NOVEMBER 4, 2026
JUNGLE ISLAND

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WELCOME TO THE 25TH ANNUAL NOVO AWARDS

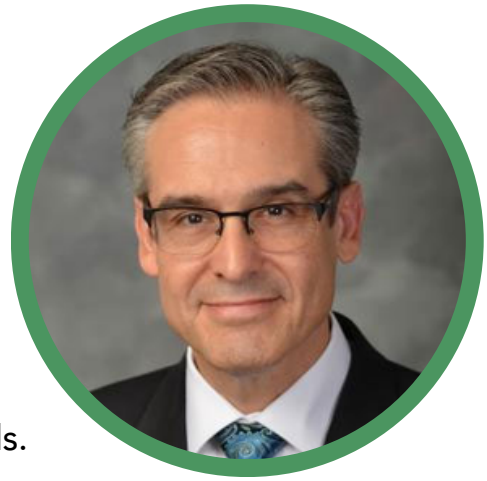
As a signature program of the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce, the NOVO Awards have been honoring Nonprofit Businesses for 25 years. Nonprofits play a vital role in the economic, social, and cultural fabric of Miami-Dade County. They feed, heal, shelter, educate, inspire, enlighten, nurture, and contribute to the overall well-being of the community. The NOVO Awards recognize programs and individuals that have made a difference in the lives of the people they serve, produce outcomes that exemplify innovative excellence, and feature best practices of not-for-profit businesses.

Awards are presented in three categories:

- Innovative excellence in a nonprofit organization with a budget of less than $2 Million
- Innovative excellence in a nonprofit organization with a budget of more than $2 Million
- Outstanding Board Leader that exemplifies the best in nonprofit board service

We thank you for joining us today as we honor these exceptional organizations and individuals.





November 4th, 2026

The Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce is proud to present the 25th Annual NOVO Nonprofit Business Awards.

For a quarter century, the NOVO Awards have recognized the nonprofits and leaders who push Miami toward greater equity, smarter innovation and improved quality of life.

Nonprofits are an essential part of our regional economy. According to the Florida Nonprofit Alliance, Miami-Dade's 2,800 nonprofits generated more than $24.8 billion in revenue, employed more than 87,000 people, and paid $6.6 billion in wages in 2025.

Those numbers tell only part of the story. Every day, these organizations feed families, train workers, house neighbors, and keep the arts alive, often in partnership with Miami's businesses and public agencies.

The NOVO Awards honor nonprofits that employ best practices and outside-the-box innovation. They deliver lasting change for the people they serve. Their work not only addresses immediate challenges, but also builds a stronger, more inclusive, and resilient community.

To this year's winners and all the nominees, thank you for the work you do and congratulations.

Sincerely,

Alfred Sanchez
President & CEO
Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce



NONPROFIT BUSINESS CHAIRS



Arlene Peterson
Executive Director - The WOW Center Miami



Vanessa Benavides
Vice President, Community Impact - United Way Miami





JUDGING PANELISTS

Patrick Morris
Senior Manager Civic & Philanthropic Partnerships
Equity and Engagement, Office of Mayor Daniella Levine Cava

Christina Scott
VP of Marketing & Communications
Chapman Partnership

Julissa Rivera
Senior Community Engagement Manager
The Miami Foundation

Raymond Dueñas
Director of Community Affairs
Miami Herald

Robert Placer
VP Store Manager
TD Bank



Innovative Excellence in a Nonprofit Organization

Organization Budget Under $2 Million

Finalists

A child saw hunger, was shocked, and decided to act. At four and a half, Joshua Williams gave a homeless man twenty dollars, a gift from his grandmother. That spark became Joshua's Heart Foundation. Twenty-one years later, it has grown into a lasting movement. JHF is powered by its youth. Students in grades 7 through 12, for example, help fundraise, track data, and lead outreach. JHF has served more than 820,000 individuals and distributed over 10 million pounds of food. Its innovative model turns service into leadership: young people take responsibility for feeding their communities while developing the skills to lead them. Joshua lit the flame. These young leaders are proudly carrying the torch. *"What Are You Hungry For?"™* invites you to join the movement.

Virtutem Populo, Inc. turns civic education into civic action. Led by students in Miami-Dade County, the nonprofit has reached more than 4,000 young people through programs that connect knowledge, institutional access, and meaningful responsibility. Its Civic Knowledge Bowl expanded from nine to 21 schools, while Youth Governance Day grew from 13 to 19 municipalities, bringing students inside local government. Through the STRIVE305 Economic Fellowship, students researched local businesses and presented a Legacy Business Framework before county commissioners. The innovation is practical: young people design and lead experiences that position their peers as researchers, problem solvers, and public participants. By connecting classrooms, government, and community partners, Virtutem Populo makes civic leadership something students practice today and carry into their communities tomorrow.

