

Papitto Opportunity Connection

November 2025

POC's Connector Conference: Celebrating 5 Years of Transformative Community Impact

The Crowne Plaza ballroom was filled with energy and optimism as more than 250 Papitto Opportunity Connection (POC) grantees gathered for the organization's fifth annual Connector Conference. The event celebrated a powerful milestone: in just five years, POC has invested \$100 million to support over 360 nonprofit organizations across Rhode Island.

The impact: incalculable!



Above from left to right: POC Founder, Barbara Papitto and POC Managing Trustee, John Tarantino.

Kicking off the conference, POC founder Barbara Papitto inspired attendees by reflecting on POC's origins and its unwavering focus.

"Our mission has always been clear: to eliminate barriers and create pathways to success for people in need across Rhode Island."

Barbara highlighted how POC began with a strong focus on communities that needed it the most—specifically Rhode Island's urban core of Central Falls, Pawtucket, and Providence. The initial investment prioritized breaking barriers in areas like education, entrepreneurship, and job skills training. Responding to the direct needs of the community, the scope soon broadened and expanded to include crucial services such as healthcare, housing, and criminal justice.



Above and below: 2025 Connector Conference attendees.

POC's \$100 million investment supports organizations—both big and small—that are on the front lines, providing critical services and driving transformative initiatives in every corner of the state. These funds are directly contributing to the creation of a more equitable Rhode Island.



This year's conference offered practical, high-value sessions to equip nonprofit leaders for future success. Attendees learned about the changing legal landscape with a key presentation from Amy Romero and Kevin Hubbard of the [Lawyers Committee For Rhode Island](#). Additionally, grant writer Derek Collamati provided valuable tips on effective grant writing to help organizations maximize their impact.

Barbara concluded her keynote with a heartfelt expression of gratitude to the dedicated attendees. "Thank you for being part of this journey—and for helping us

shape a stronger, more equitable Rhode Island."

Get Ready: December Grant Cycle is Coming!

Mark your calendars, POC will be accepting non-solicited grant proposals Dec. 1-15 through our online portal on the [POC](#) website. Here are some important things to keep in mind if you are considering applying for a POC grant.

Rhode Island non-profit organizations can apply for either our Million Dollar Innovation Challenge (MDIC) grant or our smaller general operating grant program. We provided an extensive discussion on both opportunities in our October newsletter, but as a reminder here are some things to consider when applying for either.

When applying for an MDIC grant, your organization must have at least a \$1 million budget and be able to demonstrate the ability to manage an infusion of capital into your organization at that level. This is a one-time grant, and you must also be able to demonstrate how the program you are proposing for POC funds will be sustained when POC funding ends.



POC Managing Trustee John Tarantino shared this advice at the POC Connector Conference for those considering applying for an MDIC grant:

"If you apply for a Million Dollar Innovation Challenge grant the way to get my attention and the trustees is to show us how your proposed program is going to change the *community*, we don't want to know how it will change your organization," said Tarantino.

Tarantino also urged applicants to consider "whether your proposed program really needs a million dollars to work." He noted that there are "many good ideas out there that don't require a million dollars to be successful."

It is also important to remember; POC's trustees may decide to make one award for \$1-million or distribute the \$1 million amongst multiple applicants. If you apply for an MDIC and aren't selected, your application will automatically be put into consideration for a general operating grant. General operating grants are smaller in nature, and will not exceed \$50,000, in fact most are between \$2,500 and \$10,000.

Feeding Hope: the ELISHA project Shares Food & More With Those In Need.

The sun had yet to break through the darkness on a brisk Saturday morning in late October, but [the ELISHA project](#) founder George Ortiz had already logged several miles walking the streets of Pawtucket. Long before the darkness began to fade, George—

wearing a bright yellow coat that allowed him to stand out in the darkness—saw the long line of cars and stopped at each one. George spoke to each passenger and handed them a coveted ticket that would provide access to the Share Market. There, they would receive fresh meats and produce along with hygiene and household products.

“What we’re doing is sharing,” said George. “All I’m trying to do is help and let you know that people still care. We have to take care of each other.”

