

2021 NONPROFIT INNOVATION LAB



For Immediate Release

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7 Leaders Selected for Second-Ever Nonprofit Innovation Lab

Fellows will spend the coming months developing and honing new solutions to pressing social issues, culminating in a “Shark Tank-like” presentation to secure funding to bring their ideas to life

Providence, R.I. (May 18, 2021) — [United Way of Rhode Island](#) and [Social Enterprise Greenhouse](#) (SEG) have selected leaders from 7 local organizations as fellows for the second iteration of their joint Nonprofit Innovation Lab. The unique social innovation program challenges organizations to develop new solutions to pressing social issues, and offers an opportunity to secure seed funding to bring those ideas to life.

Through the Nonprofit Innovation Lab, United Way and SEG seek to accelerate organizations’ ability to implement their creative ideas to build greater social impact. The program provides fellows with the coaching, knowledge, resources, and networking opportunities that help turn transformative ideas into reality. It culminates with a “Shark Tank-like” presentation where fellows compete for \$90,000 in seed funding and other in-kind services and supports.

The fellows selected and their respective organizations are:

- **Mario Gomez Anaya**, Spectrum Theatre Ensemble
- **Edward McPherson**, Newport Mental Health
- **Kelly Nevins**, Women’s Fund of Rhode Island
- **Brent Runyon**, Providence Preservation Society
- **Michelle Taylor**, Community Care Alliance
- **Joshua Wizer-Vecchi**, Children’s Friend & Service
- **Destenie Vital**, What Cheer Flower Farm

“We are beyond thrilled to partner again with Social Enterprise Greenhouse and bring back the Nonprofit Innovation Lab,” said Cortney Nicolato, United Way’s president and CEO. “The times of today call for innovative ideas and solutions if we’re to make Rhode Island the best it can be, and innovation is absolutely where our state’s nonprofit community excels. And it’s our job to support and nurture that creativity.”

Among the projects selected for advancement include developing more sensory-friendly practices to better serve Neurodiverse audiences throughout the entertainment industry; building a self-sustaining insurance brokerage business with its profits supporting nonprofit operations; rehabilitating a nearly 3 acre Brownsfield site in Providence and transforming it into community space; and creating a social enterprise that hires its trainees to work on and restore old buildings and homes.

“It’s an honor to have the opportunity to work with this year’s cohort of fellows as they launch and grow innovative projects to improve our communities and make them stronger,” said Kelly Ramirez, CEO of Social Enterprise Greenhouse. “We’re incredibly grateful to United Way for their partnership and excited to again recruit and engage some of the state’s best business and community leaders to support our fellows.”

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The Nonprofit Innovation Lab begins this month with a 12-week virtual Boot Camp, followed by a 16-week accelerator stage. In the Boot Camp, fellows receive intensive instruction, refine a business plan and set goals. A \$5,000 stipend is provided during the Boot Camp to support fellows' time away from their organization and to cover expenses related to the early development of their concepts.

Throughout the program, each fellow is paired with a custom team of coaches and provided access to hundreds of experts across the United Way and SEG communities. In November, the fellows who offer the most compelling innovation plans will be invited to pitch for the prize funding.

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About Social Enterprise Greenhouse

Social Enterprise Greenhouse creates positive social and economic impact by providing social entrepreneurs and enterprises with the tools and networks they need to thrive. It fosters an ecosystem of diverse stakeholders who work to enable a more just, equitable and resilient economy. SEG operates statewide in Rhode Island from three programming sites in Providence, Newport, and Pawtucket/Central Falls. Its network of 600+ social 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.

About United Way of Rhode Island

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](#).