

BRIDGES

Public Service, Personal Responsibility

Volume 1 Issue 2

Partnering for Public Good

Rutgers-Newark
Receives National
Recognition with
Carnegie Classification
for Community
Engagement

PAGE 10



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NEWARK

Building Community **BRIDGES**

BRIDGES MAGAZINE showcases community-engaged research, teaching, and practice across the Rutgers University–Newark campus and with area partners. It is published by the School of Public Affairs and Administration (SPAA) with support from the school's Office of Community Engagement and Office of Communications, and is sponsored by the RU-N Chancellor's Office.

Executive Editor
Dr. Kaifeng Yang
Dean & Professor
School of Public Affairs and Administration (SPAA)

Managing Editor
Dr. Briana Huett
Director, Office of Community Engagement
School of Public Affairs and Administration (SPAA)

Production Editor
Ginger Swiston
Director of Communications
School of Public Affairs and Administration (SPAA)



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Table of **CONTENTS**

- 4** Empowering the Next Generation of Public Leaders
- 7** Rutgers CHECE Leads a Community-Driven Movement for Change with Inaugural Research Symposium
- 10** Rutgers-Newark Receives National Recognition with Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement
- 13** RU-N's Annual Community Engagement Day Brings the Campus and Community Together
- 14** Around Rutgers-Newark
- 18** Community Partner News
- 20** Community Engagement Publications & Policies
- 22** Student Voices

Cover Photo

*Students volunteer at RU-N
Community Engagement Day 2026.*

Collaboration As Key

Empowering the Next Generation of Public Leaders

By Briana Huett (Director, Office of Community Engagement, School of Public Affairs and Administration, RU-N)

With the upcoming 250th anniversary of American independence, many have been reflecting on the evolving role of government in individuals' everyday lives. Because our most pressing public problems are becoming increasingly complex and interconnected, it has become clear that government cannot address them alone.

Understanding this reality, universities across the country have begun reassessing how they can prepare

the next generation of public-facing leaders across the public, nonprofit, and private sectors. For Rutgers School of Public Affairs and Administration (SPAA), this has led to the creation of the Next Generation Leadership Academy (NextGen Leadership), a multi-year undergraduate leadership development program that launched in Fall 2025.

NextGen Leadership joins a national network of 28 universities across 21 states that together seek to inspire

and prepare students to serve their communities and the nation by building practical, collaborative leadership skills.

Created by the Volcker Alliance, the network currently involves over 1,500 students (and over 950 alumni) that engage in cross-university peer networking; exclusive government, nonprofit, and private internships; and national programming.

While part of this network, however,



L to R from top: Dr. Briana Huett, Dija Janneh, Joseph Bashore, Danny Carmona, Joey Cortez, Ayesha Khan, Isaiah Jordan, Emily Jiang, Gabriella De La Lanza Banos, and Janae Brownridge.

er, NextGen Leadership is tailored specifically to RU-N students and the Newark community. Students from all majors experience the program as a cohort, where together they engage in exclusive programming focused on exposing them to current community challenges from different stakeholder perspectives, as well as successful and ongoing cross-sector collaborations between Newark and New Jersey government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and private companies.

Through these experiences – coupled with those offered through the national NextGen network – NextGen students learn to identify and develop leadership skills necessary for creating

collaborative solutions, all while being mentored by effective community leaders to help prepare them for their future careers.

The inaugural NextGen Leadership cohort included 11 RU-N undergraduates:

