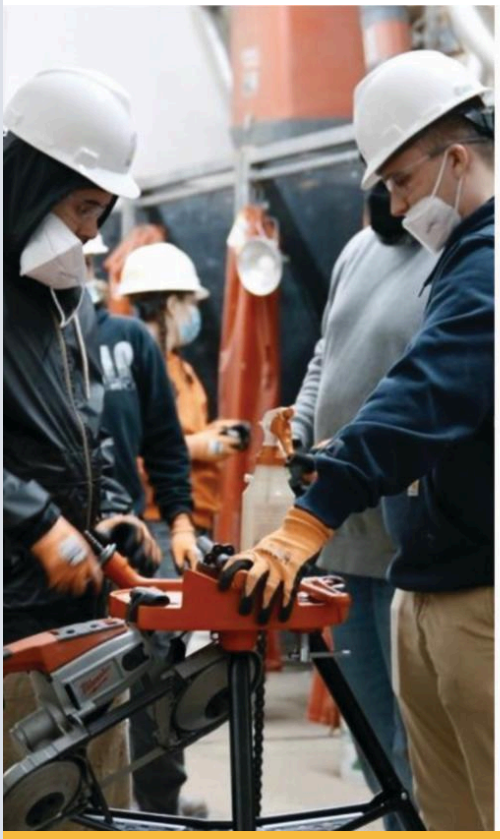
Papitto Opportunity Connection

March 2026



Investing In Rhode Island

Learn More

Each year, Papitto Opportunity Connection (POC) is proud to invest more than $6 million in solicited and non-solicited grants to support Rhode Island nonprofit organizations doing meaningful work in education, job skills training, and entrepreneurship across our state. We also invest more than $1 million in the Transform RI Scholarship.

We were truly inspired by the response to our December 2025 grant cycle. POC received more than two dozen Innovation Challenge proposals — each one a testament to the creativity and dedication of Rhode Island's nonprofit community.

After careful review, the POC Board of Trustees and Advisory Board are pleased to share that one organization will receive a $1 million grant for a program we believe

will be genuinely transformative for our community. We will make an announcement in April.

The quality of submissions was so strong that the Board felt compelled to recognize the broader field. An additional $1 million in grants will be shared among other standout organizations whose proposals reflect both creativity and need in our community.

The Small Grant Program also saw tremendous applications this cycle, with the Board awarding more than $750,000 to approximately 120 nonprofits.

In total, the December 2025 portal resulted in $2.75 million awarded to Rhode Island communities — and we couldn't be more excited about the work ahead.

Looking ahead to the June grant cycle, to remain responsible stewards of POC's 2026 budget, we will not offer the Innovation Challenge during the June 2026 portal. It will return during our December portal.

However, we are pleased to share that $1.25 million will be available through the Small Grant Program, and we warmly encourage all eligible organizations to apply when the portal is open on June 1-15.

We are grateful for the passion and commitment of every organization that has submitted a proposal — your work is the heart of what we do.

We Celebrate Women's History Month

In honor of Women's History Month, we connected with several women-led, POC-funded nonprofits whose transformative work is shaping communities and driving change. We asked them who inspires them and what advice they can offer to women that are pursuing similar career paths in community service—and here's what they had to share:

Nirva LaFortune, City Year RI

The women who have shaped my life helped me understand the power of resilience, education, and service.

My grandmothers shaped my understanding of strength and sacrifice. My aunt, who was also my best friend growing up, played an important role in my life as well. I was also deeply influenced by educators and mentors who believed in me along the way. One of the most significant was Dr. Theresa Powell, the former Vice President for Student Affairs at Temple University. She guided me through a pivotal time in my life and was a pillar of encouragement and wisdom. From mentors like Dr. Powell, I learned the importance of lifting others as you climb and believing in people even when they cannot yet see their own potential.

Nirva's advice to other women:

Trust your voice. Be bold enough to follow your own direction and remember you do not have to do it alone. Seek advice, mentorship, and support along the way.

The very things that make you different may be the very things that allow you to change the world.

Marcela Betancur, Latino Policy Institute

My mom is one of the most inspirational people in my life. Her determination, work ethic, and compassion have been exemplary ways to live and move through life. Even while she had to leave her family and country behind, she always led with focus and determination to ensure I had a safe home, food on the table, and a good education. She faced enormous challenges and discriminatory behavior at work and in society as an immigrant with little English language abilities. However, that never prevented her from putting on a big smile at work and doing her best.

Marcela's advice to other women:

Surround yourself with humans who can cheer you on when you're doing great things, but more importantly, when you're failing. Create friendships and relationships with people who have lived different lives, because it is only through proximity that we can truly understand the world. Read, travel, laugh.

Anita Bruno, Women in the Trades

I'm inspired by trailblazers in the building tradeswomen who have broken barriers and created space for others to follow. Tammy Rivera, the first female business agent for the New York District Council of Carpenters, represents what progress looks like in action. Another powerful example is Vicky O'Leary, an ironworker who has used her experience in the field to advocate for safety and stronger protections for women in construction. Her work reminds us that progress isn't just about getting women into the trades—it's about ensuring they can work safely, be respected, and truly thrive once they're there.

