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## DESIGNxRI awards \$172,000 in seed funding to 10 Rhode Island small businesses

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Shown (from left, back row) are: Andreas von Sachsen-Altenburg, Storytime Online; Spocka, Public; Analiese Stinson, Feel Fine Jewelry; Mason Hainey, M.Haine; and Erminio Pinque, BIG NAZO LAB.

Shown (from left, front row) are: Tyler Bisson, Audio Geography; Casandra Inez, Public; Siobhan Marie, Blue Tomato Studio; Ayumi Kodama, Ayumiya; Renee Metro, Fulcrum Stained Glass; and Therese Iacono, Therese Iacono Photography.

Providence, RI Ten local design businesses are being supported and celebrated as the latest awardees in DESIGNxRI's 2024 Design Catalyst Program.

In its eighth round of supporting small design businesses across the state, DESIGNxRI is awarding \$172,000 in seed funding to 10 small creative businesses. Each participant will be paired with a mentor and will have access to a tailored business education program. This year's cohort features designers from an array of disciplines, including photography, perfume design, audio engineering, furniture design, and creative space making.

“So much of Rhode Island’s identity and personality is shaped by our small businesses,” Berit Lavender, co-executive director, said. “The incredible talent and entrepreneurship of our state is what makes this place so amazing. The Design Catalyst program helps ensure the health and vibrancy of the creative communities we cherish as Rhode Islanders. Supporting, educating, and funding our design sector is crucial.”

The 2024 awardees are:

- Jeweler Feel Fine Jewelry
- Multilingual literacy focused web design Storytime Online
- Perfume designer M. Hainey
- Stained glass designer Fulcrum Stained Glass
- Audio Engineer Audio Geography
- Furniture designer Studio Ayumia
- Creative space designer Public LLC
- Puppet designer and performance artist Big Nazo
- Creativity coach and joy facilitator Blue Tomato Studio and
- Photographer Therese Iacono

Since the program began in 2016, DESIGNxRI has invested in over 80 Rhode Island design businesses. More than 50 mentors and professional development leaders have also participated in the program. The financial support and resulting success of Catalyst grantees has been deeply impactful, fueling Rhode Island's design sector and affording opportunities for creatives to thrive.

“Months and years after going through the program, Catalyst designers consistently describe the opportunity as life-changing,” said Rue Sakayama, co-executive director. “The lasting success of alumni businesses attests to the strength and importance of Design Catalyst as a driver of individual and full-sector creative entrepreneurial growth.”

The Design Catalyst program is designed to boost small design business growth by providing grant capital, mentorship, and business training during a five-month milestone-based cohort experience. It is led by DESIGNxRI in partnership with CIC Providence and funded by the city of Providence's Department of Community Development, RI Commerce, Eastern Bank, and Real Jobs RI, a program of the RI Department of Labor and Training.

DESIGNxRI is a non-profit organization with a mission to create a vibrant and opportunity-driven environment for RI designers, design businesses and the design sector to thrive. Through education, economic development, and community development, we coalesce designers, elevate awareness of the RI design sector, spotlight the diverse talent base located in the state, and invest in strengthening and growing RI design-driven businesses.

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