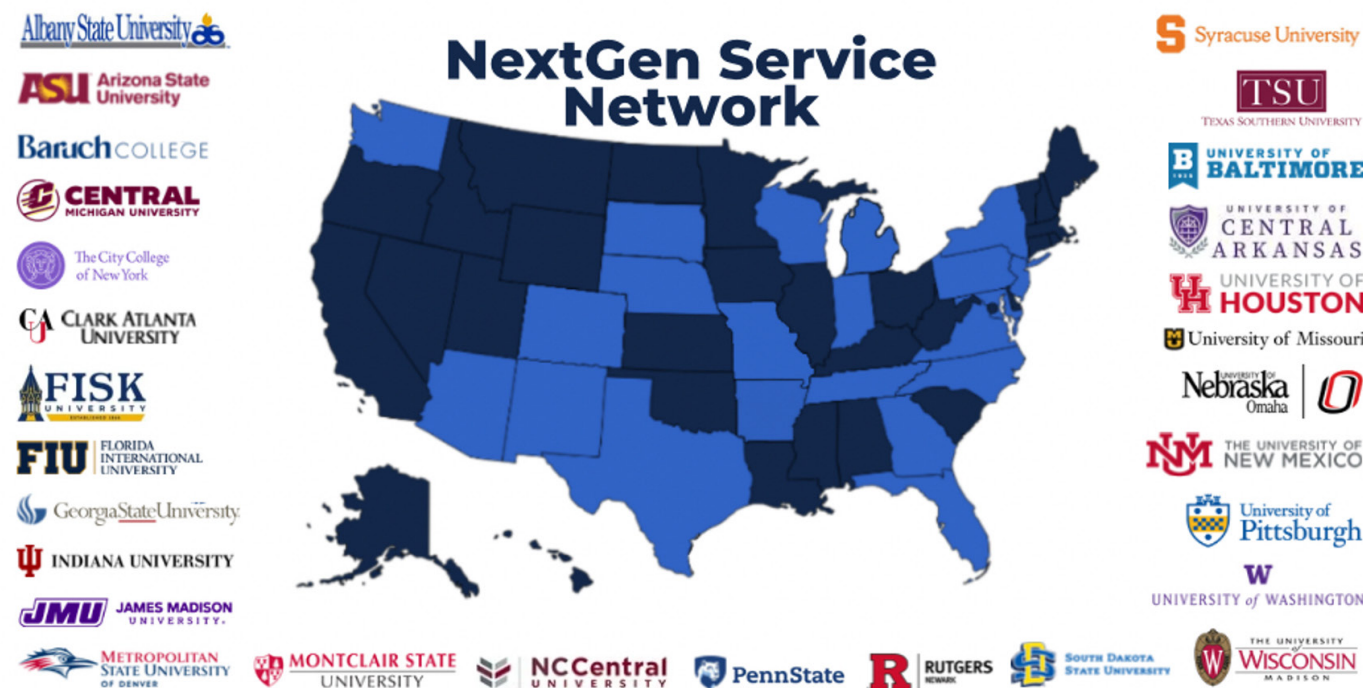
- Joseph Bashore (Winter '26)
- Janae Brownridge (Spring '29)
- Danny Carmona (Spring '27)
- Joey Cortez (Spring '28)
- Gabriella De La Lanza Banos (Spring '27)
- Dija Janneh (Spring '28)
- Emily Jiang (Winter '26)
- Isaiah Jordan (Spring '26)
- Ayesha Khan (Spring '27)
- Marielena Perla (Spring '29)
- Mia Vasquez (Spring '28)

“The Next Gen leadership program for me is about serving the community in ways that bridge connections amongst people while creating positive change for our future generations to thrive.”

*Gabriella De La Lanza Banos
NextGen Student*

During their time in the program, these students:

- Earn a minor or certificate in Public Leadership;
- Complete two internships within the public, nonprofit, and private



- sectors;
- Form community impact teams dedicated to tackling specific public issues through intentional learning, community networking, and working directly with an organization on a group impact project; and
- Participate in core leadership programming, including a New Member Retreat, Collab Lab Experiences, ILead Workshops, NextGen Regional Meetups, and National NextGen Student Exchanges.

For the 2026-2027 academic year, NextGen experiences — including the selected program sites, speakers, and collaborative projects — will be

tailored specifically to admitted students' career goals and public issues of interest.

In this way, no matter their future career, NextGen students leave the program with direct, tangible experience that will prepare them to serve their communities in meaningful ways.

Students interested in learning more about the Next Generation Leadership Academy, including information about the application process and the signature events planned for the upcoming year, can visit <https://spaa.newark.rutgers.edu/nextgen> or contact the program director, Dr. Briana Huett (briana.huett@rutgers.edu).

