

A close-up photograph of several young green seedlings growing in a black plastic seedling tray. The soil is dark brown and rich. The seedlings have two main leaves each, and their stems are thin and green. The lighting is warm, suggesting an indoor grow light or a sunny window.

 West Virginia University
CENTER FOR RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

GROUND- WORK 2025

Growth Report

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Celebrating Growth, Learning from Challenges

Many years ago, living in the distant mountains of Central America, I learned a great deal about coffee. During this time among my farming friends, I came to appreciate the rhythms of nature and the hard work that makes our daily cup of coffee possible.

In many rural mountain regions of the world, millions of workers hand pick each cherry-like fruit from the coffee trees. These red fruits contain the seeds of the coffee plant that later make their way through many more hands and processes to become the roasted bean, ground and brewed into a delicious drink. From the perspective of farmers, that cup of coffee is not achieved in one harvest season. Indeed, it takes at least five years for a coffee tree to produce a full harvest. As most coffee farmers would say, it takes five years before you can truly assess the qualities of your crop, the first time you can glimpse its potential.

It has been five years since we planted the West Virginia University Center for Resilient Communities in the soil of the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences. Many hands have tended to its growth, and their work is just beginning to bear fruit.

The CRC's growth is the result of the groundwork, dedication and commitment of innumerable individuals

“As most coffee farmers would say, it takes five years before you can truly assess the qualities of your crop, the first time you can glimpse its potential.”

working together to promote the well-being of the people in communities across our region. We have been inspired by young people, the next generation, who are taking action for transformative change. We have been fortified by generous and steadfast foundation partners who have provided moral and financial support. And we have been led by successive

collaborating teams of staff and assistants whose vision and constant effort have brought us this ample harvest.

We hope 2025 can be a time for celebrating our growth and learning from challenges, reflecting on the path walked and taking new steps into the field of action, stronger than before.

We are excited for what the next five years will bring. The staff, partners and collaborators of the CRC will continue to lay the groundwork for building more vibrant communities. We welcome you to join us in the seasons ahead.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bradley R. Wilson'.

Bradley R. Wilson, Ph.D.
*Executive Director, WVU Center
for Resilient Communities*



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Impactful Work

Five years ago, the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences embarked on an exciting new path for educational programming and scholarship by intentionally and thoughtfully embracing community engagement as a central part of our educational mission, as well as a fundamental tenet of the modern land-grant university.

The most significant and tangible step was the launch of our Center for Resilient Communities. The Center for Resilient Communities has become a model of innovation in how the academic community can cooperatively work and learn from the communities we seek to serve. The Center represents a paradigm shift in our efforts to both acquire and apply knowledge to address critical issues confronting communities across the state of West Virginia and beyond.

As the Center for Resilient Communities celebrates this important milestone, we express our gratitude for the impactful work that has been accomplished and its ongoing meaningful contributions to our communities. We look forward to what the Center can achieve in the next five years.



Greg Dunaway
Dean of the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences, West Virginia University

A Center for Learning

The Center for Resilient Communities advances community engaged research and education programs to generate knowledge and raise up human resources for a more just, equitable and vibrant communities in West Virginia, the greater Appalachian region and across the world. Our aim is to foster a positive spirit, support collective inquiry, elevate new grassroots leadership, and to encourage people to find creative solutions within themselves to promote community well-being in our region. Because of our action-orientation we often liken the CRC to a learning laboratory, a field station, an experimental space and a makeshop for personal and social transformation. The CRC works with students, scholars and community partners through long-term commitments and cooperative agreements across the region and around the world.



Learning Together

Areas of Inquiry and Action

COMMUNITY ECONOMIES AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Creativity, cooperation, and solidarity are crucial to building local wealth and promoting just pathways to sustainable development at regional, national, and global levels. Our project partnerships are rooted in a vision of wealth building where social enterprises, racial diversity, gender equity, and shared prosperity form the basis of everyday life and livelihoods in small towns and cities.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE, CLIMATE ACTION AND COMMUNITY WELLBEING

Building vibrant communities depends upon safe, healthy, and equitable environments where residents are prepared to address past degradation and future hazards related to industrial development and climate vulnerabilities. Our project partnerships are rooted in a vision of democratic participation and capacity building to promote water security, flood preparedness and the health and wellbeing of all.





