FUEL Incubator Strategic Plan

2026-2029



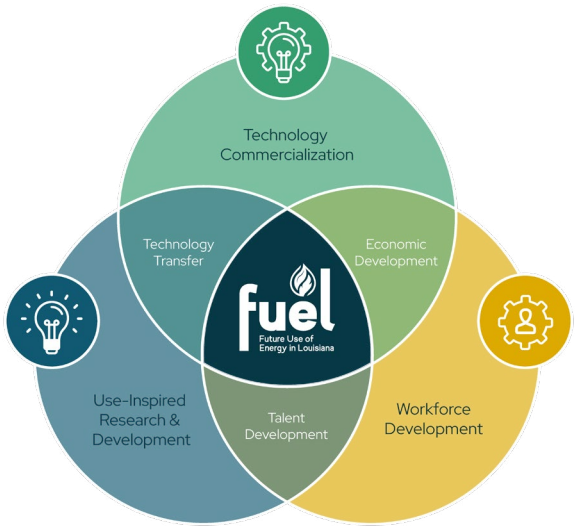
fuel

LA.IO
LOUISIANA INNOVATION

Executive Summary

BUILDING LOUISIANA'S INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM

Future Use of Energy in Louisiana (FUEL) is a statewide network of industry, academic, government, and community partners working to future-proof Louisiana's energy economy. Supported by the National Science Foundation (NSF) and Louisiana Economic Development (LED), FUEL's vision is to drive decarbonization, accelerate technology commercialization, and build a thriving innovation ecosystem that creates and keeps new businesses and jobs in Louisiana. Our work is focused in three core areas: Use-Inspired Research and Development (UIRD), Technology Commercialization, and Workforce Development.



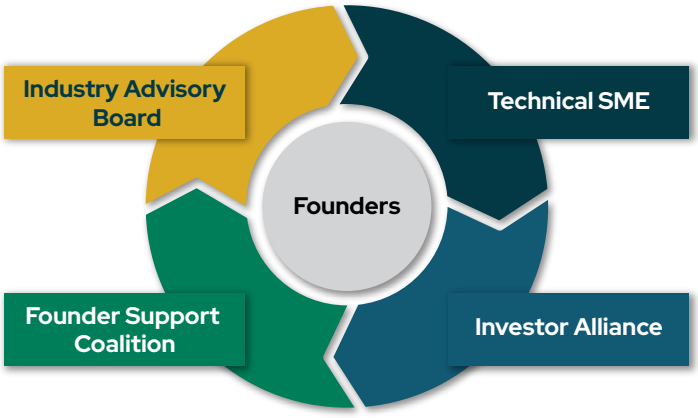
THE FUEL INCUBATOR

FUEL is developing a statewide incubator to help early-stage founders commercialize carbon management technologies through a coalition of partners. The incubator is a fundamental part of FUEL's overall technology commercialization pipeline, which aims to ensure founders can advance from idea to commercial deployment without ever leaving the state. The incubator is intentionally designed around founder needs at the earliest stages of the technology development journey and focuses on ventures at Technology Readiness Levels (TRL) 3 and 4, where ideas are formed, validated, and prepared for acceleration. Rather than duplicating existing resources, the incubator coordinates Louisiana's diverse network of entrepreneurial support organizations, universities, industry partners, and investors to provide founders with seamless access to the expertise and resources they need.

THIS STRATEGIC PLAN

FUEL is organized around a five-year NSF plan that outlined FUEL's strategy to coordinate existing entrepreneurship resources and organizations to support the energy innovation economy in Louisiana. This strategic plan details the model and implementation approaches for the FUEL Incubator, aligning with Years 3-5 of the NSF plan. It provides a detailed roadmap for building and activating a coordinated coalition that will serve carbon management founders from March 2026 through March 2029.

COORDINATING STAKEHOLDERS AROUND FOUNDER NEEDS



Incubating and accelerating effective carbon management technologies requires coordinating diverse stakeholder groups, each contributing distinct expertise, resources, and networks to meet founder needs. Founders in the FUEL Incubator are supported by a wide network of existing business, technical, and capital resources in Louisiana while ensuring geographic coverage across the state.

FUEL will serve as the strategic coordinator across these stakeholders, maintaining shared infrastructure, industry resources, and consistent communication to support constant, high-quality founder support. Regular meetings within each of these groups and across the entire ecosystem will enable cohesive statewide impact.

HOW WE BUILT THIS PLAN

This strategic plan is grounded in input gathered from these diverse stakeholder groups across the Louisiana innovation ecosystem. As part of a rigorous three-phase planning process spanning April 2025 to January 2026, FUEL engaged founders, Entrepreneurial Support Organization (ESO) leaders, investors, and partners from universities, industry, and public agencies to ensure the incubator's design reflects real needs and builds on existing strengths and assets.

Landscape Research | **Stakeholder Interviews** | **Surveys** | **Collaborative Planning Sessions**

HOW FOUNDERS ARE SERVED

A core component of the FUEL Incubator is a coordinated, coaching-centered model that layers energy-specific expertise onto Louisiana's existing entrepreneurial ecosystem. Founders will participate in business modeling and other entrepreneurial support programming through coalition members, while also receiving industry-specific coaching delivered by trained members. Coaching is a hands-on approach to technical assistance focused on connecting founders to specialized resources and advancing them through critical milestones in the startup journey. Over the next three years, this coordinated approach will create a more seamless pathway for carbon management innovators to move from idea to impact within Louisiana.



The FUEL Incubator intersects existing entrepreneurial programs and resources with energy-specific coaching using a milestone-based framework, where founders unlock deeper levels of support as their ventures achieve key objectives.

THE FOUNDER SUPPORT COALITION

The Founder Support Coalition will be a network of partners from across the entrepreneurial landscape, organized in three tiers of membership based on intensity of support to FUEL founders.

TIER	ROLE	FUEL SUPPORT
General Member	Joins coalition meetings to stay informed on ecosystem opportunities; may refer founders into FUEL and has access to shared resources	Voluntary participation
Contributing Member	Hosts workshops or FUEL events to promote opportunities in the energy sector and help surface talent and/or new ideas; may contribute to building shared FUEL resources	Project/event-based honorariums
Coaching Member TRAINED BY FUEL	Designates a qualified staff person to participate in the FUEL Train-the-Trainer program and provide regular 1:1 coaching to FUEL entrepreneurs	Annual subaward agreement

Coaching members will serve as the bridge between founders and the wider FUEL ecosystem of support, using a FUEL Energy Sector Toolkit and their own expertise to advance key decisions, build capacity, and generate tangible progress. The FUEL Energy Sector Toolkit will be a curated set of industry resources, commercialization guidance, and technical knowledge, ensuring high-quality support is available for carbon management founders across the state.

