

Papitto Opportunity Connection

January 2024

We're Looking For The Million Dollar Idea

Siya Singhal, a student at the Wheeler School, envisions a world in which students of all backgrounds will feel culturally confident, gain a sense of pride, and go to school feeling unique, instead of different. She had an idea. Six months later, the 2023 Transform Rhode Island (TRIS) winner's big idea is becoming a reality.

Growing up in Woonsocket, Mariam Kaba visualized transforming this community in need to one filled with opportunities and resources for its residents to grow and thrive. She had an idea. Since being named the first-ever TRIS winner in 2022, Mariam has worked tirelessly to "Restore the Village."

Both Mariam and Siya received \$25,000 TRIS scholarships and Papitto Opportunity Connection (POC) invested \$1 million to make each of their ideas become a reality. In a short period of time, both are making a difference and implementing real change in the Ocean State.



Left Picture: Barbara Papitto (back left), Mariam Kaba (center) John Tarantino (back right).
Right Picture: Siya Singhal

Who will be Next?

Bigger and better than ever before, the third annual TRIS is designed to empower high school students and provide them with the opportunity to share their ideas to create real change in the Ocean State.

To apply, students must simply answer one question:

If you had a million dollars to improve the lives of those who need it most in Rhode Island, how would you do it?

POC has once again committed to investing \$1 million in making the winning idea a reality and will award ten TRIS finalists' one-time scholarships worth between \$5,000-\$25,000.



Pictured above: Chachi Carvalho (left) along with the ten 2023 TRIS winners

TRIS is open to ALL high school students in RI. Students can share their ideas by either submitting an essay (no more than 1,000 words), a 3-minute video, or a multimedia

presentation. The deadline to enter is March 31, 2024.

What are you waiting for? To submit your idea or to learn more, [click here](#).



Pictured above: Barbara Papitto (left) with past TRIS winners, and friends.

Follow TRIS on social media: @TransformRI and help us spread the word about this amazing opportunity that offers a chance for all of RI's high school students to have a voice and create real change in their communities.

POC Funding Ignites Action at City Year Providence & Black Leadership Institute

On the third Monday in January, our nation comes together to celebrate and honor Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. —a visionary leader who devoted his life to the struggle for justice and equality. Dr. King's powerful message of love, peace, and nonviolence inspired a generation to act and change the course of U.S. history.



Pictured above: City Year Coaches Gather in Providence, RI

Carrying on Dr. King's legacy are the scores of dedicated community advocates who are making a difference today. Here in Rhode Island, they include the [City Year](#) coaches supporting a positive school culture for 3,000 Providence elementary and middle school students.

Dr. King's vision is also realized in the successful outcomes behind the [Institute For Nonprofit Practice's](#) (INP) launch of the [Black Leadership Institute](#) (BLI) —an initiative that “inspires, and uplifts senior-level Black leaders shaping social impact across the country.”



Pictured above: Black Leadership Institute

“Being a part of the BLI has profoundly impacted my leadership journey,” said Ibn Hashim Bakari, Executive Director of [Lights & Sirens International](#) and one of 20 fellows recruited for BLI's inaugural cohort. Lights & Sirens works to educate, support, and develop youth by integrating sports and cultural exposure through civic education and guidance with a focus on developing community cohesion in Rhode Island and the Dominican Republic.

“One of the most significant outcomes of this experience has been the power of community. The communal learning environment provided by the BLI fostered a strong sense of unity, shared purpose, and collective growth. This, in turn, has greatly influenced my leadership style and positively affected Lights & Sirens International.”

This month, the BLI program will launch its next cohort, serving thirty senior-level Black leaders from six cities across the U.S., including Providence and Boston.

POC is proud to continue to support organizations working towards transformative change in Rhode Island.

Pictured: Ibn Hashim Bakari, Executive Director of Lights & Sirens International.



College Visions Celebrates Breaking Down Barriers: Providing Pathways to College and Beyond

For two decades, [College Visions](#) (CV) has worked tirelessly to break down barriers and create a successful route to higher education for first-generation college students in Rhode Island. CV’s free program includes 1-on-1 advising, resources, guidance, and offers support to students from the admission process through college graduation.



Picture above: Students gather at College Visions for a recent workshop

As College Vision embarks on its 20th anniversary this year, the nonprofit organization has a lot to celebrate. More than 70% of CV’s participants earn a degree within six years, greater than the 43% average graduation rate for Rhode Island’s low-income students. Over 500 CV Scholars have graduated from college and gone on to become public school teachers, non-profit executives, business owners, healthcare professionals, and elected officials across the state.

