



# Rice University

Office of Public Affairs / News & Media Relations

## NEWS RELEASE

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## **The Ion awarded \$1.4M to launch Aerospace Innovation Hub** *NASA, DivInc partnership will bring startup opportunities to Houston*

HOUSTON – (Oct. 8, 2020) – The Ion has been awarded \$1.4 million in federal funding for a partnership with NASA's Johnson Space Center (JSC) and DivInc to create its Aerospace Innovation Hub (ASCI-Hub) – which will support and develop regional minority business enterprises (MBEs) that address aerospace-related challenges.

NASA will bring expertise and resources to the Ion's ASCI-Hub and support MBEs as they tackle challenges in various areas that include robotics, medicine, health support systems and advanced materials and manufacturing.

“Landing this award is another win for the region that leverages the unique strengths of the crewed space program at NASA JSC,” said [Jan E. Odegard](#), interim executive director of the Ion and principal investigator on the award. “As Houston was critical to landing men on the moon in the late-'60s, the Ion's Aerospace Innovation Hub will be key not only to advancing the future of spaceflight, including the mission to Mars in the future, but also to tackling challenges facing our everyday lives here on Earth.”

The Ion received the award as part of the Economic Development Administration's (EDA) Minority Business Enterprise Inner City Innovation Hubs program, designed to focus on research and technology transfer, digital innovation, artificial intelligence and entrepreneurship. The [Minority Business Development Agency](#) (MBDA) provides federal assistance to support innovative projects seeking to promote and ensure the inclusion and use of minority enterprises.

“We're eager to partner with the EDA's MBDA, Rice University and the Ion to help develop and grow minority entrepreneurs and accelerate innovative and tech-forward solutions in Houston,” said [Vanessa Wyche](#), deputy director of the JSC. “This partnership builds toward NASA's goals to enhance scientific and technological knowledge to benefit all of humankind and catalyze

economic growth, as we propel commercialization of space and extend our presence in the solar system.”

The ASCI-Hub will provide events, workshops and programs designed to assist MBEs and provide a forum for them to present their solutions to a consortium of industry and academic partners as well as JSC experts. MBE’s will receive not only feedback, but also opportunities for collaboration. The hub will also offer an aerospace innovation-focused accelerator for startups whose technologies tackle the challenges experienced in industrial settings and on spaceflights.

Housing the ASCI-Hub at the Ion will enable deeper synergies with other accelerators at the [Accelerator Hub](#), as well as with surrounding regional partners such as suppliers, engineering and consulting firms, and universities.

DivInc, an Austin-based accelerator focused on addressing and correcting social injustices, will apply its expertise to the ASCI-Hub by aiding in its launch; hosting lectures, webinars and panels; and expanding the MBE pipeline and mentor network. DivInc will also help identify, recruit and select MBEs for participation in the accelerator.

“This grant award reinforces the commitment to helping Houston build a top global innovation ecosystem by making it the most diverse, equitable and inclusive startup community in the world,” said Preston L. James II, DivInc co-founder and CEO. “When we can tap into the broader pool of talent this city has to offer, we can drive unprecedented innovation and experience stronger economic growth across all demographics. This is the future that we want to create today.”

With community events, education and training, and an accelerator program, the ASCI-Hub will stimulate short- and long-term economic growth and job creation.

“While we have taken many small -- and valuable -- steps over the past few years, this is one giant leap forward for our efforts to promote sustainable inclusion in Houston’s entrepreneurial and technological ecosystem,” said Christine Galib, senior director of programs at the Ion and co-principal investigator on the award.

Opening in 2021, the Ion will accelerate Houston's innovation ecosystem through partnerships, pathways and programs that create opportunities for economic growth. For ASCI-Hub related inquiries, please email [accelerator@ionhouston.com](mailto:accelerator@ionhouston.com).

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To schedule an interview with Odegard or for more information, contact Avery Franklin, media relations specialist at Rice, at [averyrf@rice.edu](mailto:averyrf@rice.edu) or 713-348-6327.