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SECTION 1:

Background

FUEL Strategic Missions

Future Use of Energy in Louisiana (FUEL) is a statewide coalition of industry, academic, government, and community partners working to future-proof Louisiana's energy economy. Supported by the National Science Foundation (NSF) and Louisiana Economic Development (LED), FUEL's vision is to create a nationally prominent innovation ecosystem that translates carbon-to-value technologies and creates wealth-generating opportunities for all communities in Louisiana.

MISSION 1

Innovation Ecosystem for Carbon Management

Build a thriving innovation ecosystem in Louisiana consisting of intellectual property-enabled growth within companies that develop and scale commercial products centered around carbon management technologies.

MISSION 2

Economic Development & Talent Retention

Create jobs and wealth-building opportunities through innovation-based economic development that attracts and retains world-class talent, especially Louisiana innovators, so they may develop their ideas within the state.

MISSION 3

Workforce Development

Prepare an innovative energy workforce from across all Louisiana communities to fill and sustain the jobs created and retained.

MISSION 1

Innovation Ecosystem for Carbon Management

GOAL: Develop pathways for 60+ companies to be added to the FUEL Innovation Ecosystem by Year 5

KPIS: Support 12 seed-stage companies per year, support 12 growth-stage companies by Year 5, and participate in recruiting three scale-stage companies by Year 5

MISSION 2

Economic Development & Talent Retention

GOAL: Grow the number of energy-related founders in FUEL's Entrepreneurial Network of founders from 15 to more than 80 by Year 5

KPI: Each year add up to 15 founders into FUEL's ecosystem

Founder Support Coalition Supporting KPI:

Recruit five companies through FSO coalition per year

FUEL Technical Areas

Based on the experts of FUEL's partners, the physical infrastructure of Louisiana, and the state's industry capabilities, the FUEL team developed six technical areas where investments in use-inspired research and development, technology commercialization, and workforce development would significantly impact carbon management initiatives.

Companies and founders working within these technical areas are priorities for FUEL's technology commercialization initiatives.

Reduction of industrial CO_2 emissions through carbon capture, usage, and subsurface sequestration (CCUS)

Capturing, storing, or reusing CO_2 emissions from industrial sources to reduce greenhouse gases and enable the creation of new carbon-based products

Energy efficiency and CO_2 as a feedstock

Turning captured CO_2 into valuable products, such as chemicals or materials, while improving energy efficiency across industrial processes

Structural integrity and sustainable manufacturing for energy and hydrocarbon transition

Ensuring the materials, infrastructure, and **manufacturing processes of the energy sector are robust, safe, and sustainable** as the industry evolves

Sustainable industrial hydrogen (H_2) economy

Developing and scaling cleaner hydrogen production and infrastructure to support low-carbon energy and industrial uses statewide

Sustainable water management for innovative energy and hydrocarbon transition

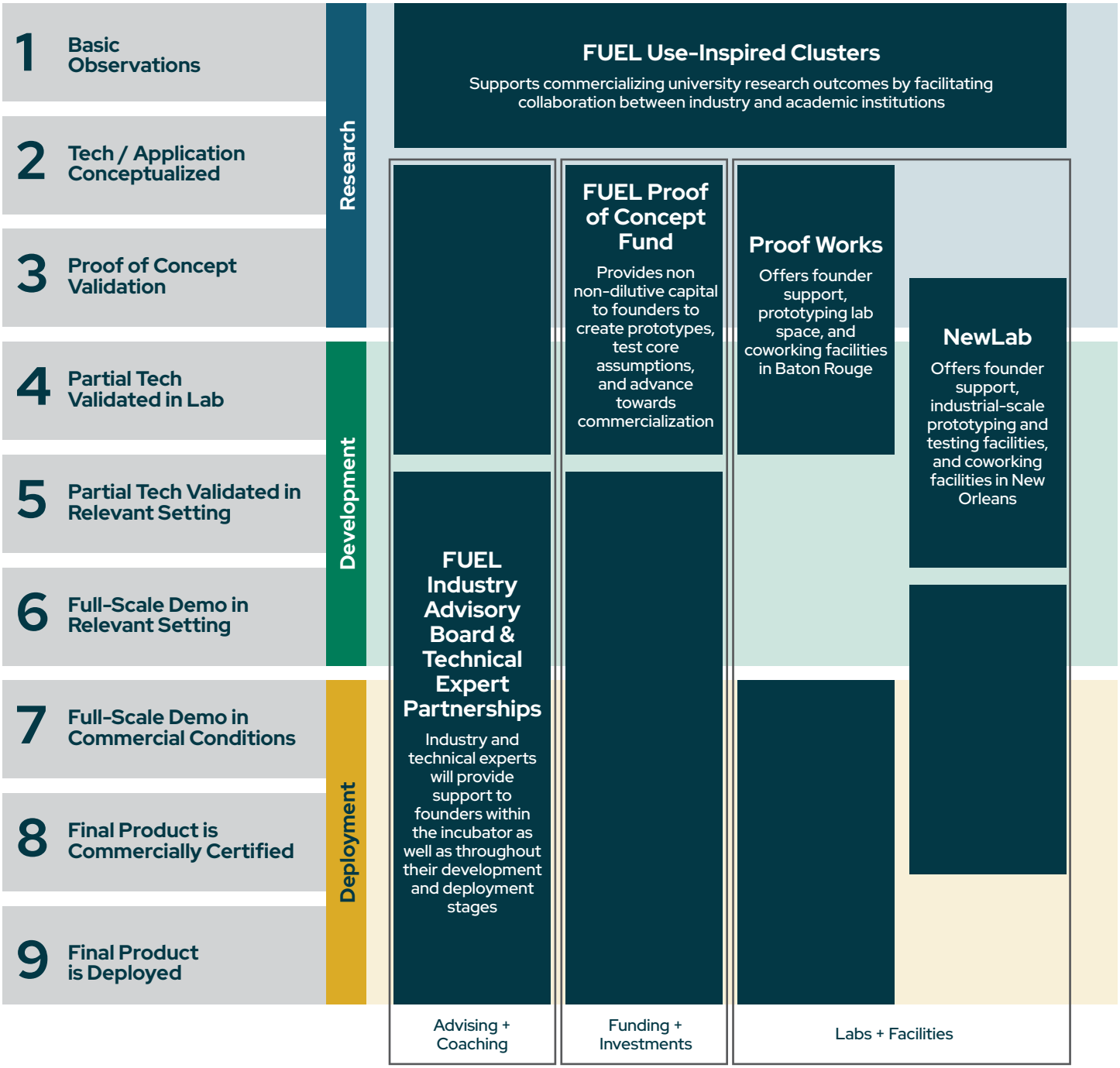
Implementing efficient and responsible water use in energy and manufacturing to support Louisiana's energy transition and protect vital resources

