

# Small city grants can help tiny tech companies buy time to grow

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A city program that recently handed out money to tech groups would hardly make an impact on most companies' budgets, with the highest

award being \$10,000.

But to the small groups that actually received money, these grants—which ranged from \$2,000 to \$10,000—can buy the thing they might need most: time to grow.

"If we are stuck in the minutiae of spending all of our time thinking about how we are going to pay for pizza, when will we have time to get it all organized?" said Kunal Patel, organizer of the space-related video game building event called Indiegalactic Space Jam. "It helps buy time."

Patel landed two of the 16 grants on the list, with Indiegalactic getting \$10,000 and his independent video game development group Indienomicon receiving another \$2,000.

The City of Orlando's new Technology Community Support Pilot Program is meant to boost the city's budding tech scene.

On Aug. 17, the city announced that it had spread \$65,000 among 16 efforts, including the student coding group Tech Sassy Girlz, University of Central Florida's Press Play Conference and the downtown coworking space Catalyst.

Raising money to support these kinds of programs has been more successful elsewhere, with other cities bringing large organizations on board to fund specific efforts.

Last year, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation poured \$1.2 million into Blacktech Week and other programs with a goal of supporting black entrepreneurs in Miami.

Blaire Martin, CEO and co-founder of the early stage company investment group Florida Angel Nexus, says Orlando's grant program

could become a jumping-off point to future funding efforts.

"Over time, we will have the support the entrepreneurial community needs," she said. "It's not like anyone is saying we don't want to do it."

Phil Dumas, who served on a city-organized panel to select the [grant](#) winners, knows firsthand the difficulties of funding a startup company.

His Orlando-based tech company UniKey Technologies, which builds a home smart-lock system that can be accessed through a mobile phone or with the touch of a finger, struggled early on to raise money but has since been able to land \$21 million in venture capital.

"One of the great things about Orlando is startup capital goes a lot further here than in other markets such as Silicon Valley," Dumas said. "While it may not seem like a lot, these grants absolutely have the ability to move the needle. But, of course, we, as a community, need to do everything we can to amplify this investment."

Touting financial wins like these city grants can help boost the tech community, he said.

"The startup community and the City of Orlando can always do better," he said. "But we have to start somewhere, and this is a great step that most cities have yet to do."

But the [city](#) has a ways to go if it's going to change its reputation, Martin said.

"Florida was not built on the backs of tech entrepreneurs," she said. "The tech ecosystem has not been what has fueled our growth as a state. But I think it's time to compete with tourism and oranges and cattle with a real emphasis on building differentiated [tech](#) businesses."

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