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How Seed the South Looks to Be Bigger and Better in Its Second Year

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Seed the South underway in 2019. Courtesy photo.

By Courtney Gabrielson

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Yesterday, [we spoke with Charlotte Innovation Week organizer Lynn Luong](#) to get the scoop on the city's first-ever celebration of its kind. Next up is Sam Smith, CEO of the startup Vishion and creator of [Seed the South](#), the headline event of Charlotte Innovation Week.

Jan. 22 and 23 marks the program's second run, which Smith said was created to foster connections between early-stage startups, investors and those curious about the ecosystem (as well as provide an opportunity for the Charlotte tech and entrepreneurial community a chance to shine).

The [Collective Hustle](#)-presented event does this a number of ways. There are fireside chats, keynote speakers, town halls, networking opportunities and even a "Big Pitch" opportunity on day two.

"The focus was hitting every element of a startup ecosystem," Smith told Charlotte Inno. "Not only the angel investors, being able to describe what it's like in our region, but also the local government and those in a corporate environment [speaking] about how we might be able to work together as an entire innovation community to really bolster our ecosystem."

"Seed the South gives us the platform to showcase just how powerful inclusion and diversity in innovation can be."

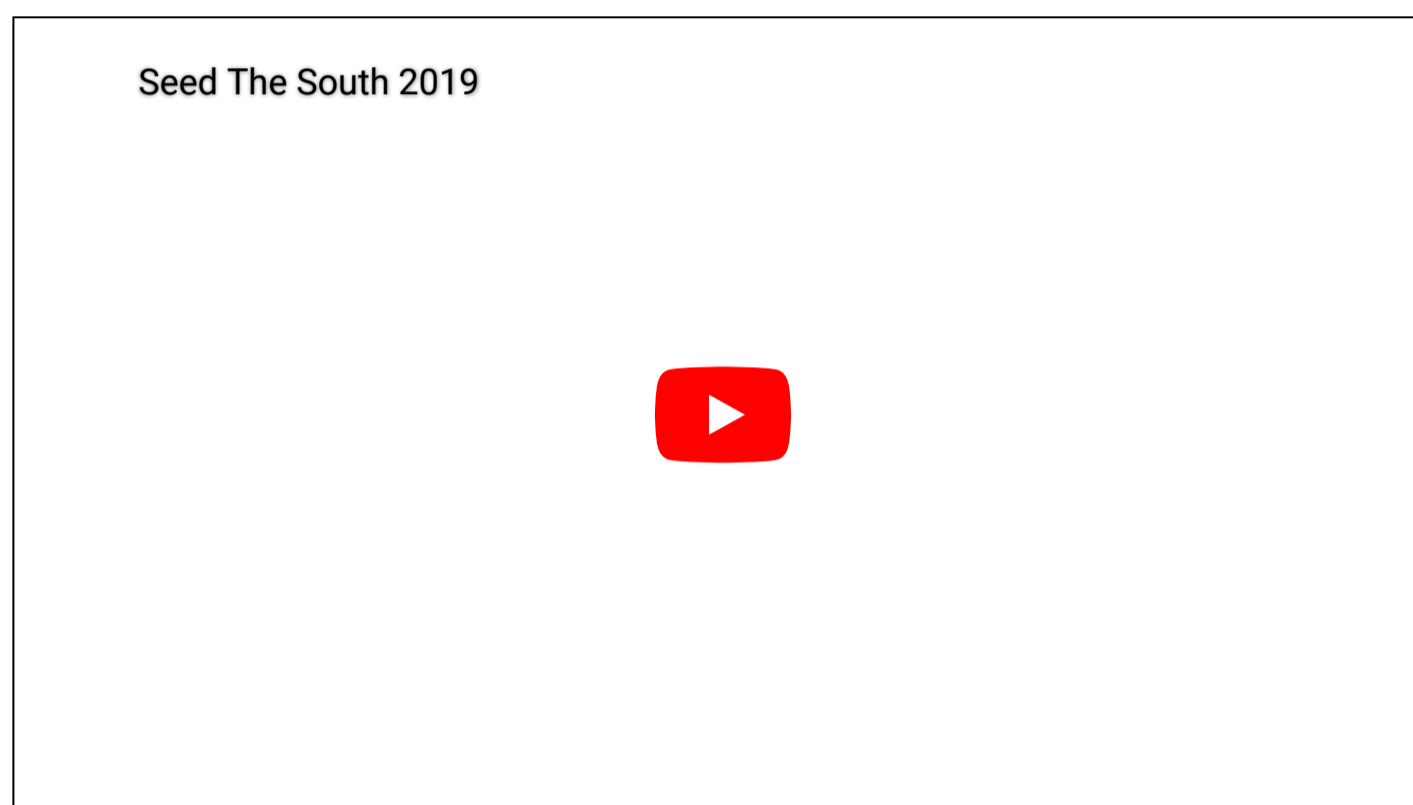
One of the participating companies, [Grocery Shopii](#), heard about Seed the South after it buzzily concluded last year. And Katie Hotze, founder and CEO, knew she wanted to be a part of its 2020 iteration.

"This town supports its homegrown companies, and we are proud to be growing our business in this ecosystem," Hotze said. "Being at Seed the South was a non-negotiable for us. We knew we would be there, and we know investors are driving far and wide to see what's happening in Charlotte."

Hotze added that the event is an opportunity for smaller startups, veteran-owned organizations and other factions of the community to "pull all of [their] energy into one summit for maximum impact."

Ensuring Seed the South gave a platform to founders across the spectrum was a priority for Smith and her team since year one.

"Our focus is still on ... elevating all startups, including those that have female founders and founders of color," Smith said, "and showcasing exactly how Charlotte can be an inclusive ecosystem and how that's what we can be known for."



And in some ways, that representation happened organically. Smith said that the best local founders were selected to showcase their companies on the Big Pitch stage. Around 50% of those startups have at least one underrepresented founder on their teams.

"Seed the South gives us the platform to showcase just how powerful inclusion and diversity in innovation can be," Smith added in an additional statement.

The event isn't just something that was magicked out of thin air for Smith and Collective Hustle's enjoyment. She emphasized how well the community responded to Seed the South's first year.

"People are hungry for this type of content that is not easily available," she said.

It's this interest that caused Collect Hustle to expand the event from a one-day program in 2019 to something spread over two days this year. The result, she added, is something promising even more engagement and insight than last year.

"You're definitely in for a high-tech innovation symposium," Smith said.

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