“Being part of the NextGen program has given me the opportunity to grow both personally and professionally while building meaningful connections with others. I’ve gained meaningful experiences, support, and confidence, and I’m looking forward to continuing to learn, take on new opportunities, and strengthen those relationships next year!”

*Mia Vasquez
NextGen Student*

Redefining Research

Rutgers CHECE Leads a Community-Driven Movement for Change with Inaugural Research Symposium

By Caryl R. Lucas

The face of research is changing, and at Rutgers Center for Health Excellence and Community Empowerment (CHECE), that transformation is driven by community voices, collaboration, and a bold new vision for impact.

“At CHECE, we are advancing ‘A New Paradigm for Community Empowerment’— one where research is rooted in lived experience and shaped by the voices of the people it is meant to serve,” said Diane Hill, co-founder of CHECE. “We commend our community partners for their dedication, insight,

and trust. They are essential to advancing this work and ensuring that our research leads to real, measurable change.”

Those remarks set the tone for the recent “Inaugural Community Matters: A Collaborative Research Symposium.” A milestone event held at Ruth Bader Ginsburg Hall, it brought together Rutgers leadership, state officials, community scientists, students, and partners to showcase how research is being reimagined to better serve communities.

Dr. Hill recognized the internal force behind the center’s growing success. “The symposium provided an important opportunity to highlight the depth and impact of CHECE’s work—from initiatives like the Intergenerational Fight Against Menthol (IFAM) project to Senior Connect and the Digital Divide, and our Community Scientists program,” she said.

“It allowed us to showcase how our research is not only addressing critical health disparities but also building sustainable partnerships and creating



Students and staff from four NextGen schools (Rutgers University–Newark, Baruch College, City College of New York, and Montclair State University) gather in a commemorative photo of the first NextGen regional event alongside the four NYC government panelists.



Alfred F. Tallia, MD, MPH, professor and chair of Family Medicine and Community Health, Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School.

“We are creating innovations in care based on the needs that our communities have told us they need and want. We are Rutgers’ healthcare innovation lab, and we will transform care by empowering communities with services for the betterment of all of us in the state.”

*Dr. Alfred F. Tallia
Robert Wood Johnson
Medical School*



Dr. Diane Hill, co-founder of the Rutgers Center for Health Excellence and Community Empowerment (CHECE), leads a fireside chat at the center's inaugural research symposium.

pathways for community voices to shape solutions.”

New Jersey Health Commissioner Dr. Raynard E. Washington reinforced the urgency of this approach. “Public health can’t afford to treat community voices as afterthoughts. Real, lasting change happens when the people closest to a problem are partners in solving it,” said Dr. Washington, “It’s essential that we build a state where there’s an unbroken thread connecting lived experience to research, research to policy, and policy to the community.”

That commitment to community-driven solutions is already taking shape through CHECE’s growing academic and clinical partnerships, including its collaboration with Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School.

“Working with Dr. Diane Hill, we are creating innovations in care based on the needs that our communities have told us they need and want,” said Alfred F. Tallia, MD, MPH, professor and chair of Family Medicine and Community Health, Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School.

“We are Rutgers’ healthcare innovation lab and we will transform care by empowering communities with services for the betterment of all of us in the state. Stay tuned!”

Among the dignitaries in attendance was Dr. Tonya Smith-Jackson, chancellor of Rutgers University–Newark, who commended CHECE for its groundbreaking work advancing community-driven research and engagement.

Reinforcing the center’s mission, Chancellor Jackson commended CHECE

for its intentional focus on elevating community voices as a driving force in research and innovation—an approach she has championed throughout her career.

“What’s happening through CHECE is exactly the kind of work we need to see more of — research that is deeply rooted in the community and shaped by the people it is meant to serve,” she said. “This collaborative symposium reflects that commitment, and it’s exciting to see it take form. I’m not new to this approach.

“As far back as 1999, when I was an engineer at Virginia Tech, I was engaged in action-based community research — bringing community members with lived experience into the process as experts,” Chancellor Jackson told the packed audience.

