

THE PINNACLE PRIZE

For KC's Young Visionary Leaders



Rachel Jefferson

2022 Winner

Rachel Jefferson is the Executive Director of Groundwork Northeast Revitalization Group (Groundwork NRG), formerly known as the Historic Northeast-Midtown Association. As Executive Director, she leads the organization in its efforts to champion economic, environmental, land, housing, and food sovereignty and cultural identity and belonging to the community in Northeast Kansas City, Kansas. Groundwork NRG connects local community members with programs, resources, projects, and organizations to continue to develop the historically rich area.

Born and raised in Kansas City, Missouri, Rachel attended Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. Upon her return to Kansas City, she relocated to the Kansas side of the state line and became a dedicated resident of the northeast area of KCK. She witnesses the impact redlining, predatory businesses, and need for community intervention have on local socio-economics every day.

Since 2020, Rachel and Groundwork NRG have sponsored and hosted 53 events, programs, projects, and trainings in their community, including several neighborhood canvassing initiatives. In an effort to bring the city's inequitable Tax Sale process to an end, the group raised more than \$80,000 to help 34 local families fight unfair evictions and stay in their homes.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the organization coordinated the Dial-a-Neighbor Census Equity Campaign, providing wellness checks and public health emergency information to 8,869 residents in difficult-to-count census tracts which resulted in increased census completions and follow up visits from community health workers for those in need of assistance.

The Groundwork NRG Green Team engages high school-age youth from primarily BIPOC communities in environmental education, job training, stewardship, employment, and leadership opportunities. The Green Team initiative teaches youth environmental stewardship and how to transform neglected land into community assets through community-based participatory research and design-think methodology. Recent projects have included a habitat enrichment project in the Jersey Creek area and working with three neighborhoods to co-design green infrastructure interventions and revitalize three neighborhood vacant lots.

Rachel is also the founder and former President of Isaac Eugene Jefferson Farms, which partnered with local youth and community groups to promote sustainable agriculture in the northeast area of Kansas City, Kansas. Her commitment to agriculture and food equity results in Groundwork NRG partnerships like the USDA Farms to Families Food Box program which has distributed more than 19,000 pounds of fresh produce and dairy, valued at more than \$53,000, to community organizations and individuals in need.

Rachel loves and stands in solidarity with the people in her neighborhood that have persevered in the fight to create a self-determined and equitable Kansas City, Kansas for all.

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Brandon Calloway

2022 Winner

Brandon Calloway is Co-Founder and CEO of Generating Income for Tomorrow (G.I.F.T.). A veteran of the U.S. Army and a former health and fitness trainer, he started his own fitness business before transitioning to nonprofit work with the United Way of Greater Kansas City in 2018.

As someone who grew up in the urban core of Kansas City, Missouri, he has long been committed to finding ways to create transformative change in the areas of the city that need it the most and for the residents who reside there. Brandon co-founded G.I.F.T. in 2020 to address Kansas City's substantial racial wealth gap.

The nonprofit organization's mission is to provide assistance to Black-owned businesses in our community, with a specific interest in businesses that operate in low-income areas. Historic redlining, discriminatory lending practices and lack of financial education services have contributed to the racial wealth disparity and increased poverty-related crime and violence in our community. G.I.F.T.'s goal is to convert economically disadvantaged areas into areas of economic opportunity by creating a clear path to prosperity and wealth for African Americans.

G.I.F.T. provides grants of \$10,000, \$25,000 and \$50,000 to businesses operating east of Troost. The rigorous application process to determine their two recipients each month includes application reviews, in-person interviews and Board of Director consultations. After receiving the grants, Kansas City G.I.F.T. provides technical assistance to ensure the grant recipients are set up for long-term success.

Brandon helped double the economic impact of Kansas City G.I.F.T. from 2020 to 2021. After just two years, the organization has contributed \$687,000 to 37 black-owned businesses resulting in 58 new jobs created and an average quarterly growth of 304%.

To promote black businesses that G.I.F.T. was not able to support with grants, Brandon helped establish the Black Business Market in October 2021. The market takes place on the fourth Saturday of each month giving 20-60 black businesses a consistent, free space to sell their products.

In early 2022, G.I.F.T. opened a business center to provide technical assistance to the small business community in Kansas City. The center offers free drop-in coworking space, business coaching, accounting and marketing support, banking centers, and nonprofit and general consulting services.

Brandon is a graduate of the Pinnacle Career Institute in South Kansas City and holds a bachelor's degree from Avila University.