

**Summary:** In the past two years, America has begun to face a long overdue reckoning for the systemic racism that has created measurable socio-economic disparities between white communities and communities of color. The Papitto Opportunity Connection was established to change that narrative and empower Black, Indigenous and People of Color in education, skills-training and entrepreneurship in Rhode Island. The Perry Group created a comprehensive community relations campaign to overcome significant trust hurdles and encourage BIPOC non-profits to apply for grants. By the end of 2021, 100+ non-profits serving BIPOC communities would seek funding and POC would commit more than \$50 million.

**Insights & Analysis:** In December 2020, the Papitto Opportunity Connection (POC), a private foundation, was created to invest in educational, skills training and entrepreneurial programs for Rhode Island’s Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. While all new organizations must create awareness, familiarity, and favorability, POC’s challenge was whether the communities it was built to serve would ever trust and accept help from an organization with the name “Papitto.” In 2007, Ralph Papitto, while chairman of the board of trustees at Roger Williams University in Bristol, RI, used an offensive word in a meeting. It was wrong, and while Ralph immediately apologized, the man who had been at the top of Rhode Island’s business and philanthropic community for more than 40-years paid a heavy price in the community because of his mistake. Given Ralph Papitto’s well-known past, would Rhode Island’s BIPOC communities, that represent 29% of the Ocean State’s population, seek and/or accept money from a foundation funded by the widow of a man who had disparaged African Americans?

The Perry Group (TPG) was engaged to create an omni-channel community relations campaign, driven by public relations, to: introduce POC and its 11-member all BIPOC board of advisors; communicate its mission to Rhode Island’s communities of color; begin to earn their trust and encourage them to seek funding. The result: the “Here to Listen. Here to Help.” campaign exceeded all objectives for its first year, with 50 non-profits requesting and receiving \$50 million in multi-year commitments for funding by the end of 2021, and another 53 requesting funding during POC’s two-week December unsolicited proposal period.

**Research:** TPG conducted “grass tops” and “grassroots” research before publicly announcing the creation of POC.

#### **Planning**

##### **Objectives:**

1. Raise awareness of POC among people of color, BIPOC influencers and non-profit leaders to inform them of a new funding source supporting education, job-skills training and entrepreneurship programs in Rhode Island serving people of color. POC set a goal to directly engage 25 BIPOC influencers and non-profit leaders, and at least 125 BIPOC individuals over six months.
2. Encourage non-profits serving BIPOC communities to apply for funding. POC set a goal of funding 10 organizations for \$2 million in 2021.
3. Create excitement surrounding POC’s Transform RI Scholarship (TRIS) and encourage BIPOC high school students to apply. The organization set a goal of getting at least 75 students of color to apply for the TRIS scholarship.

##### **Target Audiences:**

- Black, Indigenous and People of color in Rhode Island, including high school students, those seeking to elevate their job skills and entrepreneurs
- Leaders of non-profit organizations that support communities of color in Rhode Island
- Educators including guidance counselors
- Rhode Island-based print, digital and broadcast media, including Spanish language media

##### **Strategies:**

1. Use owned and earned media to create awareness, familiarity, and favorability of POC.
2. Leverage iconic cultural event to introduce POC to public.
3. Develop sub-campaign to create awareness of TRIS and encourage high school students of color to apply.

##### **Execution:**

###### **Strategy One: Use owned and earned media to create awareness of POC.**

**Website:** TPG, working with our digital design partner Figmint and Ian Travis Barnard Photography, directed creation of a story-telling website featuring 20 digital stories and 10 first person videos focusing on the impact and outcomes of the grants provided to 30 non-profit organizations rather than on the monetary investment.

**Electronic Newsletter:** TPG, working with our design partner, New Flavor Media, created an e-newsletter that attracted, and has retained, a loyal following that averages a 30% open rate.

**Brand Story Boards:** Working with our design partner TPG guided the process to develop a series of brand story boards detailing the unique mission of 18 POC funded organizations, the impact of the POC support on programs, and the people they served. The boards were displayed at a WaterFire event that drew 20,000 people.