“The quality of research is grounded in its validity and its ability to address real-world issues. You cannot do meaningful, community-centered research without the community at the table.”

*Dr. Tonya Smith-Jackson
RU-N Chancellor*

“At the time, it challenged traditional thinking, but the principle was clear then and remains true today: the quality of research is grounded in its validity and its ability to address real-world issues. You cannot do meaningful, community-centered research without the community at the table.”

Building on that sentiment, Dr. Kai-feng Yang, dean of Rutgers School of Public Affairs and Administration, also expressed his appreciation to Dr. Hill and the CHECE team, reflecting on the deeper connection between research and community impact.

“When I arrived in Newark 30 years ago as an international student, the community opened its arms to me — and that experience has shaped how I see the role of research today,” said Dr. Yang. “Research must live in the community and, more importantly, matter to the community. That is the true value of what is being built through this center.



“It reflects the University’s mission — knowledge not for its own sake, but knowledge that serves, and technology that transforms communities,” he explained. “Thank you for creating a space where science and social justice meet, and to our community scientists and partners — thank you for your trust in us.”

The symposium also served as a celebration honoring Assemblywoman Cleopatra Tucker, Assemblyman Michael Venezia, and New Jersey Cabinet Secretary Office of the NJ Governor Jayne’ Johnson, Esq. for their longstanding support of the center’s mission.

During the symposium, fireside chat panel discussions were held highlighting the partnerships with CHECE’s community partners, community scientists, and intergenerational research projects.

The purpose of the Center for Health

Excellence and Community Empowerment (CHECE) is to build upon proven effective community engagement strategies developed by Rutgers University–Newark’s Office of University-Community Partnerships (OUCP) and the scholarship and knowledge-based services that are the hallmarks of the School of Public Affairs and Administration (SPAA).

The center’s mission is to support public, nonprofit, and private sector entities to effectively engage under-represented urban constituencies in health research, scholarship, policy and decision-making, service delivery, community engagement, and assessment.

During the inaugural symposium, the East Orange Senior Volunteer Corporation was awarded a \$10,000 grant for the organization’s community engagement sustainability project.

Partnering for Public Good

Rutgers-Newark Receives National Recognition with Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement

By Carrie Stetler (Assistant Director of Media Relations, RU-N)

Rutgers University–Newark is among 237 U.S. colleges and universities nationwide to receive the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification for 2026, which recognizes institutions that excel at integrating community engagement across teaching, research, and service.

RU–N has held the classification since 2010, but institutions must reapply every five years to earn a designation for the next cycle. The 2026 designation reflects the university’s ability to demonstrate deep, sustained engagement over time.

Granted by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, the designation reflects RU–N’s long-standing collaboration with community organizations, local schools, government agencies, and civic leaders to advance social impact and economic development in the city and the surrounding region.

Last year, RU–N also received a Carnegie Classification as an Opportunity College and University, a category created for the first time to recognize

schools that excel at helping economically disadvantaged students find careers that pay competitive wages.

For the past 19 years, the Community Engagement classification has served as the leading framework for institutional assessment and national recognition of community engagement in U.S. higher education.

“Our colleges and universities not only fuel science and innovation, they build prosperity in rural, urban and suburban communities nationwide,” said Timothy F.C. Knowles, president of the Carnegie Foundation.

“We celebrate each of these institutions, particularly their dedication to partnering with their neighbors — fostering civic engagement, building useable knowledge, and catalyzing real-world learning experiences for students.”

Institutions that received the designation in 2026 joined 40 classified in 2024, for a total of 277 institutions nationwide.

“We are proud to have our community-engaged mission reaffirmed by the Carnegie Foundation. This redesignation is evidence that our faculty,

staff and students remain true to our goal of building reciprocal partnerships with the communities we serve and co-creating knowledge that is impactful and responsive to societal challenges,” said RU–N

Chancellor Tonya Smith-Jackson.

Rutgers University–Newark’s role as an anchor institution in the city is key to its mission. Faculty, staff and students have increased the rate of college-going residents, increased local hiring and procurement rates, improved public health, and teamed with local artists and cultural institutions to create



“Earning the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification affirms that community engagement is not just an activity, but a core institutional commitment — integrated into teaching, research, and civic life to create lasting, reciprocal impact.”

