

Community Grants 2021: Community Reviewers

Community Grants full proposals are evaluated by community members with personal and professional experiences related to each funding category, as well as select Miami Foundation board members. The Foundation's intention is to develop a diversity of perspectives through individuals who reflect our values of equity and fairness in order to collectively guide the selection process. We are incredibly grateful for the reviewers' time, perspectives, and leadership in service of Greater Miami.

Access to Health and Wellness

Zelalem Adefris

Zelalem is the Vice President of Policy & Advocacy at Catalyst Miami, where she oversees Catalyst's Policy & Engagement Department. Her previous work experiences include environmental justice organizing at the Environmental Justice League of Rhode Island and conducting emergency preparedness research at the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. She holds an MPH in Global Environmental Health from Emory University and a bachelor's degree in Community Health from Brown University. Zelalem serves as a steering committee member of the Miami Climate Alliance, a philanthropic trustee of the Solutions Project, as well as a board member of the Miami-Dade College Earth Ethics Institute and Miami-Dade County Community Action Agency.

Kareem Brantley

Kareem Brantley was born and raised in Miami and is an active member in the business and political community. Kareem has twenty years of engineering and real estate investment, development, and construction experience. Kareem is the founding member and Managing Partner of Bravis Group (BG). In partnership with joint venture partner, The Related Group, BG recently began construction of the \$307MM redevelopment of Liberty Square in Miami, Florida. In 2021, Kareem joined forces with The Integral Group to form Integral Florida. Kareem was awarded the Rising Star award from the Miami Chamber of Commerce and is a member of the Miami Foundation Fellows Class VIII and the South Florida Builder's Association. He is a member of The Miami Foundation's Board of Trustees and sits on the Foundation's Community Investment Committee.

Raissa Fernandez

Raissa has always lived in the Little Havana neighborhood where her immigrant family settled and began the family-owned business Brickell Kidz Bus. She graduated with her bachelor's degree in Social Work from FIU in 2009 and has served as a volunteer for human rights groups, political campaigns, youth community advisory groups and more. She has been a volunteer with the Live Healthy Little Havana initiative since 2013 and now serves as the Chair of the organization's Board of Directors.

Sherrie Giusto

As a Miami native, Sherrie brings over 30 years of experience in fitness education and currently owns her own Pilates studio where she hosts healing-focused yoga retreats for residents in Miami. Sherrie is also a proud wife, mother, and grandmother; she has 3 grown and loving children who support her mission to share the gift of yoga with a heart and physical fitness throughout Miami.

David Michael Roper

David is a community activist/leader who has been feeding and teaching the people in the Overtown community how to grow their own crops since 2018. He also puts youth events together to unite the community and mentors youth in the communities. David is leading an amazing team on a mission to “empower residents to live a healthy sustainable life, through freshly grown food.” Although David has fed over 10,000 families over the years, he says, “This is only the beginning.” David plans to have green Havens all across Florida.

Economic Stability

Aaron McKinney

Aaron is the Co-Founder and Board Vice Chair for The Black Collective. A Miami native from Liberty City, Aaron has spent nearly 10 years laboring on the front lines in some of Miami-Dade’s most underserved communities. Prior to his current tenure as an assistant project manager with Related Urban on the Liberty Square revitalization initiative, Aaron served as the deputy chief of staff in the Office of Miami-Dade County Commissioner Barbara J. Jordan, covering issues related to housing and social services, infrastructure and utilities, and public safety. Aaron’s service experience also includes several programming and administrative roles in local community-based organizations, including the 5000 Role Models of Excellence Project and Empowered Youth, as well as community organizing.

Rebekah Monson

Rebekah Monson is co-founder and COO of WhereBy.Us, whose Letterhead software helps creators build media businesses through editorial email. WhereBy.Us’s local newsletter brands, Miami’s The New Tropic, Seattle’s The Evergrey, Portland’s Bridgeline, Orlando’s Pulptown and Pittsburgh’s The Incline, engage more than a million curious locals each year. Rebekah also co-founded Commissioner, a local art membership program, and Code for Miami, the city’s first civic hacking organization. She serves on several professional and civic boards aimed at improving journalism, technology, and civic life, including LION Publishers and The Miami Foundation.

