



Lauren Maillian is catalyzing economic growth and creating new pathways for Black and Latinx women entrepreneurs.

Lauren Maillian is a change agent committed to diversity, innovation, equity, and inclusion. She is an award-winning marketer, prolific investor, advisor, entrepreneur, and board member with a deep understanding of consumer brands and culture woven through her multi-hyphenate career—which includes wine expert, philanthropist and former international fashion model. Maillian’s entrepreneurial journey is an inspiration for many; and equally is the work she is doing to redefine the path for future generations of entrepreneurs.

Which brings us to Maillian’s current role as CEO of digitalundivided, the leading nonprofit leveraging data, programs, and advocacy to catalyze economic growth for Black and Latinx women entrepreneurs and innovators. The mission is to create a greater world in which all women of color own their work and worth. As the former Board Chair of digitalundivided, Lauren took the helm to evolve and grow the organization to further support women of color entrepreneurs, especially in the wake of the racial reckoning amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The organization was also the first to debut authoritative research on the state of Black and Latinx women founders in the United States through the ProjectDiane Report. In the future, Maillian aims to grow the organization’s overall research capabilities to release more data reports and entrepreneurship insights annually.

Ahead, she tells Create & Cultivate about the research she is doing to address realities, experiences, and disparities present in entrepreneurship, how she avoids taking the backseat in her career, and the biggest mistake she sees entrepreneurs make.

You are an award-winning marketer, prolific investor, advisor, and entrepreneur with a multi-hyphenate career. Your latest professional endeavor includes the CEO of digitalundivided, the social startup that leverages data and advocacy to catalyze economic growth and success for Black and Latinx women entrepreneurs. How did you first discover digitalundivided and get involved in the work they are doing to address the inequities of Black and Latinx women entrepreneurs?

I met digitalundivided almost a decade ago when the organization just started. I was an early advisor to the founder and the organization and remember hosting early planning meetings at my home. I spoke at digitalundivided's first conference and wanted to get more involved. I served as the Chair of the Board of Directors for a number of years, working towards our goal of creating a greater world in which all women of color own their work and worth. We are a nonprofit with a mission to move the entrepreneurial ecosystem forward by increasing funding, access, and opportunities for women of color in business and innovation. Our work, research, and advocacy laid the groundwork to empower generations to speak in profound ways about the realities, experiences, and disparities present in entrepreneurship. As an entrepreneur and investor myself, I'm deeply familiar with these inequities and challenges. I experienced them – so this work is personal. It's very important to me to leverage my vision, commitment, and expertise to help close the gaps, unlock the genius of founders in our community and help women of color founders advance.

As the Chair of digitalundivided's Board of Directors for 3 years prior and an advisor to the organization since it began in 2012, what inspired you to step into your current role as CEO and change agent, and what about this role excites you the most? The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic changed my world and I immediately worried about how this global health crisis would impact our community and the future of innovation and entrepreneurship. At the same time, we were in the midst of a racial and social justice movement in this country. It was made clear that women of color would be disproportionately impacted, and this is a major factor in my decision to take the helm as CEO. I leaned into this moment to help create programs, data, and content to engage women of color founders and remove systemic barriers to professional success and business growth.

We are still living through a pandemic, and there's still so much work to be done, but the passion and drive of our community really excites me. When you meet the women in our programs, you will see that they are all change agents.

In a recent report, digitalundivided found that while more Black and Latinx women are building high-growth companies, they are receiving less than half of 1% of total venture capital funding. How are you making a difference and advancing Black and Latinx women as leaders in innovation in corporate America?

Our research continues to sound the alarm that the funding gap is widening, despite having a year of record venture capital investment overall. digitalundivided was the first to debut authoritative research on the state of Black and Latinx women founders with the ProjectDiane Report. ProjectDiane's latest release shows that we now receive less than half of 1% of all venture funding and we have to ask how is it possible that we are losing ground? digitalundivided's research is conducted by women of color and continues to reveal the lack of funding parity in the venture capital space. Data frames the problems and pushes for systems of accountability. Our research outcomes spark a global conversation to eliminate barriers in entrepreneurship, build awareness, and articulate the urgency for change.

We are an organization that aims to solve deeply rooted systemic issues by taking a multipronged approach. We touched on the research, but digitalundivided's programs are also barrier-breaking. From START, BIG Pre-Accelerator, BREAKTHROUGH, Do You Fellowship, and the New C-Suite, these programs mobilize community, best-in-class resources, advisory, and investment to support women of color founders at all stages of their entrepreneurial and funding journeys.



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