

Rhode Island
Foundation

Civic Leadership
Fund



The Civic Leadership Fund is a critical source of funding for the Rhode Island Foundation to enhance impact beyond grantmaking in mission-central activities like convening, advocacy, and supporting civics initiatives.

I was honored to support the early stages of creating this agile, flexible supplement to the Foundation's core funding resources.

Edward O. Handy III
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer
The Washington Trust Company

Together, **we are
a greater force
for good.**

To make the most of the philanthropic resources entrusted to them, community foundations must be willing to encourage deep civic engagement and lead that work by example.

At the Rhode Island Foundation, we understand that creating lasting change requires more than traditional charitable giving alone. It demands strategic collaboration, informed advocacy, and the courage to tackle complex challenges head-on. Embodying this vision, the Foundation's **Steinberg Civic Leadership Fund** serves as a catalyst for transformative action that strengthens our communities and creates significant impact on issues most critical to our state's future.

We are building a stronger, more vibrant Rhode Island.

What defines civic leadership?

It's the work of building a stronger, more vibrant community - where Rhode Islanders are well-informed, all voices are heard, and collaboration comes to life. While charitable giving and grantmaking address critical immediate needs, they cannot solve every challenge our state faces. However, when coupled with strategic convening, targeted advocacy, informed research, and engaged community members, a thriving Rhode Island becomes not just a possibility, but an achievable reality.

Representing this comprehensive approach to community change, the Foundation's Civic Leadership Fund was established in 2011. Since the Fund's inception, we've invested over \$5 million in systemic solutions that create an exponential impact, thanks to generous and forward-thinking donors. Contributions to the Fund provide flexibility to test innovative

approaches to challenges without drawing from traditional grantmaking resources, allowing us to respond to emerging needs in real time.

Our team works in collaboration with community partners and decision makers to solve complex issues through diverse means - whether over a shared meal, at cross-sector meetings, or by bringing together subject-specific experts. We directly elevate community needs to policymakers through rigorous research and strategic advocacy efforts, while simultaneously creating meaningful opportunities for Rhode Islanders to engage actively in civic life.

This integrated approach recognizes a fundamental truth: when we put our collective weight behind something, we make it move.

Steinberg Civic Leadership Fund

Established in 2011

\$5M

invested in systematic solutions that create exponential impact since the Fund's inception.

\$100K

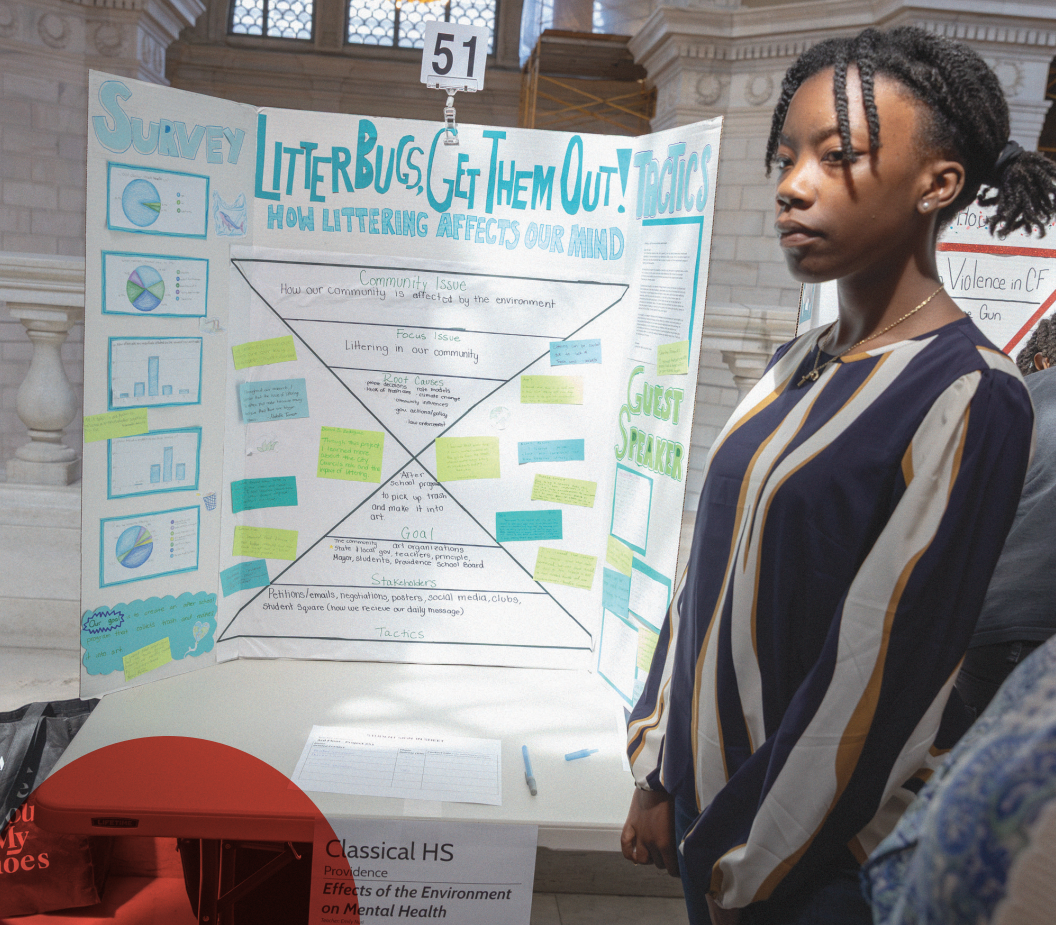
from the Civic Leadership Fund to help pass Rhode Island's recent \$120M affordable housing bond.