Economic and policy research to inform and promote pathways to decarbonization

Conducting economic and policy analysis to accelerate investment, guide technology development, and support Louisiana's leadership in low-carbon innovation

Tech Commercialization Pipeline

FUEL is working to build a future where Louisiana carbon management innovators can advance from idea to commercial deployment without ever leaving the state. Currently, founders often take their ideas elsewhere in order to access necessary specialized lab space, investors, or mentorship despite Louisiana's rich industry presence and expertise. This envisioned tech commercialization pipeline uses industry-standard Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) to illustrate how coordinated initiatives from FUEL and its partners will comprehensively support all stages of development for new energy technologies.



SECTION 2:

Incubator Model

Tailor-Built to Founder Needs

The FUEL Incubator is intentionally designed around founder needs at the earliest stages of the technology development journey, with support aligned to Technology Readiness Levels 3 and 4. At this phase, founders are transforming lab concepts into testable prototypes, validating use cases with real industry stakeholders, and making early decisions that shape feasibility, IP strategy, and market fit, all while managing capacity constraints and limited access to resources.

CAPACITY

Founders at this stage are often working other jobs and don't have the budget to hire full staff. This creates **capacity constraints,** limiting the impact of passive guidance.

The most valuable technical assistance includes hands-on execution support that helps founders make decisions and drive actual execution.

- Strategic and operational decision-making
- Navigating legal and regulatory questions
- Early commercialization steps (pricing models, procurement pathways)
- Aligning funding and capital strategies

CONNECTIONS

Founders need connections that catalyze real progress, granting access to diverse supports from across the innovation ecosystem.

- **Industry insiders** for customer discovery interviews, technical expertise, and early pilot partnerships
- **Peer founders** for shared problem-solving, learning, and community
- **Affordable professional services** across accounting, legal, IP protection, marketing, and branding
- **Mentors** who have lived experience in the tech commercialization and entrepreneurship journey

CAPITAL

Early-stage energy founders need **capital that is both non-dilutive and smart** — more than just funds. They need partners who understand the timelines and logistics of the sector.

- **Investors and capital partners** who bring expertise in industrial or energy markets
- **Guidance on aligning capital sources,** such as grants, incentives, venture, and strategic funding
- **Deal structure, valuation, and financial readiness** for pitching, fundraising, and preparing for pilots
- **Capital strategy that fits hardware realities,** such as long sales cycles, certification requirements, and manufacturing lead times

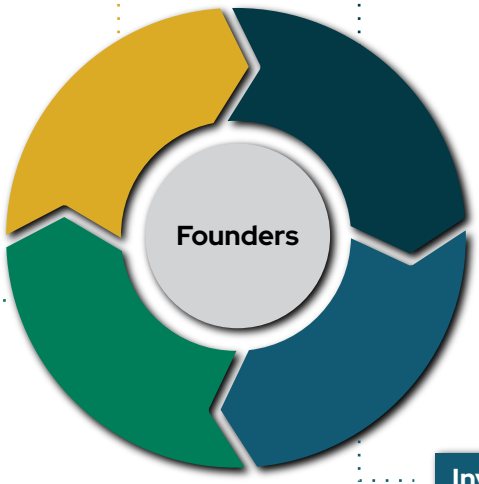
COMMERCIALIZATION PATHWAYS

Deep tech founders need **specialized expertise, equipment, and resources** to accelerate learning, reduce risk, and strategize clear pathways from validation towards demonstration and pilots.

- **Technical experts and university collaborators** for design refinement and access to specialized datasets and capabilities
- **Prototyping and testing resources,** including labs, machine shops, and facilities suited for early hardware builds
- **Regulatory, policy, and techno-economic assessment (TEA) guidance** to assess feasibility, shape research and development decisions, and navigate grid-adjacent or CCUS-related requirements

Key Ecosystem Stakeholders

Incubating and accelerating effective carbon management technologies requires coordinating diverse stakeholder groups to work together under an integrated approach to meet founder needs. Founders in the FUEL Incubator are supported by a wide network of existing business, technical, and capital resources in Louisiana while ensuring geographic coverage across the state.



Industry Advisory Board

Provides technical feasibility and market validation reviews; technical mentorship; helps ensure resources are invested in high-potential startups with a clear market need/application

Technical SME

Provides specialized services, coaching, and resources to startups that have advanced into the technical feasibility stage

- *Tech & Industry SMEs*
- *TEA Specialists*
- *Legal & Marketing Professionals*

Founder Support Coalition

Provides business mentorship, education, and coaching; lead executors of the FUEL Incubator

- *Early-Stage Incubators & Accelerators*
- *FUEL-trained Coaches*
- *Business Mentors*
- *University Innovation Programs*

Investor Alliance

Works together to provide both dilutive and non-dilutive funding to startups throughout seed and scale stages

Founder Support Coalition

Applying the hub and spoke concept seen in NSF's iCorps and Big Data innovation networks, the Founder Support Coalition operates with FUEL as a centralized hub for specialized, core resources and sector-specific training while regional spokes (coalition members) extend its reach, disseminating services and information to founders within their footprint. This distributed, coordinated approach supports scalability and efficiency, building a network to reach more people while leveraging the existing strengths and assets of Louisiana organizations.

FUEL AS THE HUB

FUEL serves as the centralized hub for the coalition, coordinating resources and partnerships statewide while nurturing deep tech innovation and new venture creation. It leads strategy, convenings, and shared infrastructure, and maintains high-quality founder support pathways, including the Energy Founder Toolkit, delivered through coalition members. As the hub, FUEL also curates mentor, investor, and industry networks and manages the data, funding, and reporting systems that enable cohesive statewide impact.

