



Michelle Morales Woods Fund Chicago

Professional Grantor Award | 2024 Annual Philanthropy Awards

Michelle Morales is the President of the Woods Fund Chicago. She is a first-generation US-born Puerto Rican. Michelle's background has focused on youth positive development and alternative education, where she has been a vocal advocate of educational justice. Michelle organized for 16 years in Chicago's Puerto Rican community, advocating for community development, education justice, economic justice, the independence of Puerto Rico, and against the rapid gentrification of the neighborhood. She also co-coordinated an international campaign to release 14 Puerto Rican political prisoners held in U.S. prisons.

At Woods Fund, Michelle leads a team of all women of color who have restructured the foundation's infrastructure to center a racial justice lens and embed a trust-based philanthropy framework to inform its grantmaking processes. In 2023, the foundation increased its payout to 11%.

Michelle has used her varied career opportunities, her experiences as a first-generation U.S. born Puerto Rican woman and her platform to raise awareness and consciousness about: the power of youth voice, the continued marginalization of youth of color, utilizing community input in decision making, colonialism in Puerto Rico and the diasporic experiences of colonized peoples living in the United States. She is also a vocal advocate concerning racially equitable workplaces and strongly encourages organizations to not only apply a racial equity and justice lens externally, but internally as well.

Michelle has a BA in Latin American/Latino Studies from DePaul University, an M.Ed in Special Education from the University of Illinois at Chicago, and an M.Ed in Educational Leadership from Northeastern Illinois University. Recently, she was appointed to serve as a co-chair of Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson's transition team, as well as to the Chicago Board of Education and to the Board of Trustees of Northeastern Illinois University. She is a mother, step-mother, wife, eldest daughter, and fur-mami to three dogs.