

# Rhode Island Foundation

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# Rhode Island Foundation

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Only Together  
Five-Year Action Plan



Partner with us today by making a gift to the Fund for Rhode Island, which enables us to address community priorities essential for a thriving state.

If you are already a Foundation fundholder, thank you! We hope you'll consider aligned giving, or adding to your existing fund, to help drive even greater impact on our shared community priorities.

Connect with a member of our development team at [FundforRhodeIsland@rifoundation.org](mailto:FundforRhodeIsland@rifoundation.org) or by calling (401) 427-4040 to learn more.

Separately, we can have impact; but only together, on a solid foundation, can we build the future we all hope for.





A word  
from our  
president.



On behalf of the Board of Directors, and the entire team at the Rhode Island Foundation, I am thrilled to share the Foundation's Five-year Action Plan with you.

We've spent more than a year conducting a careful assessment of our work and engaging deeply with Rhode Islanders from diverse backgrounds and experiences. The outcome is an evolved mission and approach that is informed by the people we serve, and by our experience over the last 100+ years. A critically important part of this work is a deepened commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and access (DEIA).

Rhode Islanders were clear about the intersecting challenges they are facing. Increased cost of living and difficulty finding a safe, affordable home; inadequately resourced public schools and rising sea levels; and challenges finding a doctor, or a childcare provider, or a living wage job.

Over and over, the Foundation's team heard the call to do more to address the state's housing crisis, improve public education, foster economic opportunity, ensure access to quality, affordable healthcare, mitigate the persistent root causes of inequity, support climate action efforts, and help communities form stronger connections to civic life.

It's a tall order – but it's what we're built for. The challenges we address are often varied and complex. They're the kind that take more than one organization, or even more than one generation, to solve. That's where the Rhode Island Foundation comes in.

Our local roots, state-wide relationships, and century of experience run deep, and our hopes for our home reach high. We're a true partner to those who help this state thrive, working hard at each table, across every community, by their side. We know our neighbors and work to earn their trust. We share their desire for the best for Rhode Island, and we see the path to reach it.

This desire fuels our bold vision for opportunity, equity, and the wellbeing of our state and its people. We're constructing the way to it with our partners and donors piece-by-piece. Because separately, we can have impact; but only together, on a solid foundation, can we build the future we all hope for.

We look forward to your continued partnership and support.

All the best,



David N. Cicilline  
President & CEO

December 2024

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# Partner with us today.

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Separately, we can have impact; but only together, on a solid foundation, can we build the future we all hope for.

# Mission

As Rhode Island's only community foundation, we mobilize generosity and motivate change that makes a difference. Our local roots, state-wide relationships, and century of experience anchor our work, and our hopes for our home reach high.

Since 1916, we've been a funder and true partner to those who help this state thrive, working hard at each table, across every community, by their side to improve the lives of all Rhode Islanders. Only together, through strong partnerships and building on work that's come before, can we create progress that lasts.









# Who We Are

## Neighbors Serving Neighbors

Our work is personal because Rhode Island is home. We know our neighbors and care about every one of them. Through these relationships, we connect the most pressing needs and practical solutions with an eye for equity and a heart for all. We start there to serve the home we share.

## The Community Table

More than ever, the world needs spaces where everyone can come to engage – so we set the table. We gather Rhode Islanders from all sides around common issues, supporting local leaders and transformative ideas. Then together, we catalyze action on our biggest challenges for the common good.

## Opportunity's Stable Ground

The generosity of countless Rhode Islanders has built the foundation we stand on. Because of them, we have state-wide reach and the financial strength to give progress a platform to leap. With a broad and long-term view, we innovate to meet systemic needs. On a century of service, each day we build the trust that gives rise to opportunity.

## A Greater Force For Good

Every act of giving makes an impact; collectively, they're a force that shapes our state. This is where we lead. With bold vision, we focus in on what works best, then we scale it. Both adaptive and adept at coordinating quick action, when we get behind something, we make it move.

# What We Do

Community foundations are a vehicle that anyone can use to turn their generosity into a powerful force for good.