COALITION MEMBERS AS THE SPOKES

Coalition members — including universities, community organizations, and accelerator programs — extend FUEL's reach across the state by surfacing regional needs and opportunities, disseminate information and resources, and collaborate to raise the collective profile and capabilities of Louisiana's innovation ecosystem.

TIER	ROLE	FUEL SUPPORT
General Member	Joins coalition meetings to stay informed on ecosystem opportunities; may refer founders into FUEL and has access to shared resources	Voluntary participation
Contributing Member	Hosts workshops or FUEL events to promote opportunities in the energy sector and help surface talent and/or new ideas; may contribute to building shared FUEL resources	Project/event-based honorariums
Coaching Member TRAINED BY FUEL	Designates a qualified staff person to participate in the FUEL Train-the-Trainer program and provide regular 1:1 coaching to FUEL entrepreneurs	Annual subaward agreement

OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH AND EVOLUTION

As the FUEL Incubator and other tech commercialization initiatives roll-out, there is an opportunity to iterate and refine the hub-and-spoke model, potentially expanding to multiple hubs with specialized focus areas or refining the roles and decision-making structures within the coalition as well as across the broader stakeholder groups in the FUEL ecosystem.

The FUEL Coach Approach

A fundamental component of the FUEL Incubator is hands-on, individualized support for founders. While "coaching" can mean many things, FUEL defines it as targeted guidance that develops a founder's strategic, technical, financial, and market readiness. Coaching Members of the Founder Support Coalition will receive FUEL funding and training to deliver coaching to carbon management startups. Coaches serve as the bridge between founders and the wider FUEL ecosystem of support, using the FUEL Energy Sector Toolkit and their own expertise to advance key decisions, build capacity, and generate tangible progress.

TRAIN-THE-TRAINER INITIATIVE: A 2026 PILOT

The Train-the-Trainer initiative will launch with a small pilot that orients selected coaching organizations to FUEL's coaching model and preliminary Energy Sector Toolkit. Coaches will complete an initial training and then begin working with existing proof-of-concept (PoC) founders, refining their coaching skills while contributing to further development of the FUEL model and tools. Coaches should actively source founders through their own networks as well as support founders referred by FUEL and coalition members.

COACHING MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

Requirements for organizations to become coaching members:

- Familiarity with business modeling programs or capabilities, including Lean Canvas or similar methodology to complete customer discovery, market research, and validate founders' concepts
- Have existing network connections for founders including business mentors, legal experts, marketing professionals, and IP advisors
- Familiarity with financial readiness program or resources, including pitch prep, financial forecasting, experience with SBIR applications, and funding strategy experience
- Have proven experience with deep and/or hard tech founders and technology commercialization pathways
- Be ready to collaborate and contribute, comfortable with co-creating processes, tools, and resources alongside founders, FUEL, and other coalition members

COACHING RESPONSIBILITIES

Coaching organizations will designate a staff member that has proven experience in 1:1 coaching for founders and who is well-versed in the Louisiana innovation ecosystem. This staff person will:

- Dedicate approximately 20 hours a month to FUEL activities, including coaching carbon management founders, participating in training and coalition activities, and contributing to toolkit development
  - » Coaches should expect to spend 2-4 hours per founder/company per week
- Attend an initial Train-the-Trainer workshop and participate in monthly check-ins with other coaches
- Engage in hybrid approaches for collaboration and coaching, including occasionally travel for in-person trainings, events, or coaching sessions
- Be an active champion of FUEL strategic missions, helping to promote energy sector opportunities and identify new talent and ideas in carbon management innovation
- Complete regular data tracking and reporting on activities and founder outcomes as necessary for coalition collaboration and grant compliance

Milestone-Based Support

The FUEL coach approach is the driver of the incubator's milestone-based framework, where founders unlock deeper and more intensive levels of support as their ventures achieve key objectives. **This framework is designed to meet founders where they are, offering multiple entry points and adaptable coaching that supports progress at every stage**. This structure creates a coordinated experience across the coalition, guiding founders from early concept through validation and ultimately toward market and partnership readiness.

	Initial Concept Formation	Business Modeling	Tech Propotyping	Partnership & Business Development
Example Milestones	• IP is vetted for potential commercial application • Founding team formed	• Complete business model • Clear funding strategy	• Validated lab results • Clear IP strategy	• Executed investment deal • Signed partnership agreements • Visible branding and PR
Example Coaching Activities & Outputs	• Connect founder to coalition program for business modeling, such as iCorps or other similar Lean Canvas program	• Connect founder to industry/customer interviewees for customer discovery • Support market and competitive analysis • Develop pitch materials for seed funding	• Connect founder with tech SME through Technical Review Advisory Committee or the Industry Advisory Board. • Connect founder to lab space and prototyping resources • Connect founder with Recursion partner to begin early techno techno-economic analysis (TEA)	• Develop risk mitigation plan • Create a go go-to -market strategy • Complete regulatory and permitting review • Identify next steps in commercialization support, such as applying for Shell GameChanger or other growth opportunities

This framework illustrates an example of milestone phases and coaching activities, as a starting point to the more detailed coaching approaches to be developed by coalition members.

SECTION 3:

Strategic Goals

Incubator Strategic Goals

The FUEL Incubator focuses on the earliest stages of the startup process to ensure founders have a strong foundation to advance towards market-ready technology. Informed by stakeholder perspectives and founder needs, the strategic goals for the next 3 years of the FUEL Incubator include the critical priorities to bringing the model to life including designing and launching coordinated structures and approaches for founder identification, support, investments, industry connectivity, and ecosystem building.

Founder Identification + Outreach

Build a strong "funnel" of carbon management technology to incubate by identifying promising startups & catalyzing new ventures.

Founder Coaching + Support

Provide founders with high quality, hands-on coaching that connects them to specialized resources and advances them through key milestones.

Investments + Funding

Equip founders with strategically aligned capital by providing both investors and founders with the knowledge, guidance, and forums necessary to execute high-quality investment deals.

Industry Connections

Ensure incubated technology is aligned with validated market needs and opportunities by facilitating relationships that create value for both industry and founders.

Ecosystem Building

Establish a statewide innovation ecosystem that accelerates founder success by ensuring open access to knowledge, coordinated support networks, and consistent opportunities for collaboration.