Healthy Heroes:

TABU Academy is a North Miami nonprofit redefining youth development by uniting fitness, academics, and character under one roof. Serving children ages 5 to 13, TABU pairs high-performance fitness training with tutoring, mentorship, and public speaking — building strong bodies, sharp minds, and confident voices. Its Healthy Heroes program adds nutrition lessons, goal-setting activities, and wellness challenges that build lifelong healthy habits. Its innovative model treats every workout as a classroom and every classroom as a proving ground, giving young people the discipline of daily fitness and the poise to lead in life. Approved for Give Miami Day 2026 and a Step Up scholarship provider, TABU Academy is proving that when a community invests in the whole child, excellence follows.



Innovative Excellence in a Nonprofit Organization

Organization Budget Over $2 Million

Finalists

Food Forests for Schools Program:

THE EDUCATION FUND
FOR EXCELLENCE IN MIAMI-DADE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Founded in 1985, The Education Fund strengthens K-12 public education in Miami-Dade County through innovation, resources, and community partnerships. The Education Fund's Food Forests for Schools is a 'first in the nation' effort that transforms school grounds into forests with trees, bushes, plants, and pathways, all focused on superfoods. These outdoor eco-classrooms use hands-on learning to increase students' knowledge of science, math, nutrition, and the environment while also improving eating habits and resiliency skills. The program reaches 45,000+ students across 81 schools. Outcomes show an 82.2% growth in the number of proficient students in science, an 88.1% growth in math, an increase in canopy from 23% to 50%, plus tens of thousands of students' cafeteria meals enhanced, while 330,000+ bags of fresh produce fed families – all benefits that will last a lifetime. Join us on this journey

NO PERSON GOES HUNGRY
FARM SHARE
EST. 1991
NO FOOD GOES TO WASTE

Founded in 1991, Farm Share is Florida's largest independent food bank, working to reduce hunger and eliminate food waste across the state. By partnering directly with Florida farmers, Farm Share rescues fresh, nutritious food that might otherwise go to waste and gets it to families through a network of nearly 2,000 community partners. Through this model, Farm Share maximizes the impact of every donation, bringing fresh food to communities, from Pensacola to Key West. Farm Share also plays a vital role in disaster relief, mobilizing food and emergency supplies to support communities affected by hurricanes and other crises. Last year, Farm Share distributed 112 million pounds of food, providing the equivalent of 100 million meals through efficient operations, and community partnerships. .

EDEN Place:

OYC
INSPIRE | EMPOWER | ENRICH | EXPOSE

OYC Miami is a trusted community anchor dedicated to inspiring, empowering, and enriching youth, adults, and families through a comprehensive, long-term approach to strengthening communities. Founded in 2003, OYC provides year-round support rooted in education, enrichment and exposure, health and wellness, family services, and economic sustainability. Through afterschool and summer programming, college and career readiness, mentoring, wellness services, family navigation, workforce development, and strategic community partnerships, OYC meets participants where they are and walks alongside them as they build pathways to stability, opportunity, and lifelong success. OYC's commitment to strengthening families is exemplified through EDEN Place (Educate. Develop. Empower. Nurture.), its family resource center that serves as a lifeline for parents and caregivers by providing wraparound support, family coaching, school advocacy, resource navigation, workforce assistance, and access to critical community services. EDEN Place is being honored for its transformative impact on families across Miami-Dade, empowering parents, removing barriers to success, and helping families achieve greater stability and self-sufficiency. By connecting families to the resources, relationships, and opportunities they need to thrive, EDEN Place has become a model for building stronger households and healthier communities. Serving thousands across Overtown and surrounding Miami-Dade communities, OYC is more than a program provider; it is a catalyst for generational change, helping children succeed academically, families access critical resources, and communities grow stronger together. Through the work of EDEN Place and its broader continuum of services, OYC continues to create lasting impact and brighter futures for generations to come.



Outstanding Board Leader

Finalists



Maria Ilcheva

Dr. Maria Ilcheva is a visionary board leader whose strategic leadership has helped transform The Women's Fund Miami-Dade into a powerful catalyst for gender equity. As Board Chair, she combines analytical rigor, innovation, and deep community commitment to advance opportunities for women and girls across Miami-Dade. Dr. Ilcheva champions data-driven decision-making, cross-sector collaboration, and bold advocacy initiatives that address economic mobility, health and well-being, leadership, and freedom from violence. She has fostered a culture of accountability, inclusion, and excellence while strengthening partnerships among nonprofit, business, academic, and civic leaders. Her ability to connect research, strategy, and action has elevated the organization's impact and is fueling meaningful systems change, creating lasting benefits for the entire community.