Alex Winn - 2024 Intern - meets with local leaders in Fayette County WV before hosting a Nourishing Networks Workshop with 40 participants. Interns work closely with grassroots organizations in localities across the state to improve plans for community food access and more.

FOOD SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION

Our food systems are vital to building community resilience at a local, regional, and even global scale. Our project partnerships seek to address food system inequalities, support community-driven structures for equitable food system development, promoting regenerative agriculture, food sovereignty and the right to food in Appalachia and beyond.

Since 2016, the Food Justice Lab of the CRC has held educational workshops across West Virginia and Ohio to support communities working collaboratively to advance local food initiatives, nutrition security and the right to food. In 2024 the CRC held five Nourishing Networks workshops in Raleigh, Marshall, Nicolas, Roane, and Wetzel Counties with over 125 participants.

Our Nourishing Networks workshops and educational outreach is made possible through our partnership with the West Virginia Family Nutrition Program of WVU Extension.



BY THE NUMBERS:

850

participants in Nourishing Networks workshops in the past 8 years

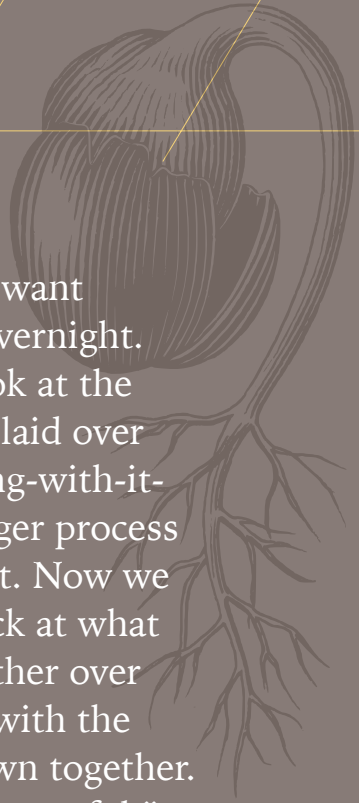
55

people trained as Nourishing Networks workshop facilitators



Project Partnerships

The CRC forges innovative project partnerships that sustain long-term commitments to build more vibrant communities in our region, neighborhoods, small towns and homeplaces. Drawing on the power of an action research, team building and project design curriculum called Groundwork for Vibrant Communities we are growing an ever widening circle of change makers in our region who are learning to plan, consult and mobilize knowledge and resources for community change.



“Sometimes people want things to happen overnight. But you have to look at the groundwork that’s laid over time. It’s the staying-with-it-ness through a longer process that yields real fruit. Now we are able to look back at what we have done together over the past five years with the CRC. We have grown together. For that, we are so grateful.”

LORI MCKINNEY,

*Executive Director, RiffRaff Arts Collective
Princeton, WV*

BY THE NUMBERS:

The CRC has partnered with

38

organizations
on 45 projects

In 2024, the CRC launched
its Summer Institute with

42

participants from across
West Virginia and beyond

Since 2019, the CRC has helped
partners raise over

\$14m

in funding for their projects



Lori McKinney and Robert Blankenship,
Co-founders of the RiffRaff Arts Collective

Graduate Training in Engaged Research

The CRC is a community hub for Masters and Doctoral students advancing impactful participatory research, engaged projects and lifting others as they climb. The CRC's training programs are preparing next generation scholars to lead careers in social, economic and environmental justice in higher education and beyond.



BY THE NUMBERS:

Since 2016 the CRC
has fully funded

18

graduate student degrees.

In 2024, the CRC launched
its Summer Research
Fellowships providing

10

graduate student awards.



“My time as an intern and then as a graduate student reinforced for me that this network was continuously growing through a process of learning by doing. I have always been inspired by learning from and with peers and community members as we journey through cycles of action and reflection in our projects. It is through shared learning that we contribute to a vision of just, equitable, and vibrant communities throughout the Appalachian region and beyond.”

KENNEDY LAWSON, *graduate student*



“Starting as an undergraduate intern I worked with local farmers and developed a profound appreciation for our food system and the need for transformation. During the following summer, I was a participant in the CRC’s Appalachian Food Justice Institute, and began to view myself and my peers in a more significant capacity as leaders. Now during my graduate studies I am advancing a project to grow the Farm to School program here in West Virginia.”