Community foundations, like ours here in Rhode Island, serve a unifying purpose. We possess the unique ability to mobilize generosity and financial resources, build and activate networks of people, provide an enduring safe harbor during times of uncertainty, and celebrate and embrace differing experiences – all with the aim of solving critical community challenges.

As a nonpartisan public charity, the Rhode Island Foundation, like all community foundations, accepts charitable gifts of all shapes and sizes, pools and invests those gifts in financial markets so that they grow over time, and uses a responsible portion of the proceeds from those invested charitable dollars to make grants, provide scholarships, and support organizations

and efforts focused on strengthening our communities and enhancing the quality of life in our state. The design is intended to provide a permanent source of funding to help improve the lives of all Rhode Islanders – now, and for generations to come.

We're always evolving in step with our state to address the issues that matter most to Rhode Islanders. Thanks to the generosity of our donors, we have the financial strength and reach to provide much more than funding. We foster collaboration among partners and decision-makers to develop innovative solutions to community needs, and we strengthen the capabilities of individual organizations and sectors to build their own resilient foundations. With a clear point of view on the challenges we face, we're driving progress and making a real difference for our neighbors state-wide.









# Community Priorities

# A Thriving Rhode Island

Through deep engagement and discussion with the public, collaboration with our partners, research, and data analysis, we identified six community priorities that are essential for a thriving Rhode Island. These priorities were consistently voiced by the community we serve and will guide our efforts in the years ahead. As the state's community foundation we will continue to address Rhode Island's most pressing needs and advance promising solutions, with an eye for equity and a heart for all.

Our vision for the future is clear. We believe in the potential for meaningful impact and are committed to using our resources, relationships, and knowledge of the community to make Rhode Island a better place for all.



# Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access

The Rhode Island Foundation is committed to advancing equity centered on valuing and embracing diverse identities and experiences and guided by inclusiveness, accessibility, compassion, mutual respect, and humility in partnership with our team and the community.

At the center of each community priority is a focus on diversity, equity, inclusion, and access, ensuring that our efforts address systemic inequities and support thriving communities.





# Why does it matter?

No one's race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, religion, socio-economic, housing, or justice-involved status should limit their access to opportunity.

## Focus areas

1

Implementing a DEIA Strategic Roadmap for the Foundation, to ensure a diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible organization, embedding our DEIA commitment in all efforts to address community priorities, and maintaining accountability.

2

Advancing transparent strategies to engage and encourage participation from diverse grantees, donors, partners, and communities.

3

Continuously improving and adapting our Equity Leadership Initiative program in alignment with our work as a community foundation and our focus on priorities for a thriving Rhode Island.

4

Enhancing systems and policies to support a diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible work environment, and vendor, grantee, and investment relationships.



Community Priorities

# Civic and Cultural Life

Together, we lift every voice.

We're committed to expanding civic and cultural opportunities that bring together people of diverse backgrounds to sustain equitable, thriving communities.



# Why does it matter?

When community members are better connected with each other, with public and cultural institutions, and with the places they live, we also see increases in a range of positive factors including physical health, employment rates, and resilience and response to emergencies.

## Focus Areas

1

Enhancing access to trusted news and information sources, including support of independent local journalism.

2

Creating spaces and opportunities for community connection, volunteering, and arts and cultural experiences.

3

Improving K-12 access to high-quality civics learning opportunities and greater access to civics professional development for educators.

4

Innovative, collaborative initiatives beyond the stated focus areas with the potential to drive greater impact on civic and cultural life - particularly those with an equity focus and/or advancing solutions across multiple community priorities.

# Climate Action and Sustainability

Together, we protect the place we call home.

As proud Rhode Islanders, we strive to mitigate the impacts of climate change and develop real resilience, especially within communities deeply and disproportionately affected by environmental pollution.





# Why does it matter?

With a challenge of this magnitude, Rhode Islanders must work together to turn the tide and protect the places we love. Our state's unique susceptibility to climate change requires coordinated attention.

## Focus Areas

1

Supporting implementation of policies that strengthen climate resiliency and adaptability and maximize access to historic federal investments for climate change mitigation, particularly for historically underserved communities.

2

Preserving the natural environment and improving access to green and open space, especially in environmental justice communities.

3

Supporting circular food systems and improving food sustainability with a focus on creating networks to connect local producers and consumers.