*Dr. Diane Hill
Assistant Chancellor,
Office of University–
Community Partnerships*

socially engaged public art projects.

“For RU–N, earning the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification affirms that community engagement is not just an activity, but a core institutional commitment — integrated into teaching, research, and civic life to create lasting, reciprocal impact,” said Diane Hill, assistant chancellor for the Office of University–Community Partnerships, which led the data collection and preparation of the application. “Community partnership is central to who we are, how we learn, and how we serve.”

Hill noted that that earning the designation was an effort that spanned all six schools at RU–N, as well as multiple offices, centers, and institutes.



RU-N students participate in Community Engagement Day 2026.

The classification is awarded following an intensive, evidence-based self-study process.

Factors considered by the Carnegie Foundation include institutional culture, faculty and staff support, curricular and co-curricular engagement, civic learning, student life, and institutional investments. In addition, 12 community partners were surveyed to assess the depth and quality of their partnerships with the university.

Some of the programs and research initiatives that were highlighted to support the designation include:

- The Newark Public Safety Collaborative, which partners with the City of Newark and community stakeholders to improve public safety through data sharing and coordinated strategies;
- Rutgers Law School’s clinical partnerships with the New Jersey



RU-N student volunteers prepare flower beds alongside Apian Industry to support Newark community gardens.

Consortium for Immigrant Children; and

- The Center for PreCollege Programs, which serves more than 2,000 students annually in grades 6–12, strengthening college access and career pathways.

Public health and workforce initiatives

featured in the application include:

- Advancing Health Literacy to Enhance Equitable Community Responses to COVID-19, a partnership with the City of Newark and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services;

“This redesignation is evidence that our faculty, staff and students remain true to our goal of building reciprocal partnerships with the communities we serve and co-creating knowledge that is impactful and responsive to societal changes.”

*Dr. Tonya Smith-Jackson
RU-N Chancellor*

- The Newark Geoscience Ecosystem, which supports the development of a diverse geoscience workforce; and
- The Rutgers–Newark Aging & Brain Health Alliance, which works with community partners to educate older African American residents in Greater Newark about dementia and Alzheimer’s disease.

“The institutions receiving the 2026 Community Engagement Classification exemplify American higher education’s commitment to the greater good,” said ACE President Ted Mitchell. “The beneficiaries of this unflagging dedication to public purpose missions are their students, their teaching and research enterprises, and their wider communities.”

A Day to Give Back

RU-N’s Annual Community Engagement Day Brings the Campus and Community Together

Spring 2026 Community Engagement Day at RU–N was a powerful celebration of service, bringing together 172 volunteers including students, staff, faculty, alumni, and community members for a day of impact across Newark.

From parks and schools to libraries and gardens, volunteers showed up with energy and purpose at 14 community sites, creating spaces for connection, growth, and care. New partners this year included The Salvation Army,

Apian Industry, and Newark Green Team.

NextGen students joined the The Salvation Army Newark site, and learned about their extensive programming and ways students can get involved.

RU–N Community Engagement Day is a bi-annual campus-wide event that brings students, faculty, staff, and community partners together to give back to the Newark community through service and civic engagement. Typically, the day includes a variety

of hands-on volunteer projects both on campus and throughout the city – including community clean-ups, food distribution, youth and senior support, and partnerships with local nonprofits – along with reflection activities that connect service to social responsibility and community impact.

The event highlights RU–N’s commitment to being an engaged anchor institution and strengthens relationships between the university and the surrounding community.



RU-N student volunteers join together to take a group photo before going to their assigned volunteer sites throughout Newark.

Rutgers-Newark and Community Partners Launch Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Initiative

By Carrie Stetler (Assistant Director of Media Relations, RU-N)



 **READ MORE**
<https://go.rutgers.edu/grandparents>

Rutgers University–Newark and partners launched a community effort to support the growing number of grandparents who are their grandchildren’s primary caregivers.

