# Freeman Consulting Group earns runner-up honors in 2023 IDEAcorps Challenge

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The Freeman Consulting Group earned runner-up honors in the 2023 IDEAcorps MBA Consulting Challenge with their pitch for KidKred, a teacher and school staff recognition platform. Pictured are, from left, KidKred's Claire Smith, Loyola University College of Business Dean Michael Capella, and Freeman Consulting Group members Michael Wink, Canaan Heard, Ivy Robinson, Lauren Cutuli and Thet Mon Aye.

With the support of the Lepage Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, the Freeman Consulting Group participated in this year's IDEAcorps MBA Consulting Challenge, securing runner-up honors and winning $2,000 for our startup client and $1,500 for the Lepage Center. As FCG's president, I was pleased to lead this exceptional team of graduate students during the 2023 IDEAcorps Challenge.

The Freeman Consulting Group is a graduate student organization that provides business consulting to local organizations on a non-fee basis. Clients are presented with workable solutions, and FCG members gain valuable consulting experience. As an extension of the Lepage Center, FCG serves New Orleans' entrepreneurial ecosystem and strives to support innovation through research, programming, and advisement.

In a kick-off meeting last fall, the team at the Lepage Center presented the IDEAcorps MBA Consulting Challenge to FCG as an experiential learning opportunity to work with a local, early-stage company. IDEAcorps is an immersive event created by the Idea Village and presented by Loyola University's Center for Entrepreneurship in concert with the New Orleans Business Alliance and Greater New Orleans Inc. The competition brings together 10 university teams and 10 small businesses to pursue robust scale-up strategies for each organization.

Bara Watts, executive director of Loyola's Center for Entrepreneurship, and Sam McCabe, assistant director of the center, matched the university teams with their startup partners. The Tulane team featured students across multiple graduate business programs: Lauren Cutuli (MBA '24), Canaan Heard (MBA '24), Thet Mon Aye (MFIN '23) and Michael Wink (MME '24). We were paired with KidKred, a teacher and school staff recognition platform founded by Claire Smith and Krissy Taft. We met with the founders over eight weeks, devising a growth plan and a scale-up strategy that was right-sized for the client. In collaboration with the Lepage Center and KidKred's founders, we learned the challenges of launching an EdTech concept and reimagined a salient customer acquisition strategy.

In January, the university teams met in New Orleans for networking events, tours of the city's innovation hubs, and the final pitch competition. The University of Alabama took home this year's grand prize with their pitch for Bypass Lines, the Freeman Consulting Group was named runner-up, and the team from Louisiana State University representing Obatala Sciences was also recognized for its pitch.

KidKred went on to pitch at SXSW EDU's Launch Startup Competition in March 2023, earning a runner-up placement and international recognition among contestants from Finland, Japan, Sri Lanka, Scotland, and the United States. KidKred followed that milestone with the ASU + GSV Summit, where they were selected as one of the Elite 200, a designation acknowledging the world's most innovative EdTech startups.

In addition to participating in this year’s IDEAcorps challenge, the Freeman Consulting Group completed a communications project with NOLA Public Schools, advised founders on growth planning and fundraising, and hosted programs with Tulane alums at EY and Accenture. Next year, IDEAcorps will take place in the Spring of 2024 in alignment with New Orleans Entrepreneur Week.

-- Ivy Robinson (MBA '23), president of Freeman Consulting Group