Anita's advice to other women:

To the next generation of tradeswomen: know that you belong in this industry. Your skill, determination, and perspective make the trades stronger. But just as important as learning the craft is building community with the women working beside you.

Julie Owens, Social Enterprise Greenhouse

Professionally, I must highlight Kelly Ramirez Stone, who preceded me as CEO of Social Enterprise Greenhouse. I vividly remember our first conversation, at the SEG Hub in Providence. After 25 years as a management consultant focused on health care systems, that conversation was a lightbulb moment: I could align my professional expertise in business strategy with my passion for social impact ... through social enterprise. Now as CEO of SEG, I work every day with entrepreneurs who are building not just healthy businesses, but healthier communities. I'm grateful every day that this is the work I get to do.

Julie's advice to other women:

1. When you feel completely over your head, recognize that as the sound of rapid growth. DO listen to it ...and put in the work. But DON'T run from it.

2. Be proactive about networking—it is everything.

3. Stay curious. Really listen when people around you are talking. Ask questions when you have them. I love when people I work with ask questions, especially when they're questioning assumptions or pushing for clarity. We all leave the room smarter.

Mark Your Calendar: 401Gives Is March 31

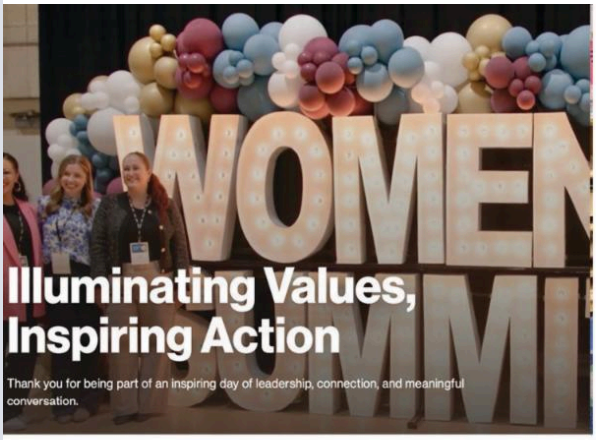
Learn More

POC is once again proud to be the lead sponsor of 401Gives, Rhode Island's statewide day of giving that supports local nonprofits, including many POC grantees. Since its launch in 2020, 401Gives, led by the United Way of Rhode Island, has raised over $10 million in total for Rhode Island nonprofits.

In 2025, 401Gives made history by raising nearly $4.9 million from 19,000 donors for 644 local nonprofits that do impactful work and provide critical resources in our state. It was 401Gives biggest day of giving yet!

This year, the goal is to shatter that number. On March 31 - which marks 2026 401Gives —iwe hope even more Rhode Islanders will support the Ocean State's vital organizations. With nonprofit funding facing increasing challenges, 401Gives is a powerful opportunity to provide stability and support at a critical time.

Nonprofits: There is still time to register. Sign up today at 401gives.org.



News & Notes

Transform Rhode Island Scholarship (TRIS) Deadline Extended To April 7

We know the recent blizzard impacted so much, including our chance to spread the word about the incredible Transform RI Scholarship opportunity. The TRIS team has decided to extend the 2026 TRIS application deadline to Tuesday, April 7 at 11:59 pm (but don't wait until the last minute to apply).

TRIS Virtual Workshop, March 25

Do you have questions about the 2026 Transform RI Scholarship? We have answers! Join us for a TRIS virtual workshop on Wednesday, March 25 at 4:30 p.m. Previous TRIS winners will share what inspired their winning idea, how easy it is to apply and be available answer questions. Register here.

A Beautiful Visit

POC Founder Barbara Papitto recently visited Beautiful Beginnings Child Care Center in Providence to read to their early education center's state pre-K class. In addition to sharing story time with the students, Barbara generously donated books to all the classrooms.

POC Founder Named Businesswoman Of The Year

POC founder Barbara Papitto was recently honored as the Kati C. Machtley Businesswoman of the Year at the Bryant University's 29th annual Women's Summit®. A graduate of Bryant ('83, '85MBA, '97H) and former member of the University's Board of Trustees, Barbara was recognized for her leadership, commitment to education, and her work with POC and Rhode Island's communities most in need.

POC's Dennis Coleman Recognized For Contributions To Basketball

The National Association of Basketball Coaches has named POC Advisory Board Member Dennis Coleman the 2026 NABC Mike Krzyzewski Award winner. For over 30 years, Dennis has served as the NABC's general counsel and, in that capacity, has been an ex-officio member of the NABC Board of Directors. He has advised NABC leadership on key initiatives, including legislative proposals and contract negotiations. Recently retired from Ropes & Gray, Dennis is one of the

nation's most respected sports attorneys, who has represented numerous high-profile coaches, franchises, and league offices.

State of Rhode Island Nonprofits

Recently, the Alliance for Nonprofit Impact and Grantmakers Council released their annual survey on the health of Rhode Island's nonprofit community.

Highlights of the report which can be found here, paints a troubling picture for an industry that employes more than 71,000 people in Rhode Island with annual wages of more than $4 billion. The report found 49% of federal grantees lost some or all federal funding; 37% of corporate grantees lost some or all funding and 27% of state grantees lost some or all funding.

A full presentation on the report can be found here. It also found 88% of safety net/basic needs organizations saw an increase in demand from 2024 to 2025.

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