

Community Priority

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.

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.

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

- Expanding availability and access to affordable housing and supports for Rhode Islanders experiencing housing insecurity.
- Increasing access to effective workforce development programs, including those with wrap-around services and training and credentialing for high-demand jobs and industries.
- 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.
- Innovative, collaborative initiatives beyond the stated focus areas with the potential to drive greater impact on housing and economic mobility - particularly those that address inequities and/or advance solutions across multiple community priorities.

Case Studies

Neighborworks Blackstone River Valley

Neighborworks Blackstone River Valley (NWBRV) is a community development corporation working to enrich neighborhood life and expand affordable housing opportunities throughout Northern Rhode Island, with a focus on Burrillville, Glocester, North Smithfield, and Woonsocket. Their work creates stable housing, fosters economic mobility, and helps build thriving communities.

Despite a state mandate requiring that 10% of each community's housing be affordable, many fall short of this threshold, limiting housing choices, and perpetuating segregation and economic inequality. NWBRV actively works to correct these inequities by developing affordable housing in underrepresented areas, ensuring families of all incomes can live, work, and attend school where they choose. Equity drives their approach through culturally specific homebuyer education, barrier-free hiring practices, and inclusive marketing.

For nearly a decade, NWBRV has operated Accessing Home, a statewide homeownership program, in partnership with AmeriCorps. The program serves low to moderate income Rhode Islanders statewide, offering resident resource navigation and eviction prevention, while providing paid career training for AmeriCorps members as HUD-certified resident services coordinators.

Rhode Island Foundation support has been instrumental in sustaining NWBRV's work, including stepping in when federal funding cuts threatened the continuity of the Accessing Home program.

During the most recent program year, 13 AmeriCorps members supported over 4,000 individuals, the highest total in the program's nine-year history—and helped nearly 600 Rhode Islanders transition into safe, healthy, affordable housing.

Rhode Island College Workforce Development Hub

The Rhode Island College Workforce Development Hub partners with residents, community organizations, and stakeholders across education, government, healthcare, and industry to build the knowledge and skills of Rhode Islanders, creating pathways to economic opportunity and career advancement.

As part of its workforce programming, and with support from the Rhode Island Foundation, the Hub offers a Medical Assistant Certificate of Continuing Study—a contextualized ESL workforce training program designed specifically for multilingual learner adults. This innovative approach combines language acquisition with career preparation, helping participants overcome barriers to entering healthcare careers. Students gain essential skills, including clinical testing, basic pharmacology, medical terminology, electronic charting, and HIPAA compliance, among other competencies needed for success in healthcare settings.

A key component of the training includes internship placements at medical sites throughout Rhode Island, providing hands-on experience in real-world healthcare environments. Partner organizations include Clínica Esperanza, Comprehensive Community Action Program, Providence Community Health Centers, and Blackstone Valley Health Center. These placements allow students to apply their learning while building professional networks and demonstrating their capabilities to potential employers.

By combining language learning, technical training, and practical experience, the program creates a pathway for multilingual learners to build successful healthcare careers that support families and communities.