Founder Identification + Outreach

GOAL: **Build a strong "funnel" of carbon management technologies to incubate by identifying promising startups and catalyzing new ventures.**

Use-Inspired Clusters

Coordination with research universities to spin-out IP for potential commercialization

Technical Research Advisory Council (TRAC)

Evaluate IP for investment and commercial feasibility

LA Boomerang

Intentional founder-identification and job-matching and support for returning innovation talent to Louisiana

FUEL Advisory & Support Team (FAST)

Connects existing and/or established companies with innovative technologies

Achieving FUEL's broader targets for business development will require proactively catalyzing start-ups by matching high-potential IP with entrepreneurial talent, in addition to identifying existing startups to support. Much of the tech and talent scouting work will be driven by work in these 4 FUEL programs.

INITIATIVES

- Conduct a comprehensive scan of high-potential IP from across corporations, industry, federal labs, universities, and the broader public. (FAST)
- Create a database of individuals across talent profiles with relevant technical, commercialization, and entrepreneurial skills and experience. (LA Boomerang)
- Promote FUEL and energy-innovation opportunities through coordinated PR and storytelling campaigns.
- Deliver workshops and events with coalition partners to surface entrepreneurial talent and spark interest in energy innovation.
- Design a structured and repeatable pairing process for matching founders with validated IP. (TRAC)

Founder Coaching + Support

GOAL: **Provide founders with high quality, hands-on coaching that connects them to specialized resources and advances them through key milestones.**

Concept Validation | **Technical Feasibility** | **Partnership Development**

As the FUEL Incubator focuses on the earliest stages of the startup process, this goal and related initiatives are about building a replicable approach to founder-centered incubation from concept validation to business growth.

INITIATIVES

- Build an Energy Sector Toolkit that includes documented resources, contacts, shared templates, IP basics and a general roadmap for energy sector tech commercialization
  - » Create a comprehensive database of capabilities of confirmed coalition members, aligning assets and resources with founders needs along the startup journey.
  - » Design flexible, milestone-based framework that allows for founders to engage at various stages and unlock needed resources as they progress.
  - » Refine and formalize clear "hand-off" points and approaches to streamline growth pathways to partners serving higher TRLs, such as NewLab and Shell GameChangers
  - » Identify a streamlined approach for connecting founders to effective business mentorship
- Pilot and scale FUEL Coaching Organizations to ensure statewide coverage and enough capacity to provide 1:1, capacity building support to founders in FUEL's portfolio.
- Design and execute a Train-the-Trainer program to ensure aligned approaches and increase shared energy-sector knowledge
- Facilitate regular virtual meetings for founders to build peer community of support
  - » Explore launching structured peer-to-peer mentorship and Entrepreneur-in-Residence programs
- Create a Founder Advisory Committee or similar forum to ensure founder perspectives are regularly incorporated into continuous improvement of the incubator
  - » Hold quarterly review of program progress and founder outcomes; identify needs for pivots and continuous improvement

Investments + Funding

GOAL: **Equip founders with strategically aligned capital by providing both investors and founders with the knowledge, guidance, and forums necessary to execute high-quality investment deals.**

Investor Education

Investors need literacy on the energy sector and an understanding of deep-tech investment dynamics, delivered in various forms such as workshops, boot camps, and access to subject matter expert pools.

Founder Readiness

Founders need to demonstrate financial acumen, strong communication of their ideas, fundamental IP strategy, and basic deal-structuring knowledge to instill confidence in potential investors.

In order to increase high-quality deal flow for energy start-ups, both investors and founders need tailored resources and support. This work will be led by both the Investor Alliance and FUEL Coaches.

INITIATIVES

- Create investor-aligned pitch prep to be integrated into the FUEL Toolkit that is leveraged by FUEL coaches, ensuring founders are ready for investment.
- Continue and refine the Proof of Concept Fund as a key early-stage capital tool, with clear pathways to follow-on capital via the Investor Alliance.
- Develop standardized assets to streamline closing deals, such as term agreements or due diligence checklists.
- Launch an Investor Alliance-led angel investor "academy" to build investor knowledge and interest in the energy sector.
  - » Explore potential for a Train-the-Trainer approach, similar to the Founder Support Coalition, to build energy investment knowledge within Louisiana's venture capital networks.
- Facilitate multiple investor touchpoints aligned with founder development milestones (e.g., curated intros, demo days, pitch competitions).

Industry Connections

GOAL: **Ensure incubated technology is aligned with validated market needs and opportunities by facilitating relationships that create value for both industry and founders.**

Defining the Industry VP

Industry partners receive preferential access to new technology, acquisition opportunities, a talent pipeline, and connections to innovation leaders who can help create solutions to persistent problems.

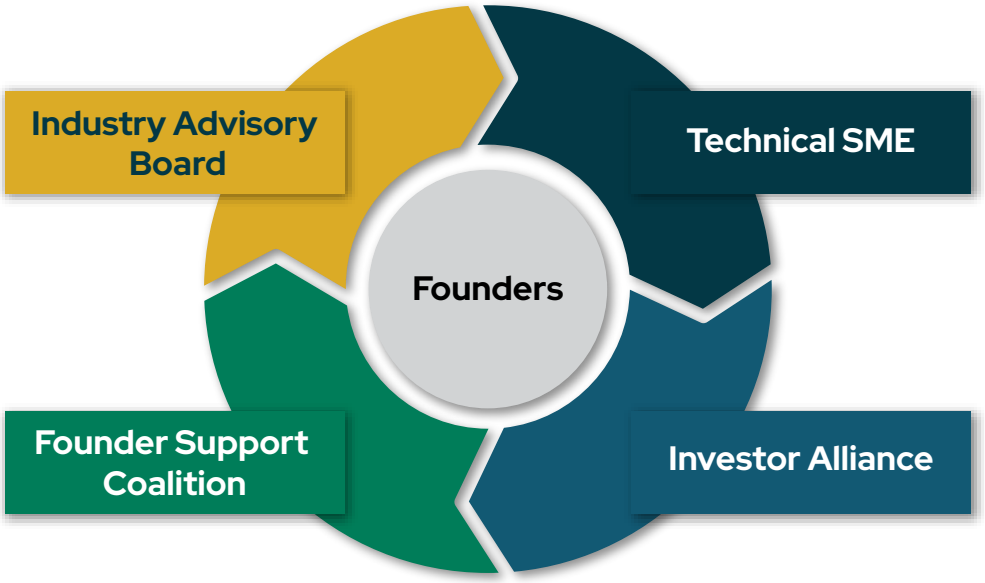
In order to attract and retain engaged industry partners into the IAB, which will support use-case validation, technical feasibility, and partnership opportunities to founders, FUEL must define a clear Value Proposition (VP).

