

Nelson I. Colón
President & CEO
Puerto Rico Community Foundation

SHORT BIO

Dr. Nelson I. Colón is the president and CEO of the Puerto Rico Community Foundation ([Fundación Comunitaria de Puerto Rico](#)), a philanthropic institution with a 35-year trajectory, working with communities in Puerto Rico and sharing its knowledge internationally. He holds a Doctorate degree in Education from Harvard University, an MA in Cultural Anthropology from SUNY Binghamton, and a BA in Sociology from University of Puerto Rico (UPR).

He joined the Foundation in the early 80's as program director and became president and CEO in 2000. Under his leadership, several initiatives aimed at building equity in Puerto Rican communities have been launched, in the areas of education, housing, community, and economic development, and—after Hurricane María—renewable energy, water, racial, and gender equity, and Sustainable Development Goals. Also, after the 2020 earthquakes and the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Colón led the design and implementation of the Foundation's philanthropic response to both emergencies, focusing on promoting and strengthening community action. The Foundation has centered its strategy on building community capital from the ground up: human, social, physical, financial, environmental, and cultural.

He has spoken on issues of community capital, racial equality, economics, human rights, and philanthropy at many events on the Island, the United States, and countries in America, Africa, Europe, and Asia. He stands out in the global arena, leading the first international meeting of community foundations in Bellagio, Italy, in 1996, and the first International Community Philanthropy Conference in 1997 in San Juan, Puerto Rico. He has received numerous recognitions. He also founded and directed the Caribbean Project for Peace and Justice of the American Friends Service Committee.

Dr. Colón has taught anthropology at major universities in Puerto Rico (Universidad de Puerto Rico y Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico), and has served on several boards of directors related to education and philanthropy in Puerto Rico and the U.S. His writings have been published in international magazines such as *Revista - Journal Harvard Review of Latin America*, and *El Nuevo Día*, the main newspaper on the Island.

LONG BIO

Some of the Foundation programs developed under his leadership are the Middle Schools Renewal Initiative, the Community Housing Development Organizations Program, the Institute for the Development of Philanthropy, the Economic Development Consortium, and the Educational Transformation 2014 Program. He was the leader and spokesperson of the Multi-sector Movement to Promote a World-Class Education in Puerto Rico, another foundation initiative.

He has served on the board of directors for Philanthropy Puerto Rico; Community Foundation Leads; Centro para el Desarrollo de Puerto Rico; the Puerto Rico's Civil Rights Commission; Hispanics in Philanthropy; Northeast and Island Regional Education Laboratory (REL-NEI); and Fundación para un Mejor País. In 2015, the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico designated Dr. Colón as a member of the Advisory Committee for Access to Justice. Dr. Colón is a former Commissioner of the Puerto Rico Civil Rights Commission and was named Emeritus Chair of Hispanics in Philanthropy in 2018. Also, Dr. Colón directed the Hispanic Office of Planning and Evaluation in Boston.

Recognitions

He has received numerous recognitions, including:

- Entrepreneur of The Year, Social Responsibility (category), awarded by Ernst & Young
- The William Díaz Impact Award, awarded by Disability Funders Network
- The Archibald Hopkins Medal, awarded by the Ladies Civic Club de Puerto Rico (2008)
- Senior Fellow of the Synergos Institute in New York
- Martin Luther King Award, for his commitment to human rights (2014), awarded by COSSMA Inc.
- The Patiño Moore Legacy Award, given by Marguerite Casey Foundation in partnership with the Association of Black Foundation Executives (ABFE) and Hispanics in Philanthropy (2016)
- Recognized as HIP Giver, given by Hispanics in Philanthropy (2018)
- Quixote Award from Nuestra Escuela, the leading alternative education school in Puerto Rico

He was also a participant of the first White House Convening on Community Foundations: Vital Leadership for America's Future, celebrated in The White House in Washington DC, in 2014, under Barack Obama presidency.

In the area of access to **renewable energy**, the Foundation hosted the visit of the National Resources Committee of the U.S. Congress, chaired by Hon. Raúl Grijalva and co-chaired by Hon. Ron Bishop. Later Dr. Colón was invited to testify before the U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources and outlined a strategy for rebuilding the Island's energy infrastructure that includes community-owned, solar energy cooperatives—a plan that could provide self-sufficiency to underserved communities.

Recent speeches

- He has been invited to address issues of equity of access to social and economic resources in Puerto Rico by the Obama Foundation, Mayor Bill de Blasio, and John C. Williams, President of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York.
- In 2019, Dr. Colón was a presenter at the Community Foundation Leads (CF Leads) Fall Forum.
- In that year, the University of Albany also invited him to be a keynote speaker at RISE 2019 National Conference: Transforming University Engagement in Pre- and Post-Disaster Environments | Lessons from Puerto Rico.
- During the beginning of 2020, he was a speaker at two events hosted in Puerto Rico: Confluence Philanthropy Gathering and the Second Climate Strong Islands Dialogue.
- In 2021, he participated as a speaker at several events, including ABFE Harambee 2021: Let's All Pull Together, and All In 2021 Community Foundation's Virtual Summit. Also, he was the main presenter of the panel for the Caribbean at the BPM (Black Philanthropy Month) 2021, Making Equity Real Summit.

In the wake of the racial injustices wave in 2020, he became a leading voice and inserted himself in the international discussion on systemic racism with the editorial ***¿Qué tiene que ver George Floyd con Puerto Rico? (What does George Floyd have to do with Puerto Rico?)***. He also became a signee, along with other prominent Black leaders in the United States, of the national request: *We Must be in It for the Long Haul: Black Foundation Executives Request Action by Philanthropy on Anti-Black Racism*; a document generated and disseminated by Association of Black Foundation Executives (ABFE).