

## The Ion Launches Aerospace Innovation Accelerator To Empower BIPOC Entrepreneurs

*With partners NASA and DivInc, The Ion is creating new pathways for Houston's economic resilience and expanding access to careers in aerospace*

**HOUSTON, April 19, 2021** – [The Ion](#), Houston's new innovation hub, today announced the launch of its Aerospace Innovation Accelerator for Minority Business Enterprises (AIA for MBEs). The AIA for MBEs develops Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) owned businesses tackling aerospace-related challenges.

Throughout the 12-week program, the four selected participants - Axialnics Systems Inc., Boozed Beverages LLC, NANCo Aero, and Stratos Perception LLC - will further develop their innovations, grow their businesses, and strengthen relationships with a broad range of individual mentors, corporate partners, and stakeholder networks. The accelerator's programming is made possible by the U.S. Department of Commerce's [Minority Business Development Agency](#).

The AIA for MBEs is part of The Ion's Aerospace Innovation Hub, which focuses on aerospace innovation through networking and outreach events and education and training. The Hub is supported by [NASA's Johnson Space Center](#), and strategic partner [DivInc](#), which transforms the existing tech entrepreneur ecosystem into a more authentically inclusive environment.

"Aerospace contains a myriad of dimensions and by demystifying the industry in the form of the AIA for MBEs, we are able to build a more inclusive innovation ecosystem," said Dr. Christine Galib, Senior Director of Programs at The Ion. "It's our goal to not only support participants to be successful, but to open the playing field for other minority business enterprises hoping to enter the space."

### **Meet the Entrepreneurs Changing Aerospace**

The selected startups are posed to tackle aerospace-related challenges, ranging from an aircraft that mitigates airport congestion, to a contactless cocktail vending machine, to an AI solution that monitors multiphase flow. The four startups selected for the AIA for MBEs are as follows:

[Axialnics Systems Inc.](#), led by Vincent Mbuvi, is an aerospace technology platform developing a Disc-wing Rotor Aircraft Concept, which takes-off as a helicopter, carries as much payload as an airplane and flies just as fast beyond the range of typical helicopters. The innovation solves runway inefficiencies and enhances military efficiency.

[Boozed Beverages LLC](#), led by Damyanna Cooke and Jim Luu, specializes in intelligent vending in the liquor industry. The company provides a contactless, AI-driven cocktail making and dispensing vending machine, for locations such as weddings and events, sporting venues, festivals, restaurants, and nightclubs and lounges.

[NANCo Aero](#), led by Shern Peters, provides urban air vehicles and drones to commercial, small business, government, and nonprofit organizations. It is working to develop the first Hybrid Personal Air Vehicle capable of transporting a family over the city of Houston.

[Stratos Perception LLC](#), led by Rube Williams, develops artificial intelligence solutions for space systems to benefit human productivity, safety, and enterprise. It is also developing an intelligent transducer, a tool that can monitor and control multiphase flow, for use in space such as lunar water extraction and waste processing.

“The Aerospace Innovation Hub came from the idea that the aerospace industry is well-known in Houston but for many people, particularly underrepresented communities, there have been barriers in entering the aerospace industry,” said Dr. Jan E. Odegard, Executive Director of The Ion. “By offering mentorship, introduction to capital and training opportunities, with significant backing from Microsoft, The Ion is working to remove the barriers.”

The AIA for MBEs will have a physical presence in The Ion when the building opens its doors later this year. The Ion is designed to be the epicenter of Houston's innovation ecosystem and bring together Houston's entrepreneurial, corporate, investors and academic communities into collaborative spaces and programs.

The AIA for MBEs accompanies three other programs at The Ion's Accelerator Hub, including The Ion Smart and Resilient Cities Accelerator, The Rice Alliance Clean Energy Accelerator, and DivInc Houston's Accelerator. The Hub currently serves over 25 startups, with Rice Alliance [applications currently open](#) for its first cohort. The Accelerator Hub, which focuses on economic growth and resilience in the Houston-Galveston region, is supported by The Ion's Founding Partners—Microsoft, Baker Botts, and Chevron Technology Ventures—as well as Intel, Vision Galveston, and a grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration.

The AIA for MBEs will introduce its inaugural cohort during a virtual launch party on April 21 at 12:00 pm CST. To attend the event, please register [here](#).

**About The Ion:** The Ion will anchor a 16-acre innovation district and is destined to become the epicenter for Houston's innovation ecosystem as an inclusive, dynamic, vibrant and dense hub focusing on quality collaborations between entrepreneurs, incubators, accelerators, corporations, academics, and the Houston community when it opens in 2021. The 266,000 square-foot building will accommodate multiple uses, including shared workspace, prototyping and maker resources, event space, classrooms, food and beverage offerings as well as indoor/outdoor communal areas with shared amenities. For more information, please visit <https://ionhouston.com/>.

To learn more about the AIA for MBEs or the Aerospace Innovation Hub, please contact Dr. Christine Galib at [cgalib@ionhouston.com](mailto:cgalib@ionhouston.com).