INITIATIVES

- Create streamlined founder–industry collaboration pathways, coordinated through the Industry Advisory Board (IAB), such as standardized interview or mentorship request forms and opt-in matchmaking structures
- Clarify and document the value proposition for industry partners to join and participate in the IAB.
- Confirm industry representation on TRAC and define their role within regular IP and technology review to support customer-informed concept validation
- Craft standardized tools to streamline partnership development such as NDA templates or regulatory checklists
- Facilitate regular touchpoints between industry leaders and founders, aligned with the incubator milestone framework to create connections at valuable stages of the startup process

Ecosystem Building

GOAL: **Establish a statewide innovation ecosystem that accelerates founder success by ensuring open access to knowledge, coordinated support networks, and consistent opportunities for collaboration.**



The 4 core stakeholder groups serving founders, as well as the founders themselves, will need strategic coordination and communications to collectively achieve ecosystem-wide goals.

INITIATIVES

- Develop multi-tier communication strategy with both broad updates and targeted engagement based on stakeholder type
  - » Launch a monthly or quarterly newsletter for shared ecosystem intelligence
  - » Explore a Slack (or equivalent) channel for real-time communication and coordination
- Identify shared data needs, such as a centralized CRM for the coalition and related networks to use.
  - » Information and data platform should support a shared knowledge hub, including the founder support toolkit, contacts, and ecosystem insights, as well as coordination tools for scheduling and workflow (e.g., shared calendar).
  - » Design an approach for shared entrepreneur data tracking.
- Coordinate regular meetings to ensure alignment, facilitate connections, and elevate collective capacity
  - » Monthly virtual meetings for each stakeholder group; Quarterly virtual ecosystem-wide meetings; Annual in-person ecosystem-wide convening for demos, pitches, and networking.
- Grow the Founder Support Coalition to ensure local members in every region.
- Evaluate ecosystem building efforts regularly and continuously improve approaches, including further refining the "hub and spoke" model.

SECTION 4:

Implementation Roadmap

Implementation Overview

Bringing the FUEL Incubator to life will require intentional, sequenced approaches to collaboration in order to achieve FUEL's overall targets as determined in their five-year NSF strategic plan. This three-year implementation roadmap is organized into phases for organizing, piloting, and scaling the coalition and incubator, tracking against Y2-Y5 of the NSF plan.

ROADMAP PHASES

Pre-Implementation
January 2026 - March 2026
NSF Plan Y2

Before launching the incubator, stakeholders must be aligned and organized for coalition work.

This brief phase defines priority actions and questions for coalition formation.

This phase, as well as the subsequent implementation activities, is dependent on the confirmation and distribution of NSF's Y3-Y5 FUEL funding. In the case of funding delays, these phases remain relevant but may take place on a different timeline.

Pilot
March 2026 - February 2027
NSF Plan Y3

The first year of the incubator focuses on starting small, with 4 coaching members serving ~15 founders, helping to build and refine the model before scaling in response to demand or need.

This roadmap phase includes sequenced initiatives by quarter and assigns owners for executing.

Refine & Scale
March 2027 - February 2028
NSF Plan Y4 & Y5

The second and third year of the incubator will focus on growing to reach more founders, replicating successful practices, and reaching scale.

This phase outlines initiatives and considerations to explore following the first full year of implementation.

IMPLEMENTATION PRINCIPLES

A statewide, coordinated effort to support technology entrepreneurs is an ambitious and complex undertaking. Implementation partners should embrace an agile mindset, guided by:

- **Continuous improvement** - Success is achieved through an iterative process of trying new things, reflecting on results, and improving along the way.
- **Collective wins** - These wins are recurring collaboration points, shared lessons and advice, notable milestones, and achieved shared goals.
- **Solutions-orientation** - Challenges are inevitable but can be overcome with a collaborative approach to troubleshooting and proposing solutions as obstacles arise.

FUEL Companies – KPIs

With the launch of a coordinated, statewide technology commercialization pipeline, FUEL aims to systematically translate high-potential IP into venture-backed startups, support founders across development stages, and scale companies to market. These KPIs are designed to guide steady growth in recruitment, support, and advancement of companies—enabling the ecosystem to reach a portfolio of approximately 60 active carbon management ventures and more than $1 billion in aggregate valuation by February 2029.

KPI BREAKDOWN

YTD
March '24 - Feb '26
NSF Plan Y1 & Y2

FUEL has supported **12 startups** through Proof of Concept funding and a SuperPitch competition.

2026-2027
March '26 - Feb '27
NSF Plan Y3

2027-2028
March '27 - Feb '28
NSF Plan Y4

2028-2029
March '28 - Feb '29
NSF Plan Y5

36 seed-stage companies
$5M median valuation

12 growth-stage companies
$20M median valuation

3 scale-stage companies (recruited into LA)
$100M median valuation

60+ companies | 80+ founders
$2B Valuation Goal by Y10

DEFINING FUEL COMPANIES

FUEL companies include those that received:

- FUEL Proof of Concept award (~5 per year)
- Investment through the FUEL Investor Alliance or related initiatives
- A minimum of 10 hours of coaching through the FUEL Incubator
- Technical mentorship or support brokered through FUEL partnerships

Inclusion requires formal onboarding and regular reporting to track outcomes.