4

Innovative, collaborative initiatives beyond the stated focus areas with the potential to drive greater impact on climate action and sustainability - particularly those with an equity focus and/or advancing solutions across multiple community priorities.



# Education and Student Success

Together, we're improving education outcomes.

We're committed to strengthening student experiences, educator support, and collaborative efforts to address inequities and set all Rhode Islanders up for educational success.



# Why does it matter?

A thriving state depends on a public education system working equitably and urgently to prepare all students to succeed in life and access pathways to opportunity.

## Focus Areas

1

Strengthening educator capacity, including efforts to diversify the teacher workforce by expanding recruitment and retention initiatives.

2

Improving secondary (middle and high school) student learning experiences (especially high-needs populations), focused on youth development, mentorship, and leadership opportunities – with additional focus on increasing out-of-school support for students in underserved communities.

3

Collaborating on policy, procedure, and use of resources at the state and local level, particularly centering on revisions to the school funding formula, multilingual student supports, creating relevant student opportunities, and addressing workforce challenges.

4

Innovative, collaborative initiatives beyond the stated focus areas with the potential to drive greater impact on education and student success – particularly those with an equity focus and/or advancing solutions across multiple community priorities.

# Healthy and Strong Communities

Together, we care for our neighbors.

We work for equitable access, use, and quality of healthcare, expanding collaborations that address social determinants of health, workforce needs, healthcare costs, and the overall health and well-being of all Rhode Islanders.



# Why does it matter?

Access to high-quality, affordable, sustainable, and culturally appropriate healthcare is critical to the health of Rhode Island as a whole. More than that, it's a fundamental right.

## Focus Areas

1

Improving equitable access, utilization, and/or coordination of primary and behavioral healthcare services, with particular focus on ensuring a robust and representative workforce across care settings.

2

Supporting efforts to mitigate key health disparities that focus on addressing underlying root causes, shifting institutional practices, and/or advancing systemic reform.

3

Sustaining and expanding comprehensive community-based efforts that help individuals and families meet their basic needs and address inequities in the determinants of health for historically marginalized communities.

4

Innovative, collaborative initiatives beyond the stated focus areas with the potential to drive greater impact on healthy and strong communities - particularly those with an equity focus and/or advancing solutions across multiple community priorities.





# Housing and Economic Mobility

Together, we're closing the gap.

We're identifying and addressing barriers to affordable housing throughout the state, reducing economic disparities, and improving household financial stability and equitable wealth building.





# Why does it matter?

Economic opportunity should be within reach for all Rhode Islanders, including affordable housing, career mobility, and generational wealth building, particularly within historically underserved communities.

## Focus Areas

1

Expanding availability and access to affordable housing and supports for Rhode Islanders experiencing housing insecurity.

2

Increasing access to effective workforce development programs, including those with wraparound services and training and credentialing for high-demand jobs and industries.

3

Enhancing financial well-being in underserved communities through initiatives that increase access to financial education and the ability to apply that learning to achieve long-term financial security.

4

Innovative, collaborative initiatives beyond the stated focus areas with the potential to drive greater impact on housing and economic mobility – particularly those with an equity focus and/or advancing solutions across multiple community priorities.







# Case Studies

# Diverse organizations leverage the power of collaboration.

Launched in October 2021, the Rhode Island Foundation's capacity building for nonprofits of color program is helping 11 organizations led by Black, Hispanic or Latino, Indigenous, Asian, and multiracial people (also referred to as BIPOC) to strengthen and extend their reach. The three-year program was funded by the Foundation's \$8.5 million investment to address racial equity, diversity, and inclusion.

The Reentry Campus Program (RCP), which James Monteiro is the founder and director of, was chosen to participate. The Providence-based nonprofit's mission is to improve access to and completion of post-secondary education for individuals who are transitioning from the incarceration system back into their communities. The RCP also has a mentorship program and provides critical wraparound services, continuous support, and resources specific to their individual needs.

Movement Education Outdoors, also one of the 11 participating organizations, started in 2018 to work with youth (ages 11-13) and community organizations from Providence, Woonsocket, Central Falls, and Pawtucket to offer outdoor experiences with the premise that all young people should have equitable chances and enjoy

outdoor activities. The activities include hiking, kayaking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, water and air quality testing, and mindfulness and movement practices.

