

GULF COAST COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FIVE FINALISTS SELECTED IN GULF COAST INNOVATION CHALLENGE

VENICE, FL (July 30, 2015) – Gulf Coast Community Foundation has named five finalists in the inaugural Gulf Coast Innovation Challenge.

Each of the five teams is now eligible for a grant up to \$25,000 to develop a prototype of its proposed business solution to positively and sustainably impact the Gulf Coast region’s Blue Economy. The finalists will present their prototypes in November, and Gulf Coast may select one team to receive an additional \$375,000 in grant funding to bring its solution to market.

“These five proposals all have potential to transform a segment of our region’s Blue Economy,” said Mark Pritchett, senior vice president for community investment at Gulf Coast Community Foundation, who is overseeing the Innovation Challenge. “Now we want to see a full plan for how they can leverage our funding to bring their ideas to reality and benefit the Gulf Coast region.”

Twenty-five teams with members from the nonprofit, private, and public sectors completed applications to vie for the finalist grants. The five finalists selected by Gulf Coast are:

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[Advanced Solar-powered Filtration Technology for Marine and Freshwater](#) | Mote Marine Laboratory, the University of Washington's Pollack Laboratory, and ROBRADY design propose to turn basic research into a working water-purification device that could transform marine and freshwater filtration models.

[Antibiotics from the Sea](#) | Omeza, LLC, will partner with senior scientists at Mote Marine Laboratory to develop and commercialize novel antibiotics from the sea.

[Cancer Therapies from Sharks](#) | Mote Marine Laboratory's biomedical research program will collaborate with the University of Central Florida's College of Medicine and pharmaceutical company Sun BioPharma to harness cancer-inhibiting compounds secreted by sharks and develop new treatments for human cancer patients.

[Healthy Earth - Gulf Coast: Sustainable Seafood System](#) | A team led by sustainable-food company Healthy Earth proposes to develop a sustainable seafood system with value-added seafood production built on the region's striped-mullet fishery.

[Taking Back the Lion's Share](#) | University of South Florida College of Marine Science researchers, a seafood wholesaler, a Sarasota restaurateur, and a family of commercial fishermen aim to develop a trap allowing for commercial-level catch of invasive lionfish to develop a new fishery in the Gulf of Mexico and provide new market opportunities for seafood businesses.

Pritchett noted that each of the finalists targets one of the first two critical near-term goals identified in Gulf Coast's 2015 [regional cluster study and economic development strategy](#) for the marine sciences and technology: make and consume more seafood regionally, and enhance the impact of regional research and development in the marine sciences.

The foundation also recognized a People's Choice Award winner for the project with the most online support from the community. The [Living Shorelines](#) team, which includes Marie Selby Botanical Gardens, Sarasota Bay Watch, Reef Ball Foundation, and other organizations, will receive a \$5,000 grant from Gulf Coast.

“We were impressed with all of the ideas that were submitted, and the community clearly likes them too,” said Gulf Coast’s Pritchett. “New collaborations have formed and momentum is building behind many more than five of these concepts, and that was another objective of our Challenge.”

As the finalists put their grants to work developing their prototypes and refining their business plans, they will provide periodic video updates on the Gulf Coast Innovation Challenge website. The public can visit GulfCoastChallenge.org to watch the progress of the finalists through October, when the prototyping phase of the Innovation Challenge ends. Proposals that weren’t selected as finalists will remain in the online Challengers Gallery, so that people can continue to learn about their ideas and potentially connect with team members.

The Gulf Coast Innovation Challenge is a \$500,000 incentive-grant challenge launched by Gulf Coast Community Foundation in February 2015. The Innovation Challenge was designed to spur and help fund innovations that will sustainably grow the marine sciences and technology sector in Sarasota, Manatee, and Charlotte counties. The initiative was announced in conjunction with the release of Gulf Coast’s [Blue Economy cluster study](#) at an event on Sarasota’s Bayfront featuring XPRIZE founder Peter Diamandis.

About Gulf Coast Community Foundation

Together with our donors, Gulf Coast Community Foundation transforms our region through bold and proactive philanthropy. Gulf Coast is a public charity that was created in 1995 through the sale of the Venice Hospital. Since then, we have become the philanthropic home of more than 600 families who have established charitable funds here, and we have invested over \$200 million in grants in the areas of health and human services, civic and economic development, education, arts and culture, and the environment. Learn more at GulfCoastCF.org.