

New Princeton University EMPOWER conference strives to broaden opportunities for underrepresented entrepreneurs from throughout academia

First conference in series will celebrate Black entrepreneurship and offer \$100,000 top prize in pitch competition

Aiming to broaden opportunities for university innovators who are underrepresented in entrepreneurship, Princeton University will host [Empower 2021](#): A Virtual Conference Celebrating Black Academic Entrepreneurship on Sept. 23-24.

This is the first in an annual conference series that will support entrepreneurs in academia from different historically underrepresented groups. Empower 2021 will bring together national thought-leaders to share actionable knowledge and tools that can help transform university discoveries into companies and ventures that advance societal and economic progress.

The two-day conference will also feature a pitch competition with a \$100,000 top cash prize. In addition, the winning entrepreneurs will receive a bundle of in-kind services, one-to-one meetings with select venture capital firms, and expert mentoring and coaching. [Applications to pitch](#) at the conference are due by mid-August.

The 2021 event highlights and celebrates Black academic entrepreneurs from universities around the U.S. and beyond. All people, groups and organizations supportive of inclusive innovation are encouraged to attend. Faculty, professional and postdoctoral researchers and graduate students will be able to build networks with industry and venture capital representatives and explore ways to start, fund and scale new startups.

“This conference and pitch competition represent a tangible commitment to support inclusive entrepreneurship, help create a more diverse innovation ecosystem and reduce the racial wealth and opportunity gaps in American society,” said Princeton Vice Dean for Innovation [Rodney Priestley](#), a professor of chemical and biological engineering and co-founder of two startup companies. “We want this conference to result in action and opportunity by connecting entrepreneurs with resources and people that can make a difference to their ventures.”

Priestley leads [Princeton Innovation](#), a Princeton University initiative formed to help translate Princeton research discoveries into technologies and services through innovation and entrepreneurship. He is also the Pomeroy and Betty Perry Smith Professor of Chemical and Biological Engineering.

Inclusive entrepreneurship is one of several new initiatives in the [racial equity action plan](#) established by Princeton’s Office of the Dean for Research in response to [the call](#) in 2020 by University President Christopher L. Eisgruber to develop plans to combat systemic racism at Princeton and beyond.

The new initiatives aim to expand participation and leadership by people of backgrounds that are presently underrepresented in research, innovation and entrepreneurship, under the leadership of Dean for Research [Pablo Debenedetti](#), the Class of 1950 Professor in Engineering and Applied Science and professor of chemical and biological engineering.

Empower 2021 is sponsored by Princeton University, Mastercard Center for Inclusive Growth, Mintz, and the National Urban League.

Attendance is virtual and free. [Please register at empower.princeton.edu.](https://empower.princeton.edu)