Mixed Magic Theatre, another of the 11 participating organizations, was for a long time among the few caretakers of Black art in Rhode Island. The husband-and-wife duo have been nationally recognized artists for more than four decades. They started the theater company in 2000.

Each organization received \$30,000 per year for each of the three years giving them the breathing room and opportunity to re-evaluate their operations and incorporate new ways to expand and future-proof their work.





When you are talking about building capacity, especially for minority-led organizations, you have to have the support of the Rhode Island Foundation.”

James Monteiro  
Reentry Campus Program

## Takeaways

1

In 2021, the Foundation launched a program for nonprofits led by people of color as part of its 3-year, \$8.5 million investment to address racial equity, diversity, and inclusion.

2

Eleven organizations were chosen to receive three years of mentoring and coaching and \$30,000 each year.

3

Organizations in this program gained strength from cross-sector collaboration.

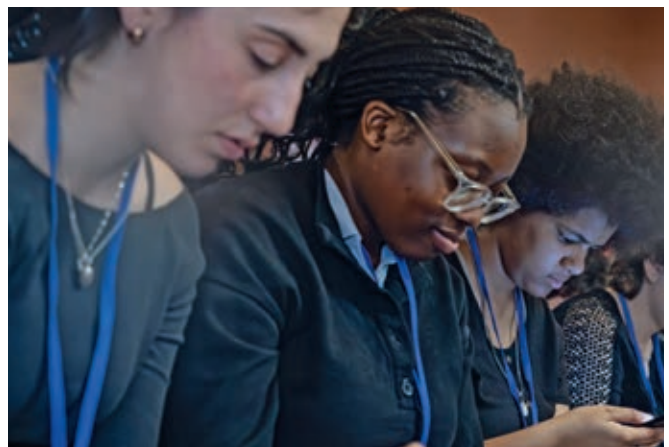


# Fostering a lifelong passion for civic action.

More than 85 students from 41 high schools throughout Rhode Island participated in the Student Civic Liaison Program initiated by Rhode Island's Office of the Secretary of State. Since June 2023, the program has introduced local students to government and community leaders through monthly workshops, which facilitate collaboration around civic action projects in the participants' own communities.

The inaugural program culminated with the first-ever Rhode Island Civic Leadership Summit, funded in part by the Rhode Island Foundation. The three-day Summit offered students the opportunity to collaborate more with their peers, participate in professionally guided workshops, and think critically about issues and evaluate potential solutions. The goal of the Summit is to foster a lifelong passion for public service and civic action, whether that be in government, the nonprofit community, or corporate stewardship.

Supporting civic education deepens community engagement and builds connections that are crucial to our work improving education, health care, and economic opportunity for all. In addition to funding this program we established a new philanthropic fund to benefit the Department of State's non-partisan programming. Together with other supporters, Foundation funding made it possible for all the students to attend the Summit for free.





Civic engagement is my love language because that is the way to transform communities. We are losing that opportunity if we are not tapping into these young minds.”

Jessica Vega

Senior Policy Analyst for Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

## Takeaways

1

The goal of the Rhode Island Civic Leadership Summit, funded by the Foundation, is to foster a lifelong passion for public service and civic action, whether that be in government, the non-profit community, or corporate stewardship.

2

The Summit is the culmination of the broader Student Civic Liaison Program sponsored by Rhode Island's Secretary of State; more than 85 students from 41 high schools throughout Rhode Island participated in the inaugural program.