Initiatives Roll-Up

Founder Outreach	• Conduct a comprehensive scan of high-potential IP from across corporations, industry, federal labs, universities, and the broader public. (FAST) • Create a database of individuals across talent profiles with relevant technical, commercialization, and entrepreneurial skills and experience. (LA Boomerang) • Promote FUEL and energy-innovation opportunities through coordinated outreach and storytelling campaigns. • Deliver workshops and events with coalition partners to surface entrepreneurial talent and spark interest in energy innovation. • Design a structured and repeatable pairing process for matching founders with validated IP. (TRAC)
Founder Coaching	• Build an Energy Sector Toolkit that includes documented resources, contacts, shared templates, IP basics, and a general roadmap for energy sector tech commercialization » Create a comprehensive database of capabilities of confirmed coalition members, aligning assets and resources with founder needs along the startup journey. » Design a flexible, milestone-based framework that allows founders to engage at various stages and unlock needed resources as they progress. » Refine and formalize clear "hand-off" points and approaches to streamline growth pathways to partners, serving higher TRLs, such as NewLab and Shell GameChangers » Identify a streamlined approach for connecting founders to effective business mentorship • Pilot and scale FUEL Coaching Organizations to ensure statewide coverage and enough capacity to provide one-on-one capacity building support to founders in FUEL's portfolio. • Design and execute a Train-the-Trainer program to ensure aligned approaches and increase shared energy-sector knowledge • Facilitate regular virtual meetings for founders to build peer community of support » Explore launching structured peer-to-peer mentorship and Entrepreneur-in-Residence programs • Create a Founder Advisory Committee or similar forum to ensure founder perspectives are regularly incorporated into continuous improvement of the incubator » Hold quarterly review of program progress and founder outcomes; identify needs for pivots and continuous improvement
Funding	• Create an investor-aligned pitch prep method to be integrated into the FUEL Toolkit that is leveraged by FUEL coaches, ensuring founders are ready for investment. • Continue and refine the Proof-of-Concept Fund as a key early-stage capital tool, with clear pathways to follow-on capital via the Investor Alliance. • Develop standardized assets to streamline closing deals, such as term agreements or due diligence checklists. • Launch an Investor Alliance-led Angel Investor Academy to build investor knowledge and interest in the energy sector. » Explore potential for a Train-the-Trainer approach, like the Founder Support Coalition, to build energy investment knowledge within Louisiana's venture capital networks. • Facilitate multiple investor touchpoints aligned with founder development milestones (e.g., curated intros, demo days, pitch competitions).
Industry Connections	• Create streamlined founder–industry collaboration pathways, coordinated through the Industry Advisory Board (IAB), such as standardized interview or mentorship request forms and opt-in matchmaking structures • Clarify and document the value proposition for industry partners to join and participate in the IAB • Create an IAB subcommittee for quarterly IP and technology review to support concept validation • Craft standardized tools to streamline partnership development such as NDA templates or regulatory checklists • Facilitate regular touchpoints between industry leaders and founders, aligned with the incubator milestone framework to create connections at valuable stages of the startup process
Ecosystem Building	• Develop multi-tier communication strategy with both broad updates and targeted engagement based on stakeholder type • Launch a monthly or quarterly newsletter for shared ecosystem intelligence • Explore communication methods (Slack, Teams, etc.) for real-time communication and coordination • Identify shared data needs, such as a centralized CRM for the coalition and related networks to use • Information and data platform should support a shared knowledge hub, including the founder support toolkit, contacts, and ecosystem insights, as well as coordination tools for scheduling and workflow • Design an approach for shared entrepreneur data tracking • Coordinate regular meetings to ensure alignment, facilitate connections, and elevate collective capacity • Monthly virtual meetings for each stakeholder group; Quarterly virtual ecosystem-wide meetings; Annual in-person ecosystem-wide convening for demos, pitches, and networking • Grow the Founder Support Coalition to ensure local members in every region. • Evaluate ecosystem building efforts regularly and continuously improve approaches, including further refining the "hub and spoke" model.

Pre-Implementation Phase

(JANUARY – MARCH 2026)

Goal of this phase

Align stakeholders on the FUEL Incubator Plan and 2026 priorities, confirm coalition roles, and finalize the structures required to launch coordinated implementation in 2026.

Key activities

- Present the plan to key stakeholders to ensure shared understanding of vision, scope, and roles for the FUEL incubator and Founder Support Coalition.
- Validate membership types (General Member, Contributing Member, and Coaching Member) and participation expectations.
- Secure initial commitments from coalition members.
- FUEL and coalition members to review what qualifies a "FUEL company" and finalize criteria.
- Formalize subaward agreements for coaching members and designate coaching staff.
- Align on coaching expectations, stage definitions, and reporting requirements.
- Identify CRM or other shared database for entrepreneur and company tracking, reporting, and information sharing within the coalition and across the FUEL Ecosystem (IAB, IA, etc.).

Pilot Phase

(MARCH 2026 – FEBRUARY 2027)

Goal of this phase

Build shared resources and coalition infrastructure, pilot the coordinated and distributed approach to founder coaching, support current PoCs and identify new founders to incubate.

	Founder Support Coalition:	IAB, TRAC/FAST, and IA:	Ecosystem-wide:
Q1: March - May	• Begin monthly coalition meetings • Begin monthly founder P2P learning meetings • Begin building out the Energy Sector Toolkit, including documenting key contacts, confirming coalition member assets and capabilities, and compiling • Confirm coalition governance structure, including meeting roles and decision-making approaches • Refine the milestone-based framework, defining when founders are eligible for receiving services and support • Launch the Train-the-Trainer program with Coaching Members • Confirm shared entrepreneur data tracking approach	• Formalize roles and processes for a comprehensive scan of high-potential IP • Document the value proposition for industry involvement in the IAB • IA formalizes plans for Investor Academy	• Refine the multi-tier communication strategy, ensuring investors, industry, technical partners, and the founder support coalition have segmented and shared information and updates • Hold first full-ecosystem convening
Q2: June - Aug	• Ramp up efforts to identify new founders through coordinated PR and local workshops/events • Formalize streamlined approaches for connecting founders to business mentorship • Collaborate with the IA to expand the Energy Sector Toolkit to include investor-aligned pitch prep & build consistent, repliable investor-founder touchpoints • Ecosystem-wide: • Hold second full-ecosystem convening	• Create database of individuals across talent profiles (LA Boomerang) • Begin crafting standardized tools to streamline partnership development such as NDA templates or regulatory checklists • Identify approach for consistent, replicable founder-industry touchpoints	• Hold second full-ecosystem convening
Q3: Sept - Nov	• Formalize “hand-off” points to higher-TRL partners • Organize a Founder Advisory Committee to engage in feedback and review of continuous improvement needs	• Begin designing structured pairing process for matching founders with validated IP (TRAC) • Launch quarterly IP/tech review with TRAC for any new ideas or scouted IP	• Hold third full-ecosystem convening, potentially hosting the annual in-person event during this quarter
Q4: Dec - Feb	• Audit the Energy Sector Toolkit & coaching framework for gaps or areas of refinement • Engage coalition & founders in evaluation efforts to understand successes and challenges of first year of the incubator	• Engage all stakeholder groups in segmented evaluation efforts to understand successes and challenges of their related goals	• Hold 4th full-ecosystem convening, with a focus on shared reflection and continuous improvement for collaboration

Refine & Scale Phase

(JANUARY – MARCH 2026)

Goal of this phase

Build upon successes and lessons learned during the pilot phase by strengthening resources and approaches, growing the coalition and ecosystem partnerships, and expanding pathways for later-stage companies.

