

Community Priority

Civic and Cultural Life

Together we lift every voice.

As Rhode Island's only community foundation, we're committed to expanding civic, arts, and cultural opportunities that bring together people of diverse backgrounds to sustain equitable, thriving communities.

Through deep engagement and discussion with the public, collaboration with our partners, research, and data analysis, we identified a set of community priorities that are essential for a thriving Rhode Island - **Civic and Cultural Life, Climate Action and Sustainability, Education and Student Success, Healthy and Strong Communities, and Housing and Economic Mobility.**

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.

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

- Enhancing access to trusted news and information sources, including support of independent local journalism.
- Creating spaces and opportunities for community connection, volunteering, and arts and cultural activities.
- Improving K-12 access to high-quality civics learning opportunities and greater access to civics professional development for educators.
- Innovative, collaborative initiatives beyond the stated focus areas with potential to drive greater impact on civic and cultural life – particularly those that address inequities and/or advance solutions across multiple community priorities.

Case Studies

Generation Citizen

Generation Citizen is leading a movement to ensure every young person is equipped and inspired to strengthen our democracy. The organization envisions a future where young people drive efforts to create a more just, participatory, and inclusive society. Through an equity-centered approach to real-world education, Generation Citizen is transforming how civics is taught, providing all students with meaningful opportunities to engage and learn.

With funding from the Rhode Island Foundation's Catalyst Grant program, Generation Citizen will support the Rhode Island Civic Learning Coalition (RICLC), a multiracial, multigenerational, and nonpartisan network committed to ensuring equitable access to high-quality civic education. Founded in 2021, RICLC brings together nonprofits, community groups, educators, youth, and public institutions to promote a democracy where all voices are empowered and heard.

Building on the 2021 Civic Literacy Act, the coalition aims to position Rhode Island as a national leader in civic learning by advancing three priorities: legislative and infrastructure development, educator support and resources, and assessment and youth engagement. Key policy efforts include advocating for a statewide civic education funding bill, revitalizing the dormant Civics Commission, and promoting the appointment of dedicated civics staff at the Rhode Island Department of Education.

The initiative will also empower educators through conferences, virtual learning communities, and curated high-quality, equity-centered resources. To track progress, the coalition is integrating civics indicators into assessment tools that measure student learning and engagement.

Students serve as active partners in this work, taking leadership roles in advocacy and coalition strategy to ensure civic education reflects their experiences and aspirations.

DownCity Design

DownCity Design empowers young people to strengthen their communities by harnessing the creative power of design. The organization offers free afterschool and summer programs that train Providence County teens to become skilled changemakers by designing and fabricating functional projects for public spaces and community groups.

Since 2009, over 3,500 participants have collaboratively created more than 115 new amenities for Providence, including pocket parks, community gardens, and outdoor classrooms, working together to make their city more accessible, healthy, and vibrant.

Rhode Island Foundation support enables DownCity Design to provide programming that addresses critical gaps in the design industry, where only 4% of registered architects and engineers identify as BIPOC and just 11% of practicing architects in Rhode Island are women. The organization works to reduce systemic barriers for youth interested in creative careers by providing hands-on technical training, career exploration, mentorship, and workforce readiness skills.

Miliany, a junior at Classical High School, reflects on her experience: "Throughout this project at DownCity Design, we've done so much... from building models, to measuring slopes, experimenting with Rhino, and using drills and tools to bring our ideas to life. It's been a hands-on, creative, and really rewarding time for us."