“As we enter our 20th year, we reaffirm our deep commitment to fighting for educational equity and access and empowering young people in our community to aim high, rise to their potential, and become our next generation of leaders,” said Lamont Gordon, Executive Director, College Visions.

College Visions headed into the milestone year on a high note. In 2023, with support from POC, College Visions grew its Career Program providing support to first-gen students who do not have access through family or community to critical career networks. CV was able to serve more students in the program aimed at building the knowledge, skills and connections needed to achieve successful careers. A key initiative was the debut of the First-Gen Career Conference. Held in the spring, 60 RI high school and college students attended the day-long conference which featured guest speakers, panel discussions and professional development workshops. CV also piloted a paid internship program with BCBSRI and held several career exploration workshops and field trips.

Ten high school juniors from Pawtucket and Providence schools participated in the debut of College Vision’s inaugural Fellowship. This new program is aimed at creating a successful pathway to higher education and increasing the numbers of Black and Latino males in Rhode Island’s college pipeline.

“It is our goal that this new initiative will aid participants on a clear pathway to and through college, while building a cohort of diverse young men working toward common educational goals and supporting each other throughout the process,” said Gordon. “We’re off to a good start.”

POC Supports Preserving Sowams for Future Generations

“Not everyone connects with history and heritage, but once people learn about it, they want to know more.” So said a participant in one of the recent Community Conversations held by the The Sowams Project team as they discussed the [Sowams Heritage Area](#)

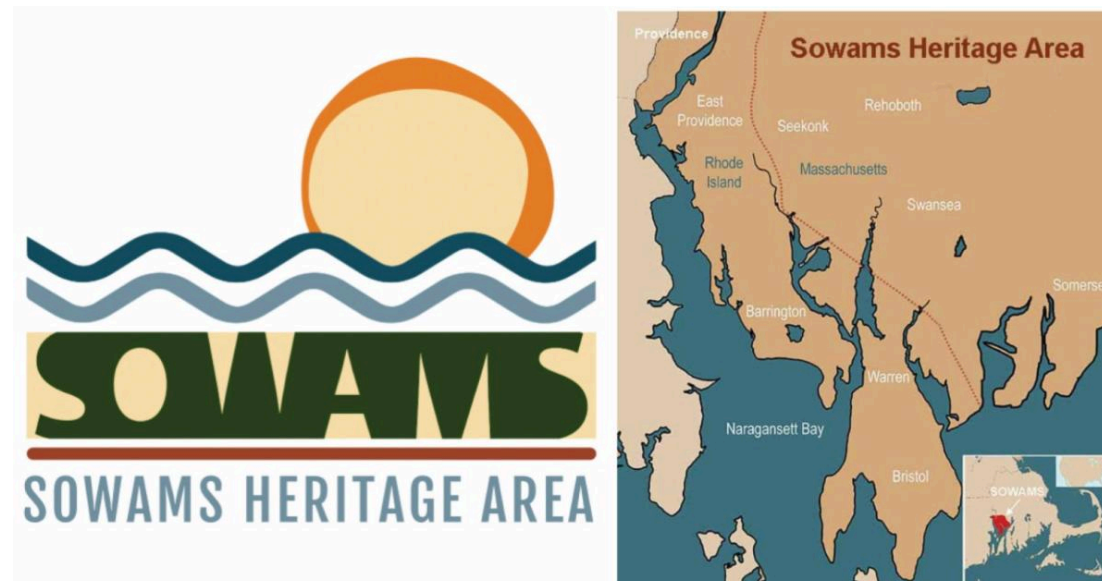
Project, an initiative to develop a National Heritage Area (NHA) in Sowams, the ancestral homeland of the Massasoit Ousamequin, who welcomed the Pilgrims in 1621.

National Heritage Areas (NHAs) are living, working, landscapes, which are designated by Congress to honor the important role of a region in our country's development and celebrate its contributions to American history and culture.



“National Heritage Areas are both a place and a strategy,” said Nancy Morgan, PhD from Point Heritage Development Consulting, the company leading the feasibility study required by the National Park Service for designation as an NHA. “An NHA is a place where history is written on the landscape in natural spaces and historic structures, in living cultural traditions, and even in the economy. They are also a community-driven strategy for heritage conservation and economic development.”

Before seeking Congressional designation as an NHA, the planning team must conduct a comprehensive feasibility study following the rigorous guidelines of the National Park Service. Thanks to a grant from POC and others, the study is well underway and expected to be submitted to the National Park Service in the fall of 2024.



Understanding and preserving these natural spaces and historic structures is vitally important to current and future generations. As one Community Conversation participant said, “Children need to understand history... We need to ensure that stories are passed on to future generations.”

Click [here](#) to learn more about the Sowam's Heritage Area Project.

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