Cynthia Selene Hernandez

Cynthia began her career as a researcher and instructor at Florida International University (FIU) in 2006. Her research interests include issues at the intersection of labor and immigration, with a focus on wage theft. Her numerous research and publications led to the creation of several county-wide anti-wage theft ordinances throughout Florida, which have helped recover millions of dollars of unpaid wages. After nearly ten years of public service at FIU, Cynthia became the Executive Director of the South Florida American Federation of Labor (AFL-CIO). In that capacity, Cynthia led several coalitions to win higher wages and benefits for low-income families in Miami-Dade County. In 2018, Cynthia joined Resilience Force, and began tracking conditions and regulations affecting Resilience Workers. In January of 2021, Cynthia re-entered public service work as the District Director of Constituent Affairs for County Commissioner Raquel Regalado. Cynthia is from Mexico, having immigrated to the U.S. at the age of five. She lives in Cutler Bay, Florida with her two sons and partner.

Jeanette Smith

Jeanette, a former attorney, is an adjunct professor of Religious Studies at Florida International University. She coordinates the department’s Faith and The Community initiative and will be teaching a class entitled “Thou Shalt Not Steal: Wage Theft & Moral Thought” for the FIU Honors College this fall. Jeanette, a founding member of the Wage Theft Task Force, currently sits on the Miami-Dade County Living Wage Commission as well on the national Interfaith Worker Justice board. She is the director of South Florida Interfaith Worker Justice and has helped to draft and develop several local wage theft ordinances in Florida and elsewhere as well as conducts workers’ rights and workplace safety trainings to encourage the development of worker-led leadership.

Inclusion of People with Diverse Abilities

Nicole Attong, LMHC

Nicole Attong is the Director for Florida International University's Embrace and the Interim ADA Coordinator for Florida International University with over 15 years of experience working with children, youth, and families in the human services field in Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties. She has expertise in capacity-building, implementing systems of care, evidence-based practices, and convening solutions-focused groups of providers, stakeholders, and constituents around social-justice issues.

Katherine Magnoli

Born with a birth defect that affected her spine but not her mind, Katherine Magnoli has been living an active life for over 36 years. At the age of 26, Katherine Magnoli, published the first of four books in the series The Adventures of KatGirl about a superhero in a wheelchair who helps kids being bullied. She is now developing a new series to continue to bring awareness to the abilities of people living with disabilities. In addition, Katherine developed the educational program "Abilities Program and Activities" that has been used by Miami-Dade County Public Schools. She has also been involved in modeling as a Bold Beauty Project Model and was crowned Ms. Wheelchair Florida in 2017. Today, Katherine uses her platform of Yobilities to advocate for accessibility and social equity for people with disabilities. She is the District 11 Representative for the Commission on Disability Issues for Miami-Dade County.

Bethany Sands, MEd

Bethany Sands has extensive experience promoting inclusionary practices and programs. Bethany was the Program Director of the Child Screening and Assessment and Inclusion program for the Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe. There, she directed a team of 20 Inclusion Specialists to implement community-wide training and implement individual family and child support initiatives. Previously, Bethany was the ARC South Florida curriculum coordinator and educational consultant in addition to being an adjunct professor for Miami-Dade College, Florida State University, Santa Fe Community College, and Barry University. Bethany has a Master of Science in Education with a specialization in Early Childhood Special Education and a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education.

Sustainable Environment

Dr. Kilan Bishop

Dr. Kilan Ashad-Bishop is a cancer biologist by training who began advocating for climate justice during her graduate training in Miami, Florida. Since 2016, Dr. Ashad-Bishop has served as an appointed advocate for low-income communities on the City of Miami Climate Resilience Committee (formerly the Sea Level Rise Committee). In this role, she has leveraged her research background and community outreach to advance policies that prioritize low-income communities and communities of color in resilience planning.

