

## 2021 NONPROFIT INNOVATION LAB



**For Immediate Release**

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### **Voting Begins Wednesday, Jan. 19 for Nonprofit Innovation Lab Public Choice Award**

*Rhode Islanders invited to watch brief videos and choose their favorite innovative idea to help that organization secure funding to bring their vision to life*

**Providence, R.I.** (January 18, 2022) — Following months of honing their innovative ideas to create positive social impact in our state, leaders of six nonprofits will make their pitch to Rhode Islanders via [brief videos](#) in hopes of winning the Public Choice Award of the Nonprofit Innovation Lab. The voting opens Jan. 19 and ends on Jan. 24, with the winning organization receiving \$5,000 in funding to help bring its vision to life.

Rhode Islanders are invited to simply watch the [videos](#), click “Vote” for the idea they find most compelling, and submit their name and email so the selection can be validated. The winner will be announced on Monday, Feb. 7, during the program’s culminating event, “Sparked! The Nonprofit Innovation Lab,” set to air on Rhode Island PBS at 9 p.m.

The Nonprofit Innovation Lab is a joint program of [United Way of Rhode Island](#) and [Social Enterprise Greenhouse](#) that aims to accelerate organizations’ ability to implement unique ideas that create social impact. The effort provides participating fellows with the coaching, resources, and networking opportunities that can turn transformative ideas into reality. In addition to the Public Choice Award, the program culminates with a Feb. 7 “Shark Tank”-like event broadcast on RI PBS, where fellows will present to a panel of judges and compete for \$90,000 in seed funding and other in-kind services and supports. The competing fellows, their organizations, and quick descriptions of their idea are below.

**Clay Martin, artistic director**, Spectrum Theatre Ensemble

- Develop a certification program that seeks to standardize and codify institutional sensory-friendly practices to better serve Neuro-diverse audiences, helping to make the entertainment industry more inclusive, accessible, and welcoming.

**Kelsey Mullen, director of education**, Providence Preservation Society

- Create a fully-equipped community workshop inclusive of a training lab for Rhode Islanders to learn the preservation trades, and shared workspace for those who launch their own trade business.

**Kelly Nevins, CEO**, Women’s Fund of Rhode Island

- Establish a non-partisan support initiative for newly elected/appointed women in local government to build communication skills in a male-dominated environment and advance issues of importance to women and their families.

**Michelle Taylor, VP, Social Health Services**, Community Care Alliance

- Train individuals in all elements of running a business, from direct service and management to marketing, via STARCleaning — a cleaning service focused on environmentally-friendly strategies.

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**Joshua Wizer-Vecchi, innovation manager**, Children’s Friend & Service

- Build systems that empower social service staff to create innovative solutions to the challenges they experience and those facing the families they serve.

**Destenie Vital, executive director**, What Cheer Flower Farm

- Expand on its mission to include and serve children in stressful situations to create and design with fresh flowers through educational programming and training.

“Nonprofits are not just charities or service organizations; they are problem-solvers and do so in extremely innovative ways — as we’ve especially seen throughout this pandemic,” said Cortney Nicolato, United Way’s president and CEO. “These are organizations that have been cultivating their ideas for nearly a year, and now the public has the opportunity to both vote for the one they feel is best and be a part of helping to strengthen our communities.”

**Following the public choice vote, everyone is invited to tune in to Rhode Island PBS at 9 p.m. on February 7 to watch the final pitches.**

“This program provides some of the state’s top social impact leaders the time, space, networks, and resources needed to better innovate within their organizations,” said Kelly Ramirez, co-founder and CEO of Social Enterprise Greenhouse. “And this year’s cohort is an inspiring group of nonprofit innovators with ideas that are truly unique, replicable, and offer impactful solutions ranging from accessibility to workforce development gaps in Rhode Island and beyond.”

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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. The organization operates throughout Rhode Island from 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. Learn more by visiting [www.segreenhouse.org](http://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, businesses, nonprofits, 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 drive policy and participation. To learn more, visit [unitedwayri.org](http://unitedwayri.org), or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#).