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2022 Nonprofit Professional of the Year: Vanessa Perez



By [Amanda L. Cole](#)



Nonprofit Professional of the Year

Vanessa Perez

Time for Change Foundation
Executive Director

About a decade ago, Vanessa Perez started her career as a communications intern at [Time for Change Foundation](#). She's now five years into her role as executive director of that same organization, and her accomplishments have earned her *NonProfit PRO's* 2022 NonProfit Professional of the Year Award.

In her 10 years of service, Perez not only has an impressive resume, but also has truly made an impact by creating ample opportunities for her constituents in San Bernardino County, California. From intern, she became a civic engagement specialist, then an associate director and, finally, executive director for the organization that formed two decades ago to help homeless women and children become self-sufficient with programs — like emergency shelter, and transitional and permanent housing — as well as services such as financial education, substance abuse assistance, parenting education and employment readiness.

In recent years, she noticed that women of color residing in the Inland Empire — a region in Southern California that spans parts of San Bernardino and Riverside counties — needed financial stability. While the poverty rate among White and Asian women in that region stands at 11%, it skyrockets beyond 22% for Native American, Black, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, and Hispanic women, according to the [“State of Women in the Inland Empire” report](#) from the University of Riverside's Center for Social Innovation.

So, she set out to empower these often underrepresented and marginalized women, and equip them with the tools they needed to get out of poverty and end the wealth gap in that area.

In 2020, she teamed up with nine other women of color to address systemic barriers, promote inclusion, and create change for future generations by investing in this underinvested community. That resulted in the development of [Black and Brown Opportunities for Profit \(BBOP\) Business Academy](#) entrepreneurship program. As a division of the foundation, the program enrolls female entrepreneurs residing in the region and teaches them to scale a business of their dreams and build generational wealth.

Perez earned her bachelor's degree in mass communications from California State University, San Bernardino, completed the Women's Foundation of California's Women's Policy Institute in 2014 and received an MBA from California Baptist University last year. Growing up in San Bernardino County, Perez experienced and witnessed the economic and societal challenges women of color faced.

“Vanessa has been extremely instrumental in achieving positive change within her community by opening the doors and creating opportunities for marginalized women of

color,” her nominator told *NonProfit PRO*. “As a Latina woman of color herself, Vanessa has taken initiative to advance change by utilizing her position of power and combining it with her personal and professional experience. She is well-established in the nonprofit community within the Inland Empire and has experience in collaborating with both policymakers and the public from her prior work at [Time for Change Foundation].

In the spring, the first cohort for the Black and Brown Opportunities for Profit Business Academy commenced, with its attendees graduating at a ceremony on Sept. 30.

In addition to the program, Perez has led decision-making for the planning and development of a 10,000-sq.-ft. building that will become the Black and Brown Opportunities for Profit (BBOP) Center where budding female entrepreneurs will be able to find office space, coaching, consulting, and technological resources for their startup businesses. Since the building’s 2021 acquisition, Perez has submitted grant proposals and obtained funding for the center’s renovation, buildout, staffing, and operations. The construction began earlier this year and is expected to be completed by early 2023.

“As Vanessa prepares for the grand opening of the BBOP Center, she continues to advocate for her community by strategizing a path forward to ensure the success of the BBOP Center and BBOP Business Academy program,” her nominator said. “Her phenomenal leadership skills exude, and Time for Change Foundation would not be in the position they are in today without her compassion for the community, inspirational ambition and selfless dedication.”

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