

# PRESS RELEASE



*Michael Cerio, Cerio Communications for United Way, (401) 743-8269, [Michael@CerioCommunications.com](mailto:Michael@CerioCommunications.com)  
Karen Donovan, SEG, (401) 272-2885, [kdonovan@segreenhouse.org](mailto:kdonovan@segreenhouse.org)*

## **Man Up, Inc. Wins Nonprofit Innovation Lab Pitch Finals, Secures \$50,000 in Seed Funding to Implement Unique Community Solution**

*Program of United Way and Social Enterprise Greenhouse culminated in virtual "Shark Tank-like" event*

**Providence, R.I.** (November 17, 2020): Out of a pool of 5 finalists, [Man Up, Inc.](#) took home the grand prize of the Nonprofit Innovation Lab's pitch finals on November 12, securing \$50,000 in seed funding to support the creation of new economic development opportunities for previously incarcerated men of color. Finishing second and receiving \$25,000 was [College Crusade of RI](#), with [Genesis Center](#) placing third and awarded \$15,000.

"The Nonprofit Innovation Lab breathed new life into my idea and helped me tap into my strengths and remain focused on the underrepresented men Man Up supports," said Rhonda Price, the organization's CEO and Founder. "The support I received toward my pursuit for social justice took my passion to a whole new level, guiding me from ideas to action. I can't express enough my appreciation and respect for everyone who made this all possible."

A joint program of United Way of Rhode Island and Social Enterprise Greenhouse, and a first-of-its-kind in the Ocean State, the Nonprofit Innovation Lab offered 10 nonprofits the chance to transform their ideas into reality to address community needs and create positive social impact. The initiative consisted of three components and relied on entrepreneurial thinking and a social enterprise curriculum, and the critical resources of coaching, access to networks and capital needed to bring ideas to life.

"This was a tremendous learning experience for everyone involved and a unique way to hone new ideas that tackle issues that have persisted for far too long," said Cortney Nicolato, President and CEO of United Way. "We feel strongly that this model can help our state to move forward. And while there is a winning pitch, the fact is everyone has come out of this program with invaluable knowledge and a collective of projects that carry a lot of potential."

The months-long effort culminated in a virtual "Shark Tank-like" event, where Fuerza Laboral and House of Hope CDC also made compelling pitches, with each receiving \$2,500 in funding. The finalists were determined in October during a digital selection round in which Rhode Islanders were invited to watch videos and vote for their favorite idea. During its winning pitch, Man Up, Inc. detailed how establishing a commercial indoor hydroponic vegetable business will create emerging jobs and economic development opportunities for previously incarcerated men of color. The new business would also provide the organization with financial sustainability to further its work to ensure equal opportunity and prosperity for those who too often face societal barriers to advancing their lives.

"It has been an honor to work with all ten NIPL fellows over the last several months. Their innovative ideas, coupled with passion and commitment are exactly what are needed to address some of our state's most pressing social challenges," said Kelly Ramirez, CEO of SEG. "We applaud their efforts and look forward to continuing to work together to ensure the fellows have the resources to execute on the innovations."

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Final pitches were evaluated by a panel of judges that included Angela Bannerman Ankoma (United Way), Michael Disandro (Wells Fargo), Ed Fitzpatrick (Boston Globe), Leland R. Merrill (BankNewport), Arnell Millhouse (Brown University), and Jill Pfitzenmayer (Rhode Island Foundation).

“The Nonprofit Innovation Lab pitch competition was awe-inspiring, with the very best of human-centered innovation designed to make the world a better place on full display,” said Arnell Millhouse, who served as a judge and is an Entrepreneur in Residence at Brown University. “I’m absolutely inspired by the entrepreneurs and their sustainable, mission driven ventures!”

The inaugural Nonprofit Innovation Lab has been generously supported by sponsors BankNewport and Wells Fargo.

“BankNewport is proud of its long history and partnership with United Way – it was an honor to serve as a judge for the final pitches and hear firsthand the innovative, outside the box ideas everyone brought to the table,” said Leland R. Merrill, EVP, Chief Operating Officer for BankNewport. “What was most impressive was how each organization not only honed their plan, but also emphasized the financial sustainability that will allow them to make the greatest impact. It’s exciting to see such energy around addressing important issues in new ways.”

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*United Way of Rhode Island is changing lives and strengthening our communities by investing in proven programs that work over the short-term, and are scalable over the long-term. For more information, visit [www.LIVEUNITEDri.org](http://www.LIVEUNITEDri.org).*

*Social Enterprise Greenhouse creates positive social and economic impact by providing social entrepreneurs and enterprises with the tools and networks they need to thrive. We also foster an ecosystem of diverse stakeholders who work to enable a more just, equitable and resilient economy. Social Enterprise Greenhouse operates statewide in Rhode Island from three programming sites in Providence, Newport, and Pawtucket/Central Falls. Our network of 600+ enterprises and 250+ business and community leaders contributes time, expertise, and funding to grow Rhode Island’s social impact ecosystem. To learn more, visit [www.segreenhouse.org](http://www.segreenhouse.org).*