DESIGNxRI has been an important partner to many of our local artists and I am thrilled to support the Design Catalyst Program which has provided more than 80 creative entrepreneurs the tools, funding, and mentorship they need to launch their businesses here in Providence.”

The Design Catalyst Program has been championed by the city of Providence, providing funding to further economic growth for creative entrepreneurs in Providence. Since 2016, the Design Catalyst Program has funded a total of 81 businesses to the tune of \$1,294,500. Total investment in the program to date, including business grant funding and administrative costs, is \$1,617,472.

This year, due to funding from RI Commerce, DESIGNxRI will expand their reach statewide, bringing together a cohort of Providence and statewide-based design businesses for the first time. This expansion goes to show the importance of the continued growth of the economic sector that is made up of designers and creative entrepreneurs.

“Supporting innovative small business growth is the cornerstone of our work at RI Commerce Corporation,” said Rhode Island Commerce secretary Liz Tanner. “The Design Catalyst Program has a proven track record of stimulating creative sector business growth through investment, training and mentorship. We’re excited to support taking this program to the statewide level and ensure more businesses throughout Rhode Island can access this dynamic business resource.”

Real Jobs Rhode Island has been a partner in this effort since 2017, providing funding to serve several businesses in the Providence community. With their support, DESIGNxRI has provided business mentorship, seed funding, and professional development training to promote sustained business growth.

“We know the impact this Design Catalyst Program has had on Providence businesses through its last five cohorts. We’re excited to see the continued growth, now that the program is expanding to serve all of Rhode Island for the first time. The business development resources this program offers are critical to supporting our state’s creative businesses and accelerating our continued economic recovery,” said director Weldon, RI Department of Labor & Training.

To learn more about the program, including full eligibility requirements and how to apply, visit the DESIGNxRI website.(www.designxri.com/learn/design-catalyst/) Application review occurs through the Catalyst steering committee, led by DESIGNxRI. Applications will be accepted beginning today,

September 1, 2023, through October 13, 2023.

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