\$150K

from the Civic Leadership Fund, commissioned research that shaped RI's Biotech & Life Sciences Plan and unlocked \$45M in state funding for the RI Life Sciences Hub.

2,000+

Rhode Islanders weighed in with the Foundation thanks to opportunities funded by Civic Leadership Fund donations. They shared ideas, connected with each other, and helped to shape the Foundation's work.



Civic Leadership in Action

The Civic Leadership Fund supports the Foundation's unwavering commitment to fostering long-term systemic change through four strategic pillars: advocacy for policy transformation, convening stakeholders around critical issues, supporting research that informs decision making, and enhancing civic health through education and engagement opportunities. Each pillar reinforces the others, creating a framework for impact.





Advocacy: Championing Systemic Change

Strategic advocacy transforms individual concerns into collective action, turning community needs into policy solutions. Through the Civic Leadership Fund, we champion initiatives that offer positive, lasting structural change for Rhode Islanders.

Our support for the 2024 Housing Bond illustrates this approach. Recognizing Question 3 as an opportunity to invest in our neighbors' futures, we advocated for the \$120 million bond that would jumpstart affordable housing creation across the state. This wasn't simply about supporting a ballot measure – it was about ensuring housing and economic mobility for all Rhode Islanders. With an investment of \$100,000, as well as outreach and community

engagement, we helped secure the bond's passage for the construction and rehabilitation of affordable homes and apartments statewide.

Equally transformative is our partnership with Brown University's nationally recognized Annenberg Institute to reimagine public education funding in Rhode Island. Understanding that a thriving state depends on an equitable public education system that prepares all students for success, we initiated a comprehensive year-long study to assess and recommend a new, equitable funding formula. Our Blue Ribbon Commission, comprised of local education leaders and trusted community partners, guides this critical work to reshape educational opportunity for generations of Rhode Island students.



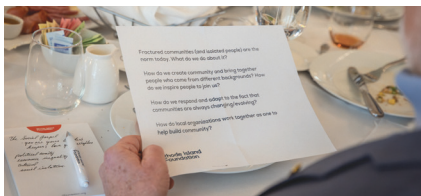
Civic Convening: Bringing Ideas to the Table

True collaboration requires intentional spaces where diverse voices can contribute to shared solutions. Through strategic convening, we create these gathering points where community wisdom and experience intersect with expert knowledge.

Our Together RI 2024 initiative demonstrates our commitment to inclusive dialogue. Beginning in April 2024, we hosted community events across the state, inviting Rhode Islanders to join us for complimentary meals and meaningful conversation. These weren't merely social gatherings – they were also listening sessions, where feedback from 2,000 engaged participants helped inform our grantmaking and community

engagement activities. We operate on the principle that we work best and achieve the greatest impact when we listen to, learn from, and collaborate with those we serve.

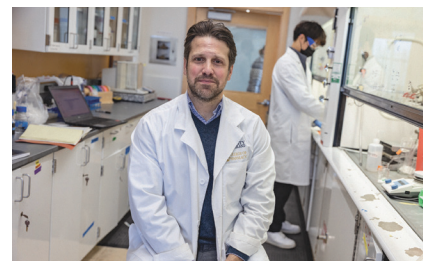
Similarly, through a recent partnership with the community advocacy group ReNEWport, we brought together local organizations and residents for focused dialogue about civic health. This convening provided an opportunity for neighbors and local leaders to brainstorm ways to maintain equitable communities, all while building relationships extending beyond the event itself.



Research: Informing Action Through Evidence

Sound policy requires solid evidence. Through the Civic Leadership Fund, we commission research that illuminates opportunities, challenges assumptions, and provides the factual foundation necessary for informed decision-making.

