

PRESS RELEASE

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With Launch of LIVE UNITED 2025, United Way Commits \$100 Million to Build Racial Equity and Opportunities for all Rhode Islanders

New 5-year Strategic Plan will address root causes of the systemic barriers that have thwarted Rhode Island's ability to thrive to create justice and opportunities for all

Providence, R.I. (January 15, 2021) [United Way of Rhode Island](#) has announced a commitment to invest \$100 million over the next 5 years to build racial equity in Rhode Island and to create justice and opportunities for all. The announcement accompanied the launch of [LIVE UNITED 2025](#), the organization's new strategic plan and roadmap to transformational change.

"This plan requires that we go deep, rather than wide. It is intentional and focused so our investments make the biggest impact toward reversing the racial inequities holding back Rhode Island," said Cortney Nicolato, United Way's president and CEO. "Where we began developing our plan prior to the pandemic, COVID-19 reinforced the painful reminder of the work that lies ahead and the disparities we must overcome."

The result of significant community input over a span of 20 months, LIVE UNITED 2025 is built upon four pillars with racial equity at the center of each. It focuses on advancing childhood reading proficiency and access to out-of-school time programs for BIPOC youth, making housing safe and affordable for all, advancing workforce development and adult education, altering policies that perpetuate inequities for people of color, and building community and nonprofit capacity.

Specific goals include doubling the number of R.I. cities and towns that meet the 10 percent affordable housing threshold; increase by 50 percent access to and participation in out-of-school time learning in low income communities; invest \$5 million in capacity-building and operational funding for local nonprofits; reduce by 25 percent the number of people of color who are underemployed unemployed, and more.

"Housing is a fundamental human right that remains out of reach for many Rhode Islanders. And this right intersects with every aspect of our lives – health, education and financial," said Michele Lederberg, United Way board chair and interim president and CEO of Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island. "We may have been taught that all races are equal, but the data demonstrates that not everyone has been treated the same or afforded the same opportunities. This struggle has undermined our state's ability to thrive for too long."

Through developing the plan and realizing support for it, United Way has received tremendous backing from major Rhode Island stakeholders across various sectors, further validating its importance. Brown University has committed \$600,000 over 4 years, with others such as Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island, CVS Health, Rhode Island AFL-CIO, state leadership, R.I. Dept. of Education, and more having signed on.

"Brown is proud to deepen our relationship with United Way, an organization that makes an enormous difference in people's day-to-day lives," said Brown University President Christina H. Paxson. "United Way's dedication to engaging the community in its strategic planning process reflects an ongoing commitment to meet the real needs of our region's most vulnerable populations in meaningful and lasting ways."

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In December 2020, United Way received a \$10 million gift from philanthropist MacKenzie Scott in support of its vision for a Rhode Island where every individual in each community has equal opportunity for prosperity.

“Rhode Islanders have a tremendous amount of pride for their state,” said Nicolato. “And we are committed to leveraging all of our assets – advocacy, strategic investments, convening and awareness building – to creating the best Rhode Island possible.”

In unveiling LIVE UNITED 2025 and plans for far-reaching community investments during its Annual Celebration, United Way of Rhode Island also took the opportunity to recognize community champions for their dedication to helping others. Honored were Tomas Avila, Phil Fogarty, Chris Hardy, and Lisa Guillette.

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United Way of Rhode Island is uniting our community and resources to build racial equity and opportunities for all Rhode Islanders. A member of the world’s largest nonprofit network, we bring together individuals, business, nonprofit, community leaders and government to tackle the root causes of inequity and achieve specific, measurable goals. Our programs include 211, the statewide front door connecting Rhode Islanders with social services, resources, and vital programs. Both directly and through grants to nonprofits, we are investing to build economic opportunity, advance childhood learning, expand philanthropy, and to drive policy and participation. To learn more, visit unitedwayri.org, or follow us on [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#) or [Twitter](#).