By 7 a.m., cars stretched from the ELISHA project headquarters in Pawtucket (formerly Apex) all the way to the end of Alfred Stone Road where Pawtucket crosses into Providence. By 8 a.m., the line had extended to Lincoln School on Providence’s East Side. The first person in line had arrived at 8 p.m. the night before and hadn’t budged, sleeping in his car overnight, determined to be the day’s first recipient of food and essentials so he could share with his friends and family members who weren’t able to attend the Share Market.



Volunteers at the Share Market event.

The ELISHA project holds Share Markets throughout the year, but the one this late October Saturday was special. It was held in response to the overwhelming number of calls the ELISHA project had received from communities and public officials when 140,000 Rhode Islanders were facing the loss of SNAP benefits. The Share Market was just one of several initiatives that are part of the ELISHA project’s broader effort to improve the lives of those who need it most in Rhode Island.

“The line is an explicit data point of where people are. We’ve always had lines, but we have never seen them like this,” said George.

Aided by dozens of volunteers including POC Founder Barbara Papitto, the ELISHA project distributed more than 50,000 pounds of fresh food, produce, hygiene products and household goods to 600 Rhode Island families in need.

“The ELISHA project does great work. They’ve been feeding people—and providing essentials— wherever there is a need in the state,” said Barbara.

In 2025 alone, EP is on track to distribute approximately 7.8 million pounds of culturally responsive food, furniture and essential supplies across RI’s urban core through share markets and other programs. Culturally responsive foods are safe, nutritious, and delicious options that align with a community’s cultural identity, preferences, and traditions.

In addition, through its recently established Bodega program, EP distributes 70,000 pounds of food and essential items to approximately 5,500 RI families in need in 14 bodegas located in schools and community organizations in Providence, Pawtucket and Woonsocket.

POC is proud to support the ELISHA project and the critical work the organization provides to all those in need in Rhode Island.

"The ELISHA project is phenomenal. POC has supported the ELISHA project for the last four years and is thrilled to be just a little piece of this," said Barbara.

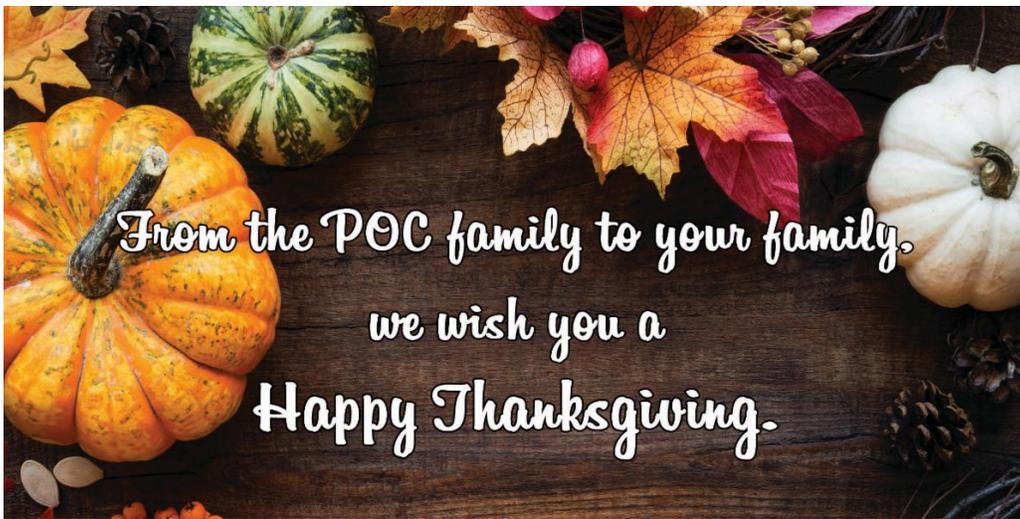
The ELISHA project and POC Featured on *Street Stories Unpaved*

George Ortiz and Barbara Papitto joined WPRI 12's Mike Montecalvo on a recent episode of *Street Stories Unpaved* to talk about the ELISHA project's critical work and POC's \$100 million investment in Rhode Island communities that need it most.

Listen [here](#).



Above from left to right: George Ortiz, the ELISHA project founder, Barbara Papitto, and WPRI's *Street Stories Unpaved* host, Mike Montecalvo.



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