Elisa Juárez

Elisa Juárez works with companies to help them invest a share of company profits back into communities. She strives to build resilient and thriving communities through social impact investing, strategic partnerships, and community engagement. She is on the national board of the Hispanic Heritage Foundation and volunteers with the World Happiness Summit and The Global Center for Climate Resilience. She has a bachelor's degree from Brown University, an MBA from the IAE in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and a corporate social responsibility certificate through Harvard Business School.

Abigail Watts-Fitzgerald

Abigail has over 40 years of experience as a corporate lawyer and acting as outside general counsel to a variety of for-profit and nonprofit corporations on all aspects of corporate governance. She earned her J.D. at University of Miami School of Law where she was Editor-in-Chief of the Law Review and has been honored by Best Lawyers in America® “Women in the Law” Business Edition, Best Lawyers in America® Mergers and Acquisitions and Best Lawyers in America® Non-Profit/Charities Law. She is a member of The Miami Foundation’s Board of Trustees.

Thriving Youth and Families

Victoria Byfield

Born and raised in Miami, Victoria brings 22 years of lived experience and 6 years of volunteer and work experience with social justice organizations, building community as a youth leader, event coordinator, and restorative justice facilitator. She is committed to this work for the foreseeable future. When she is not out fighting for social justice, Victoria is walking her fur baby “Nipsey.”

Carole Hall

Carole F. Hall is a former associate publisher and editor-in-chief of general interest books at John Wiley and Sons, Inc. Prior to joining Wiley, she was executive editor of Touchstone Books, Simon & Schuster, Inc. Carole has chaired the African American Experience Fund of the National Park Foundation and served as a trustee of the Miami Art Museum and Pérez Art Museum Miami. She is a member of The Miami Foundation’s Board of Trustees.

Pamela Hollingsworth

Pamela Hollingsworth is a self-described visionary and disruptor in the early childhood development sector. She is a Senior Vice President for the Office of Strategic Initiatives and The Equity Institute at the Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe (ELCMDM), one of the largest nonprofits in South Florida.

Ebony Johnson

Ebony Johnson is a community activist, educator, and natural leader. Ms. Johnson earned a Master’s Degree in Reading and Learning Disabilities from the University of Miami. She became an elementary school teacher for Miami-Dade County Public Schools, serving Brentwood Elementary, Linda Lentin Elementary and Phyllis Miller Elementary schools for almost a decade. After this, in 2001, she organized a nonprofit community center called The Resource Room. As Executive Director of The Resource Room and The Resource Room Child Care & Learning Center, she has spearheaded education efforts in afterschool programs and currently serves over 200 families daily while connecting them with the resources they need to lead successful lives.

Alison Miller

Alison Miller is a Director and Shareholder of Stearns Weaver Miller Weissler Alhadeff & Sitterson, P.A. and heads the Firm’s Corporate & Securities practice. She is a member of The Miami Foundation’s Board of Trustees and chairs the Foundation’s Community Investment Committee.

Susan Racher

Susan Racher is Vice President and Chief Financial Officer of the Wallace H. Coulter Foundation, which she joined when the foundation was formed. Prior to joining the foundation, Susan was a Senior Vice President and Manager of Bank of America’s Florida Corporate Group. Susan’s volunteer work is focused on mental health – she is the volunteer President of NAMI Miami-Dade, sits on the Board of Thriving Mind South Florida and chairs the Treasury Advisory Committee for Miami-Dade County Public Schools.

Nicole Washington

Nicole Washington serves as Vice Chair of the Miami-Dade College District Board of Trustees and as a board member of Florida A&M University. As the founder of Washington Education Strategies LLC, Nicole is a national education policy advisor focused on integrating work and education to build stronger talent pipelines. Nicole is a strategic advisor to clients including executive and legislative policymakers, leaders of education institutions, higher education systems, and national foundations in order to build research-based policies, institutional frameworks, and investments that provide equitable access to high-quality education and careers.

Sandra West

Sandra West is a mother of three and has been part of PTA since her oldest child entered kindergarten 25 years ago. She has held office in a PTA every year since, and she now serves as President of the Miami-Dade County Council of PTAs/PTSAs. Previously, she worked for 30 years in the field of medical research at Vanderbilt, Duke, and the University of Miami. She is currently a science teacher at Hialeah Miami Lakes Senior High School.