Alex Rodriguez

Alex Rodriguez demonstrates exemplary leadership by combining entrepreneurial vision with a 40-year commitment to keeping families together. Building on his late father's legacy as a founding member, Alex serves as Board President and Capital Campaign Chairman for Ronald McDonald House South Florida, with his children actively engaged in this generational mission. He leads a 20-member board driving the $33 million expansion of the Griffin Family Campus at Jackson Memorial Medical Center. Under his strategic guidance, the organization secured landmark gifts, including $3 million from Griffin Catalyst, while championing the McDonald's Round-Up program across regional restaurants. A University of Miami Iron Arrow alumnus and McDonald's Owner/Operator, Alex's dedicated service gives parents a comforting home and vital support near their child's bedside.



Lisa Chin

Lisa Chin has demonstrated exemplary community leadership through a lifelong commitment to service, advocacy, and hands-on engagement. Inspired by her parents' belief in giving back, she began volunteering in high school and has continued her community involvement throughout her life.

She now serves as the Immediate Past Chair on the Board of the Alliance for Aging, which advocates for older adults who need additional support to live safely and with dignity in their own homes. Prior to her Board Chair role, she served as Vice Chair, chair of the Communication and Development Committee and as a committee member of the Finance Committee.

Lisa's leadership is defined by service, empathy, and a steadfast commitment to uplifting vulnerable populations.

PAST NOVO AWARD RECIPIENTS

Innovative Excellence in a Nonprofit Organization

	Innovative Excellence in a Nonprofit Organization Organization budget $2 Million & Above	**Innovative Excellence in a Nonprofit Organization** Organization Budget Under $2 Million
2025	Chapman Partnership, CP Works, Park Stewards Program	M.U.J.E.R. (2025)
2024	Alliance for Aging, Hospital to Home (H2H) Program	Junior Achievement of Greater Miami, Inc. JA Company Program
2023	Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired	The Key Clubhouse of South Florida
2022	Jewish Community Services of South Florida, Inc.	305 Pink Pack Inc
2021	Guitars Over Guns	Sofia's Hope (Pediatric Cardio-Oncology Research program)
2020	Chapman Partnership	ICU Baby | Transportation Assistance Program
2019	Branches	Council for Educational Change
2018	Carrfour Supportive Housing	"I Have a Dream" Foundation of Miami
2017	His House Children's Home	Ladies Empowerment Action Program (LEAP)
2016	The Sundari Foundation | Lotus House	The Women's Fund of Miami-Dade
2015	Take Stock in Children	PACE Center for Girls
2014	Miami Children's Museum	Educate Tomorrow
2013	Switchboard of Miami	Casa Valentina
2012	The Posse Foundation | Posse Miami	Strong Women, Strong Girls | South Florida Mentoring Program
2011	Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater Miami, Inc.	Belafonte TACOLCY Center, Inc.
2010	United Homecare Services	Human Services Coalition
2009	ACCION USA	The Education Fund
2008	Goodwill Industries of South Florida, Inc.	The Women's Alliance, Inc.
2007	Kristi House	The Children's Bereavement Center
2006	Teach for America – Miami-Dade	Women's Advocacy Project
2005	DFYIT	Heiken Children's Vision Fund
2004	Family Services Program	Trauma Resolution Program
2003	Catholic Charities Legal Services	Non-Violence Project
2002	Camillus House	Girls Advocacy Project

PAST NOVO AWARD RECIPIENTS

OUTSTANDING BOARD LEADER			
2025	Ben Gerber	Board Co-Chair	Big Brothers Big Sisters
2024	Jorge Plasencia	Founder and Chairman Emeritus	Amigos for Kids
2023	Natasha Lowell	Board Chair	Casa Familia Inc.
2022	Amaka Amalu	Board Member	Branches, Inc.
2021	Nancy Hector	Board Treasurer	His House Children's Home
2020	Allan J. Pekor	Board President	Key Clubhouse of South Florida
2019	Amy McClellan	Board President	Key Clubhouse of South Florida
2018	Gerald Grant, Jr	Trustee	Florida International University
2017	Harry Kelton	Secretary	Pelican Harbor Seabird Station
2016	Ed Deppman	Board Treasurer	Branches
2015	Bob Dickinson	Chairman of the Board	Camillus House
2014	Darryl K. Sharpton	Chairman of the Public Health Trust Board of Trustees	Jackson Health System
2013	Rodney H. Bell	Board Chair	Branches, Inc.
2012	Richard Brilliant	Treasurer and Finance & Audit Committee Chair, Board of Directors	FIU Foundation, Inc.
2011	Alex Montague	Board Chairman	Children's Bereavement Center

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