The Rutgers Center for Health Excellence & Community Empowerment (CHECE) coordinated with partners to establish the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Initiative, which works with local organizations to provide

New Jersey grandparents with educational resources, fresh produce and wellness services.

“This is about dignity, stability, and equity,” said Diane Hill, director of the Rutgers Center for Health Excellence & Community Empowerment. “By aligning our resources with partners, we can build a more wholistic model to support grandparents.”

Express Newark and Partners Prepare City Residents for Film Industry Jobs

By Carrie Stetler (Assistant Director of Media Relations, RU-N)

The Community Media Center (CMC) at Express Newark, a hybrid art space at RU–N that brings together faculty, staff, and community artists, is now part of a collaboration called Newark Film Works, which was awarded a \$750,000 grant from the New Jersey

Economic Development Authority (NJEDA) Board to fund workforce development initiatives.

The program will provide free training for Production Assistant and Rigger/Grip/Set Grip positions to Newark residents, along with additional hands-on

training. Newark Film Works will provide wraparound support services, professional development, career mentorship, and job placement support.

 **READ MORE**
<https://go.rutgers.edu/film-jobs>

SPAA Course Partners with Essex County Office of LGBTQ Affairs to Address Critical Issues

From The School of Public Affairs and Administration (SPAA)

During the Spring 2026 semester, the “Introduction to Public Policy” course at Rutgers School of Public Affairs and Administration (SPAA) partnered with the Essex County Office of LGBTQ Affairs to develop policy briefs on critical LGBTQ+ issues facing the county, with the aim for what’s produced to go beyond theoretical exercises and be real recommendations that will reach policy decision-makers.

 **READ MORE**
<https://go.rutgers.edu/ec-lgbtq-s26>



Rutgers-Newark Selected for National Effort to Foster Student Dialogue

By Carrie Stetler (Assistant Director of Media Relations, RU-N)

Rutgers University–Newark has been selected to participate in a national program that helps faculty guide students through difficult conversations in the classroom and beyond.

Called Deliberative Dialogue, the professional development effort is designed to support college and university faculty as they guide students in navigating differences in a respectful, civil way while strengthening critical thinking and communication skills — an increasingly urgent need as public



discourse becomes more polarized and complex issues surface in classrooms across disciplines.

 **READ MORE**
<https://go.rutgers.edu/student-dialogue>

AROUND Rutgers-Newark

School of Criminal Justice Joins Newark Police and Fire Career Path Program for High Schoolers

By Carrie Stetler (Assistant Director of Media Relations, RU-N)

The School of Criminal Justice has joined a Newark program designed to prepare high school students for future careers in public safety, including a pathway into the Newark Police and Fire Divisions, Newark Mayor Ras J. Baraka announced.

The initiative, a collaboration that includes the RU-N Center for Pre-College Programs, was unveiled at a press

conference at City Hall on Tuesday. The press conference included remarks from the School of Criminal Justice Dean Nancy La Vigne, Baraka, Public Safety Director Emanuel Miranda Sr., and Newark Public Schools Superintendent Roger León.

The effort builds on the district's strategic plan that seeks to create structured pipelines connecting high

school learning to college and career opportunities. Barringer High School will become the home for the Public Safety program that will focus on careers that span public services in the City of Newark.



Rutgers-Newark Chancellor Encourages Newark Girls to ‘Bring Your Very Best Self’

By Carrie Stetler (Assistant Director of Media Relations, RU-N)

At the Camden Street School in Newark, little girls in tutus and tiaras lined up to tell RU-N Chancellor Tonya Smith-Jackson what they do to help themselves feel poised and powerful. The event, Poised and Powerful: Reflections of Inner Beauty, was organized by the RU-N Staff Council in partnership with the Rutgers Police Department. Smith-Jackson was invited to be the keynote speaker at the annual celebration, held to honor Women’s History Month and empower girls at the school.



Rutgers Center for Nonprofit Leadership and Development Hosts Evening of Film and Dialogue on “Reimagining Democracy”

From Rutgers Center for Nonprofit Leadership and Development

The Rutgers Center for Nonprofit Leadership and Development hosted an evening of film and dialogue for “Reimagining Democracy: Justice, Reentry & Community Voice Through Film” at Express Newark at Rutgers University–Newark on April 15.