The Foundation's funding for the Rhode Island Biotech and Life Sciences Plan represents a \$150,000 investment from the Civic Leadership Fund in economic development research and in the health of all Rhode Islanders. By collaborating with experts to evaluate Rhode Island's potential in this growing sector, we supported the development of strategies for scaling biotechnology and life sciences industries in our state. Our funding and institutional commitment to this work informed a \$45 million state-level investment



in what has become the RI Life Science Hub.

Similarly, our commission of "Housing Supply and Homelessness in Rhode Island," a report compiled by the Boston Consulting Group, demonstrates our commitment to understanding complex challenges comprehensively. As Rhode Island's community foundation, we've monitored our state's housing emergency for decades while supporting front-line organizations addressing it. This proactive research engaged stakeholders across the private, public, and social service sectors, providing factual analysis and concrete next steps to address the state's housing crisis.





Civic Engagement: Encouraging Meaningful Participation

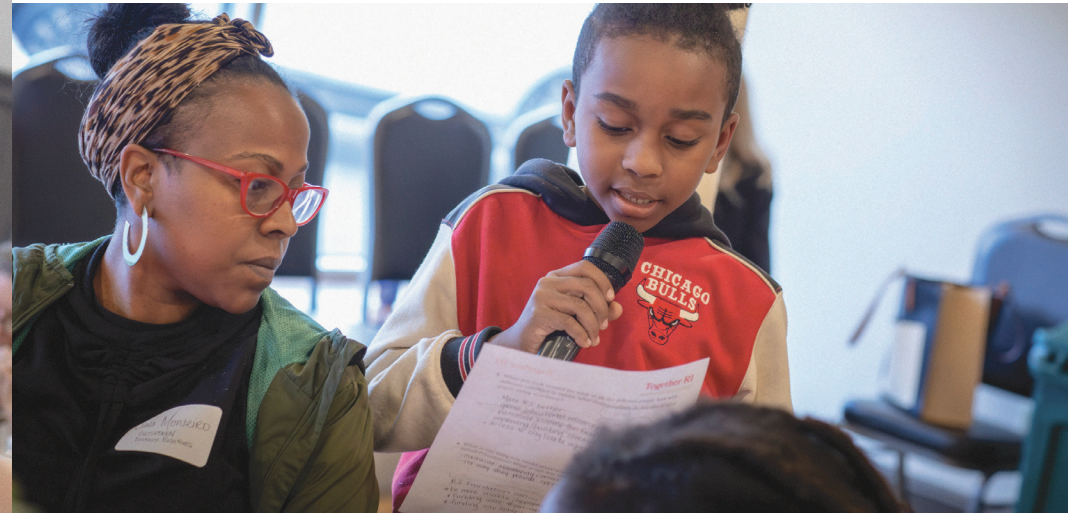
A healthy democracy requires people to be engaged, informed, and equipped with the tools and knowledge necessary for meaningful participation. Through civic health initiatives, we are strengthening community participation across Rhode Island. Our support for

Generation Citizen's annual Civics Day empowers young people through hands-on civic education. High school students from across the state present civics projects to peers, community members, and business leaders, engaging in substantive dialogue about potential solutions to critical issues, allowing for real-world application of the civic skills essential for sustaining a healthy democracy. Additionally, funding for the Rhode Island Secretary of State's Student Civic Liaison Program demonstrates our commitment to nurturing

future civic leaders. Students from over 40 Rhode Island high schools participate in monthly workshops with government and community leaders, facilitating collaboration around local civic action projects. The Rhode Island Civic Leadership Summit, initially funded through our Civic Leadership

tutorials and investigative fellowships that strengthen reporting capabilities across the state.

Our establishment of Press Forward Rhode Island, in partnership with the van Beuren Charitable Foundation, also represents a long-



Fund, provides intensive collaborative opportunities for young students that encourage critical thinking about community issues and potential solutions.

Recognizing that informed participation requires access to reliable local news, we've invested in strengthening Rhode Island's journalism landscape. Our funding assisted in launching "Ocean State Stories" in 2023, with award-winning journalist G. Wayne Miller leading reporting that serves diverse communities. Through partnership with the New England First Amendment Coalition, we've supported freedom of information

term investment in information infrastructure. This nationwide initiative strengthens democracy by revitalizing local news, cultivating civically engaged communities through diverse, reliable information sources.



Only Together

Now, more than ever, Rhode Island needs people who are willing to step forward and invest in our collective future. The challenges we face – from housing affordability to educational equity, from economic development to civic engagement – require coordinated action that transcends traditional boundaries.

As a Civic Leadership Fund donor, your investment becomes part of a larger movement toward systemic change. Together, we can create the conditions for sustainable progress, ensuring that Rhode Island remains a place where every resident can thrive, contribute, and build meaningful community connections.

**Together, we are
a greater force for good.**



To join us, please visit:
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