**Earned Media Launch:** At the outset, TPG recommended POC not engage with the media until it had the opportunity to introduce itself to Rhode Island’s BIPOC communities through one-on-one meetings, focus groups and initial investments. A public launch was planned for September, but due to COVID-19 surges, the in-person launch was cancelled, and TPG recommended an exclusive media launch in the *Boston Globe*, RI’s most read print and digital news source. The *Globe* published an in-depth digital and print story as well as a podcast on the launch.

**Awareness Earned Media:** Once POC was public in September, TPG began to pitch POC, its mission and programs, including the BIPOC WaterFire event, and inaugural Transform RI Scholarship. Between September 16, and January 20, 2022, TPG secured 28 stories (English and Spanish language) for POC including 17 focusing on the Transform RI Scholarship. Earned media included: WLNE-TV, WJAR-TV, WPRI-TV, *Boston Globe*, *Providence Journal*, *Providence Business News*, *Rhode Island Monthly*, *Providence Monthly*, *Brown Daily Herald*, *Newport Daily News*, *Cranston Herald*, *Rhode Island Patch*, *RI News Today*. Additionally, TPG conducted outreach to Rhode Island’s leading Spanish-speaking radio and newspapers to further amplify the TRIS scholarship. POC Advisory Board member Paola Fernandez conducted Spanish-language interviews with *America News*, El Poder Radio and RI Latina Radio.

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**Strategy Two: Leverage iconic cultural event to introduce POC to public**

In October 2021 POC sponsored a BIPOC-themed WaterFire in Providence, a first in WaterFire’s 25 year history. This was POC’s first public facing event and it featured POC’s trustees and all BIPOC board of advisors as ceremonial torch lighters demonstrating their commitment to helping change the narrative of RI’s communities of color. TPG secured multi-cultural performance and musical artists. A speaking program featuring Black and Latina community leaders served as the kick-off for the Transform RI Scholarship. A POC Village was created featuring 18 POC-funded organizations who shared information and opportunities for the BIPOC community. Mindful of COVID 19 concerns, the RI Department of Health provided multi-lingual staff to provide information, testing and vaccinations and POC distributed 3,000 branded facemasks. More than 20,000 people attended.

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**Strategy Three: Develop sub-campaign to create awareness of TRIS and encourage BIPOC high school students to apply.**

To support this unique, three-tiered scholarship asking RI high school students one question, “If you had \$1,000,000 how would you improve Rhode Island’s communities of color?” TPG working with Figmint developed a sub-campaign based on four core pillars: Transformation, Inspiration, Rhode Island and the Power of Youth. Implementation included branding, web integration, video multimedia, media buys and digital marketing.

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**Evaluation:** All objectives were exceeded.

**Objective One:** Raise awareness of POC among people of color and BIPOC influencers and non-profit leaders to inform them of a new funding source supporting education, job-skills training and entrepreneurship programs in Rhode Island serving people of color. The organization set a goal to directly engage 25 BIPOC influencers and non-profit leaders, and at least 125 BIPOC individuals from Black, Indigenous, Southeast Asian and Latino/Hispanic Communities. **Results: Over six months, 34 (+26%) BIPOC influencers and non-profit leaders along with 156 (+20%) BIPOC individuals were directly engaged.**

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**Objective Two:** Encourage non-profits serving BIPOC communities to apply for funding. The organization set a goal of funding 10 organizations for \$2 million in 2021. **Results: By December 31, 2021, 50 non-profits requested and received \$50 million in multi-year commitments for funding. Another 53 requested funding during POC’s two-week December unsolicited proposal period.**

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**Objective Three:** Create excitement surrounding POC’s Transform RI Scholarship and encourage BIPOC high school students to apply. The organization set an objective to have at least 75 students of color to apply for the TRIS scholarship between Nov 1, 2021, and January 31, 2022. **Results: By January 31, 2022, a total of 97 BIPOC high school students applied for the TRIS scholarship exceeding the goal by 23%.**