Writer, producer, and director Kiara C. Jones (Cultivated Films, LLC) and Christopher Agans, executive director at the

New Jersey Scholarship and Transformative Education in Prisons program (NJ STEP), shared their insights following the screening of “A Woman on the Outside,” a film that follows Kristal Bush, a young woman in Philadelphia who saw nearly every man in her life disappear to prison.

Over the course of the evening, approximately 50 participants, in-

cluding students, faculty, community members, NJ STEP participants, and members of the reentry community joined together to reflect on the power of storytelling, lived experience, and education in shaping more just and inclusive communities.



COMMUNITY Partner News

New Jersey Black Women’s Collective Launches Leadership Institute at Rutgers-Newark

From New Jersey Black Women’s Collective (NJBWC) and Rutgers School of Public Affairs and Administration (SPAA)

The New Jersey Black Women’s Collective (NJBWC), in partnership with the Rutgers School of Public Affairs and Administration (SPAA), announced their Inaugural Leadership Institute at Rutgers–Newark. This four-month executive leadership experience is designed to support, prepare, and advance Black women leaders committed to serving New Jersey with vision, integrity, and sustainable impact. The cohort launched on Saturday, February 28, 2026, and concludes on Sunday, June 7, 2026.

“Black women continue to show up

for our communities in extraordinary ways. As we witnessed in New Jersey’s most recent gubernatorial election, the impact of strong leadership is undeniable. This institute was created to nurture that brilliance by equipping participants with the tools, strategies, and connections needed to lead with purpose and power,” said Tennille McCoy, co-founder of NJBWC and chair of the Leadership Institute.

“As a Scarlet Knight, I am thrilled about this new partnership between Rutgers University–Newark and the New Jersey Black Women’s Collective.

Our collaboration began with Mercer County Community College, where we saw a tremendous response from women in North Jersey who traveled every other Saturday to participate. They asked for a more accessible option, and we answered. This partnership allows leaders to join our program without the burden of long commutes and benefit from interactive sessions led by Rutgers SPAA professors.”

Kaifeng Yang, the dean of Rutgers SPAA stated, “We are proud to begin this partnership and serve as the academic home for the NJBWC Leadership Institute in North Jersey. The work taking place within this program aligns directly with our mission: creating pathways for advancement, supporting community leadership, and providing equitable access to high-level professional growth.”

Hanifa Barnes, Esq., co-founder of NJBWC and co-chair of NJBWC Newark, shared, “I’m excited to be in Newark and lead this important initiative. The

New Jersey Black Women’s Collective (NJBWC)

The New Jersey Black Women’s Collective (NJBWC) is New Jersey’s first comprehensive advocacy organization solely dedicated to the proliferation of Black women leaders in the state. Established in 2021, the organization’s goal is to garner, harness and strengthen the economic, social and political power of Black women in New Jersey by directly investing in and advocating for Black women through coalition building, fundraising, community and stakeholder engagement. Visit <https://njblackwomenscollective.org> for more information.



L to R: Kaifeng Yang, dean of Rutgers SPAA, and Tennille R. McCoy, co-founder and chair, NJBWC Leadership Institute.

cohort will engage with top-notch faculty, have unique opportunities to visit Nasdaq, and interact with local small businesses, enriching their learning experience and expanding their professional networks.”

Kim Brooks, Esq., NJBWC co-founder and co-chair of NJBWC Newark, stated, “This shared work is community work. Each year, the cohort reflects the values of service, dignity, legacy, and collective impact. Supporting leaders

who are already doing the work and giving them access, preparation, and partnership changes the trajectory of every space they manage.”

The goal of the Leadership Institute is to assist leaders in propelling to the next level. Sessions will cover topics such as “Think Like a CFO,” “Marketing You,” and “Little P on Politics,” designed to equip participants with practical skills and insights. Additionally, the cohort will include dedicated

coaching sessions to further support personal and professional growth.