3

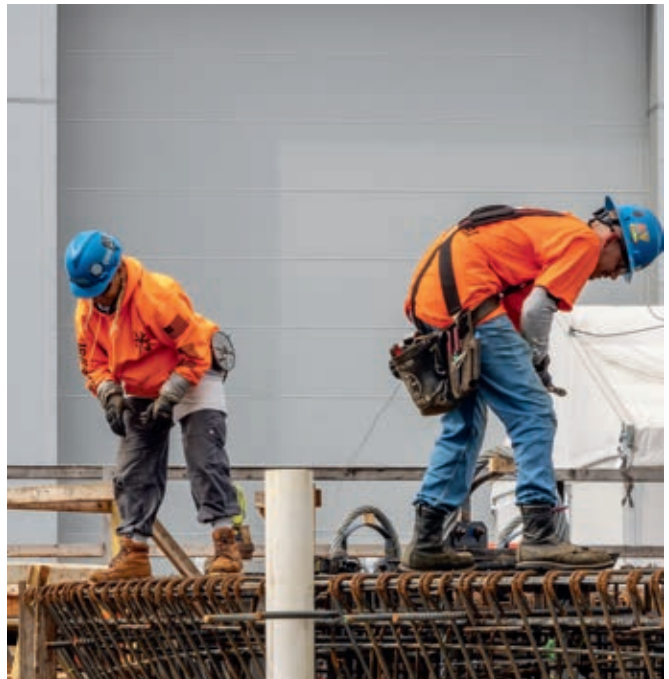
We know engaged students seek opportunities to become more involved with their communities.

# A challenge so big, there's only one way to solve it: together.

Environmentalists and labor have come together and are working to build a 'just transition' to green energy according to Michael Roles, executive director at Climate Jobs Rhode Island (CJRI), a broad labor/environmental coalition committed to an equitable, pro-worker, pro-climate green economy. Rhode Island Foundation has supported the organization with \$75,000 to help them maximize current federal funding opportunities.

Building a Just Transition for a Resilient Future: A Climate Jobs Program for Rhode Island, a report developed by Labor Leading on Climate Initiative at the Worker Institute at Cornell, lays out wide-ranging policy recommendations to transition the Ocean State's building, school, energy, and transportation sectors to renewable energy with the most robust labor and equity standards.

Training the next generation of green workers hinges on intentional, proactive local leadership. The onus is on local leaders to identify various sectors in need of talent and to collaborate with other institutional partners such as colleges, community-based organizations, and other groups essential to engaging new workers, training them, and providing supportive services.







The transition to a green economy must offer durable and growing career pathways while it cleans the air”

Patrick Crowley

Co-Chair, CJRI and President, Rhode Island AFL-CIO

## Takeaways

1

As a small state, Rhode Island can be innovative and nimble at implementing approaches to mitigate climate change and build an equitable green economy.

2

Experts agree that we are nowhere near having sufficient human capital with green talent, skills, or jobs to reach desirable climate targets, where new tasks, skills, and competencies are needed.

3

The Foundation supported Climate Jobs Rhode Island with with \$75,000 to help them maximize current federal funding opportunities.

# The barriers are big; the dreams are bigger.

College Visions (CV) was founded in 2004 to provide holistic college access for underserved students. Twenty years later, CV is celebrating 500 college graduates, each of whom has been helped with all aspects of their college applications, including identifying schools that meet their needs and abilities and that offer ample financial aid.

The Rhode Island Foundation has long been a funding partner. Since 2010 the Foundation has given grants of half a million dollars, and generous donor advisors have contributed another \$1.2 million. Mindy and George Matouk, Creative Director and CEO of luxury linens maker Matouk, provided aligned funding alongside a Foundation grant to College Visions in 2021, and have continued to support the organization through their donor advised fund.

Executive Director Lamont Gordon describes the CV model as relational, rather than transactional. Building relationships with students and their families is a must. CV's college advisors, with whom the students meet weekly one-on-one, work hard to make the students feel comfortable. Advisors are all 'first gen' themselves, so their background and experience help them build a level of comfort and trust.

Most of CV's students will qualify for the maximum Pell grant. Typically, it is not just tuition

that is the problem—it's also transportation, housing, and food. CV has created an emergency fund to help students with unexpected expenses, and they do have students who are managing to navigate problems like these with their support.

Many CV students choose professions in which they can give back to their communities in some way.







We focus on college graduation and, while the college degree is our primary metric, it is not the end of the story—rather the beginning.”

Lamont Gordon  
Executive Director

## Takeaways

1

The Foundation has long been a CV funding partner, granting half a million dollars since 2010; donor advisors have contributed more than \$1 million.

2

Foundational to CV’s work is the premise that any student who wants to go to college should be supported in that process.

3

CV serves a wide academic range – from students who excel to those who have experienced rough spots in their transcripts.