DYLAN UPPERMAN, *graduate student*



BY THE NUMBERS:

Since 2019 the CRC has placed

158

undergraduate interns in high impact projects with

38

community partners.

Resilient Communities Internship Program

The Resilient Communities Internship enables undergraduate students to gain practical experience working in collaborative teams with community partners to promote the wellbeing of the people in our region. Interns get vital training and immediately hit the ground running as contributors to longer-term projects affecting lasting change in communities. After the program many RCI alumni lead high impact projects of their own, enter rigorous graduate programs, or join the workforce prepared to make a real difference.



SHELBY DAVIS RIGHT TO FOOD PROJECT

Spring 2024

Shelby Davis participated in the Resilient Communities Internship Program and was a part of our Spring 2024 cohort. During the internship, she worked on the Right to Food project that explored advocating for food system change at the county and state levels. Her team examined food as a human right and the process of community organizing to respond to food insecurity across the region. She states that:

“I saw that change takes a lot of work. The root of the problem must be fixed while helping those presently affected and those who have been hurt in the past. Change needs to address the past, present, and future”

Shelby is now a sophomore and continues to work in the Food System Transformation area of inquiry. Shelby is utilizing action-based research approaches to encourage solidarity across the state in responding to food insecurity and justice.

“I first joined RCI as a way to get involved with local community groups and social action efforts. In addition to finding a way to give back to my community and state, I’ve also found an incredible group of mentors, colleagues, and friends. The CRC has opened doors for me and given me a place to call home at WVU where I feel welcomed, accepted, and wholly supported.”

CHRISTINA WHITE, RCI 2020

Cultivating Youth Resilience Leaders

In August 2024, the CRC launched the Resilience Ambassadors program with high school students (age 15-17). The goal of the Resilience Ambassadors is to support a new generation of local changemakers who have the confidence to serve their community in areas vital to building more vibrant futures. Our first cohort included students from public schools in Monongalia County, West Virginia. Students worked with experienced graduate and undergraduate researchers from the CRC to enhance their skills, knowledge, attitudes, and data literacy necessary to contribute to addressing future climate hazards and disasters like flooding.



“The first sentence in our training materials stated, ‘At the center of our concern about flood resiliency is people,’ which is a powerful way to start. My biggest takeaway was that for a community to truly be resilient, we have to understand what resilience looks like for the people in that community.”

RAP student



This educational program was made possible through the partnership of WVU's Center for Resilient Communities, WVU's Mountain Hydrology Laboratory, and WVU Extension Services.

Collaborators



BRADLEY WILSON

Executive Director

Bradley holds a Ph.D. in Geography and is the founding director of the CRC. His action research focuses on building collaborative teams to address the pressing challenges in regions confronting economic and environmental crises.



VALENTINA MURALEEDHARAN

Post-Doctoral Researcher

Valentina holds a Ph.D. in Geography and her research focuses on new immigrant communities and the contributions that youth make to addressing social, economic, and environmental injustices in their neighborhoods.



GRACE DEVER

Assistant Director

Grace is a Ph.D. candidate in Geography and holds an M.S. in Natural Resources, Agriculture and Design from WVU. She is passionate about using community GIS and maps as a means of fostering community planning efforts.



KENNEDY LAWSON

Project Coordinator, Youth Education

Kennedy received a B.S. in Energy and Environmental Resources Management and a M.A. degree in Geography from WVU. Kennedy is empowering young people to take part in preparing their communities for future challenges.



JOSHUA LOHNES

Research Assistant Professor

Joshua holds a Ph.D in Geography and facilitates action research on the moral, political and economic place of food in the wider economy. He is passionate about the right to food and popular education.

“The CRC is a collection of thoughtful, committed, community-engaged leaders learning together in the field of social action. Our staff and students are dedicated to lifelong service to the people of West Virginia and the world.”

Celebrating Growth

2020-2025 BY THE NUMBERS



158

Undergraduate Interns



22

Graduate Researchers



38

Community Partner Organizations



45

Project Partnerships



600

Community Leaders Benefited



\$14+ million

Funds Raised for Community Partners



Supporters



With generous support from our donors, funding partners and the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences we are leveraging the knowledge and resources of our WVU land grant mission to enhance the well-being of local communities across the region.







West Virginia University

CENTER FOR RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

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