

[Celebrating Inclusive Leadership in Action: A Spotlight on our 2025 Inclusive Leadership Award Finalists](#)

Greater Rochester Chamber

At Greater Rochester Chamber, inclusion is not an initiative, it's a foundation. It shapes how we lead, how we grow, and how we show up for our region. That's why the Inclusive Leadership Award is one of the most meaningful honors we celebrate each year. It recognizes those who don't just talk about belonging, they build it into the core of how they work, hire, advocate, and lead.

This year's finalists represent a remarkable spectrum of industries, from criminal justice reform to theater, from farming to finance, and from digital strategy to construction. And yet, they are united by a shared truth: inclusive leadership is transformational. It doesn't just change workplace culture, it reshapes outcomes, industries, and lives.

Take **Amy Bach**, who founded Measures for Justice to bring transparency and accountability to our legal systems. Her data-driven approach empowers communities to push for fairer, more equitable treatment under the law. Or **Jennyrae Brongo**, whose inclusive care farm, Homesteads for Hope, is rewriting what workforce development can look like for adults with disabilities, creating a space where contribution and community are inseparable.

Like Amy and Jennyrae, **Melissa Suchodolski** and **Michelle Schleher** are reimagining traditionally rigid fields. At USC Builds, Melissa is embedding workforce equity into construction, from the jobsite to the boardroom, while Michelle has made AAC Contracting a national leader in environmental services and mentorship for women in the trades.

These finalists prove that inclusion is not one-size-fits-all, it's context-specific, courageous, and often

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deeply personal. **Stephanie Armstrong**, co-founder of Moxie Creative Studios, builds brand ecosystems designed to uplift underrepresented voices, fueled by her own journey of resilience and reinvention. And **Tricia Marsherrall**, founder of Donor Database Experts, channels her entrepreneurial success into purpose-driven action, launching a microgrant program that puts resources directly into the hands of nonprofits serving marginalized communities.

Others are leading cultural and institutional transformation from within. **Elizabeth Williamson**, Artistic Director at Geva Theatre, is expanding the narratives we see on stage by prioritizing BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, and women artists. **Marisa Geitner**, CEO of Heritage Christian Services, is pushing past industry standards to create equitable wages and inclusive growth opportunities throughout the human services sector.

There's also a strong current of operational leadership grounded in empathy. **Heather Smith** at Velocitii has built a nationally recognized workplace where people are the priority, and performance follows. **Dr. Lateef Melvin** brings that same ethos into the HR field at Amazon, guiding organizations to center purpose and equity in every policy and practice.

In the nonprofit and civic planning space, **Tanya Mooza Zwahlen** of Highland Planning and **Maritza Cubi** of Starbridge are bringing underheard voices into decision-making processes that shape our shared spaces. Their work reminds us that inclusion doesn't just happen inside organizations, it happens wherever people are invited to participate and be heard.

Leaders like **Becca Post**, CEO of Helen + Gertrude, and **Evelyn Parker**, founder of All Things DEI Consulting, are building inclusive leadership into the very DNA of how companies grow. Becca has created a human-centered agency culture where teams bring their full selves to work, and are better for it. Evelyn, meanwhile, has trained over 12,000 professionals in inclusive leadership, helping organizations across the country root their strategies in equity and belonging.

Across industries and backgrounds, these leaders share a belief that real progress happens when we bring more people in—not leave them out. That business growth and community impact are not mutually exclusive. That inclusion is both the right thing to do and the most strategic.

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As Greater Rochester Chamber continues our work to fuel connected prosperity across the region, we're proud to honor this year's finalists. Their leadership embodies our values of belonging, collaboration, and service, and sets a bold example of what it means to build in good company.

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