# Street Medicine, meeting our neighbors where they are.

The Rhode Island Foundation, in collaboration with Brown Health / Lifespan, funded an innovative Street Medicine (SM) program to deliver acute care and build trust between the medical community and unsheltered individuals. Through the program, Dr. Rebecca Karb, an emergency medicine doctor, and Megan Smith, PhD, an assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at Rhode Island College, are taking medicine to the streets.

Homelessness and health influence one another through multiple reinforcing mechanisms. People experiencing homelessness are susceptible to the same issues as people who are not – and then some – and their living conditions tend to make even the most routine medical treatment difficult.

Organizations like House of Hope and Project Weber/RENEW, with support from the Foundation, have been providing consistent outreach with the unsheltered population for some time, but there has been a gap in the engagement of medical institutions and healthcare providers with this work. Now, Brown Health / Lifespan is attempting to bring high-quality healthcare out of clinics and hospitals into the community by meeting people where they are – in parks, encampments, under bridges, abandoned buildings, and cars.

There are layers of goals for the program. First, SM is providing medical care for a marginalized and under-served population that has difficulty accessing care in the structures that have traditionally been set up. Second, healing the trauma or mistrust that has built up for the healthcare system among this population because of negative experiences they have had – being mistreated, labeled, or judged. Third, using the experience that physicians have in outreach to inform and transform care, particularly in the emergency department.





When you can meet patients on their terms, you have a better idea of their dimensionality. These are little changes that add up over time.”

Dr. Rebecca Karb  
Emergency Medicine Doctor

## Takeaways

1

Health challenges of those experiencing homelessness include: lung diseases, wounds and skin infections, malnutrition, behavioral health challenges, dental and periodontal disease, and infectious hepatitis.

2

Hospital systems have been addressing equity and social determinants of health but not always in a tangible way. This program demonstrates Brown Health / Lifespan's commitment.

3

The Foundation funded this program in December 2022 with a \$134,000 grant, and recently committed to a second year of funding.



# Building Futures: Improving lives and our state's economy.

Building Futures is more than a workforce development organization; it's a way to describe their mission and results. "They didn't tell me that Building Futures was going to change my life, but it did. This program definitely allowed my dreams to come true," says Alvin Reyes, a program graduate who became a state-licensed electrician.

Launched in 2007, Building Futures' mission is to meet employer and industry need for skilled workers through the Registered Apprenticeship system while creating family sustaining career opportunities for underserved residents of Rhode Island. Before Building Futures, Alvin was between jobs with a daughter to support and college loan debt. He is now a homeowner earning a good salary and one course away from his associate degree. He's also paying it forward, as a union official who interviews Building Futures' graduates for electrical apprenticeships.

Andrew Cortés, executive director, explains that even though demand for skilled tradespeople is growing, the supply is decreasing as workers age and fewer apprentices learn the trades. Building Futures provides a pipeline for apprenticeship programs. "We expose people to the basics through an intensive five-week program and they see what makes sense for them."

Of the 18- to 35-year olds who enroll in Building Futures, 80% are from minority groups and 50% were previously incarcerated. Most learn of the program through word of mouth. Andrew notes that they only formally recruit women, who currently comprise 10% of enrollees. With nearly 300 graduates, Building Futures boasts a 95% job retention rate after one year and 80% after 10 years.

Rhode Island Foundation was an early investor. "The Foundation has funded our direct strategy work," says Andrew, "and the grants we received have led to systemic change within the construction industry and workforce development. We're creating the next generation of laborers, as well as the next generation of leaders."





Building Futures gave me an opportunity, and now I want to give back. I want to start my own construction company and be a role model.”

Vennicia Kingston

Journeyworker Construction Craft Laborer  
& LIUNA Local 27 member

## Takeaways

1

Building Futures meets employer and industry need for skilled workers through the Registered Apprenticeship system while creating family sustaining career opportunities for diverse Rhode Islanders.

2

The Foundation has given Building Futures almost a million dollars since 2016.

3

With nearly 300 graduates, Building Futures boasts a 95% job retention rate after one year and 80% after 10 years. They actively recruit women.



Partner  
with us  
today.