Key activities

- Expand number of Coaching Member organizations to increase geographic reach and assets.
- Increase founder intake and support capacity toward portfolio growth targets.
- Institutionalize successful practices from the pilot year through documented improvements in the coaching framework and expanding the Energy Sector Toolkit.
- Explore and pilot Entrepreneur-in-Residence (EIR) or similar peer-to-peer mentorship offerings.
- Assess needs and approaches for TRL 4+ support, ensuring seamless development along the tech commercialization pipeline.
- Conduct annual evaluations of founder outcomes, ecosystem performance, and coalition effectiveness.
- Use data and feedback to adapt strategy, refine priorities, and guide future investment.

SECTION 5:

Appendix

The Planning Process

FROM DISCOVERY TO ACTION

The planning process followed a three-phase framework designed to build understanding, align stakeholders, and collaboratively develop actionable strategies for coalition implementation.



Discover Phase 1

Engaged 35+ ecosystem stakeholders from across Louisiana including founders, investors, and leaders from industry, universities, and nonprofit support organizations. This included 14 interviews, 23 survey responses, a statewide landscape scan of startup resources, and a review of national energy technology incubator models. Insights were synthesized into a Discovery Report to inform coalition design and planning priorities.

Define Phase 2

Discovery findings were shared with FUEL leadership and key partners to align coalition goals, planning priorities, and success criteria. This phase focused on defining the Incubator's role within the overall statewide tech commercialization pipeline and identifying the key activities needed to support early-stage energy tech founders.

Plan Phase 3

A series of planning sessions, including a day-long workshop at FUEL's office in Baton Rouge, engaged stakeholders from across Louisiana to envision the collaborative future of the Incubator. Key components of the Incubator model were validated with founders, and the details of the plan were then developed in collaboration with FUEL leadership. The plan was then presented to organizational leaders to review and provide input, strengthening buy-in prior to plan adoption.

STAKEHOLDERS ENGAGED

The following stakeholders participated in interviews, planning sessions, surveys, and/or advisory discussions that shaped the FUEL Incubator Strategic Plan.

- **BASF** - Amy Odom
- **Bayou Region Incubator** - Lisa Kliebert
- **BB&M / Louisiana Tech** - David Brigg, Dawn Boyter, Hussain Shaik
- **EcoGlobe** - Bea Roberts, Ana Sanz
- **EncoreCO₂** - Jordan Losavio
- **ExxonMobil** - Andrew Brennan
- **FUEL Industrial Advisory Board** - Chuck Mart
- **GNO, Inc.** - Evie Poitevent
- **Idea Village** - Jon Atkinson, Megan Balch
- **Innovation Catalyst** - Bill Ellison
- **Louisiana Economic Development (LED)** - Madeline Kawanaka, Stephanie Hartman
- **Louisiana Technology Transfer Office** - Hutch McClendon
- **Louisiana SBDC** - Bryan Greenwood
- **The Innovation Enterprise at Louisiana Tech University** - Jennifer A. Riley, Kathy Wyatt
- **LSU Innovation Park** - Jason Boudreaux
- **New Orleans BioInnovation Center** - Kris Khalil
- **Nexus** - Kyle Finke, Tony Zanders
- **NovaSpark** - Rick Harlow
- **Opportunity Machine** - Destin Ortego, Katherine Nebel
- **Renovigo** - Jeremiah Piper
- **SCALE Louisiana** - Paul Barrial
- **Shreveport Entrepreneurial Accelerator Program (EAP)** - Brett Brown
- **SW Louisiana Economic Development Alliance** - Paul Moses
- **StartUp Northshore** - Russell Richardson, Vincenzo Caronna
- **Tulane University Innovation Institute** - Kimberly Gramm, Sharon Goldsmith, Clay Christian

Planning Artifacts

The following planning artifacts provide additional detail on the process, inputs, and materials that informed the development of the FUEL Incubator Strategic Plan.

- FUEL Incubator Discovery Report
- Virtual Information Session Slides
- Virtual Planning Session Slides
- Virtual Planning Session Summary
- Planning Workshop Slides
- Planning Workshop Summary
- Plan Presentation Slides

Planning Partner

Trepwise is a strategy consulting firm, dedicated to unlocking the potential of purpose-driven organizations by aligning people, process, and vision.

Founded in New Orleans and with a national footprint, we are a high-energy creative team of strategy consultants with deep expertise as well as a shared desire to make our engagements fun and mutually rewarding for our clients. Whether we are engaging with a nonprofit or foundation, public sector entity, large corporation, or small business, we apply a proven approach that centers trust-building to unite stakeholders behind a common purpose.

OUR SERVICES

Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is a vehicle for charting a clear path forward while strengthening culture and aligning teams around shared priorities. Our planning approach is human-centered, inclusive, and practical; engages people at all levels; grounds strategy in how the organization actually works; and translates big ideas into structured, actionable roadmaps for implementation.

System Coordination

Complex challenges cannot be solved by organizations in a silo. Our systems coordination approach convenes and aligns partners around a shared agenda, examines the policies, relationships, and power dynamics shaping the system, and engages communities through participatory methods that build trust, equity, and durable momentum for change.

Board & Team Facilitation

When groups face moments of complexity or transition, skilled facilitation creates the conditions for clarity, alignment, and forward motion. Our board and team facilitation approach combines engaging, inclusive design with equity-informed and systems-aware methods to help groups make clear decisions and leave with a shared roadmap for action.

ABOUT US

Our twelve-person client service team embodies our firm's values of humanity, authenticity, rigor, collaboration, curiosity, and agility.



RECENT CLIENTS

Trepwise has an extensive track record, having worked with more than 500 purposedriven clients nationwide. Recent examples from across sectors include:

- Annie E. Casey Foundation
- Focused Community Strategies
- Girard College
- Greater New Orleans Foundation
- Houston Cultural Districts
- me too. Movement
- New Orleans Youth Master Plan
- New Orleans Vision 2035
- NOLA Public Schools
- Ochsner Health System
- SBP USA
- StriveTogether
- Southeast Raleigh Promise
- Women's Foundation of the South
- University of Oregon

PROJECT TEAM

Future Use of Energy in Louisiana

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FUEL Incubator Strategic Plan 2026-2029

DOCUMENT DESIGN: EMERGENT METHOD