The 2026 Institute proudly welcomed back Melody M. Fogarty and Rita Williams-Bogar for their third year of instruction and leadership development. Their continued service provides continuity, mentorship, and executive skills-based training throughout the 2026 cohort experience.

Share Your Story

To highlight your activities in BRIDGES Magazine, contact the Office of Community Engagement in the School of Public Affairs and Administration at Rutgers University–Newark at spaa.oce@newark.rutgers.edu



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT Publications & Policies

Journal of Higher Education Outreach & Engagement, Vol. 29, No. 4

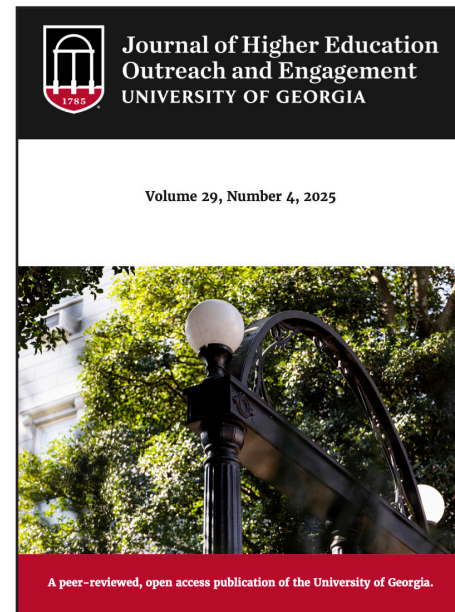
Understanding the Logic and Aims of Rutgers Future Scholars: A College Access Program Providing Hope and Opportunity to New Jersey

Analyzing the Rutgers Future Scholars (RFS) program, this article sheds light on the transformative potential of university-led programs in reshaping the trajectories of underrepresented youth and expanding access to higher education.

Established in 2007, RFS offers a comprehensive approach that aims to enhance college readiness, identity development, social skills, academic achievement, and high school per-

sistence, ultimately leading to college enrollment.

RFS's commitment to scholars aligns with restorative justice practices, emphasizing relationship-building and support. To create systemic changes within educational systems to empower students to overcome barriers to higher education, the program focuses on fostering partnerships, tailoring programs to unique contexts, and leveraging multisite locations.



Legislation

Governor Murphy Signs Legislation Establishing the New Jersey Innovation Authority

On January 5th, 2026, Governor Phil Murphy signed into law A5728/S4485 establishing the New Jersey Innovation Authority (NJIA), making New Jersey the first state in the nation to codify a state innovation office.

The NJIA will consist of a 13-member Board of Directors consisting of ex-officio members and members of the public with knowledge and expertise in data science, public engagement,

the development and implementation of digital technologies and digital product development, or the digital delivery of products, services, or benefits.

“The Office of Innovation has become a national model for delivering better, more human-centered government – from modernizing critical services and reducing administrative burden to responsibly deploying AI tools that

improve efficiency, access, and equity for New Jerseyans,” said Beth Simone Noveck, New Jersey State Chief AI Strategist.

“Its focus on real-world impact, interdisciplinary talent, and building alongside the public has helped position New Jersey as a leader in service delivery and responsible innovation.”

Collaborations: A Journal of Community-Based Research and Practice, Vol. 29, No. 4

Navigating Power Differentials in Community-Based Participatory Research: A Case Study of the Design of a Governance Model for the Refugee States Project

Examining the Refugee States project as a case study of how power inequities within universities and community organizations manifest in collaborative projects, this article critically reflects on the ways to address these challenges through the development of a governance model that increases power relation transparency.

The project is a collaboration between two universities and two non-profit community organizations serving racialized and LGBTQIA+ migrants and refugees in Montreal and the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) in Canada to create

a counter-archive of oral histories and digital stories that challenge dominant narratives of forced migration by focusing on the perspectives and expertise of refugees.

This research is rooted in principles of reciprocity, shared authority, and a capacity-building framework that empowers community members to acquire digital and oral history skills that can be adapted to their own projects in anti-racist and queer and trans-affirming ways.



Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship, Vol. 19, No. 1

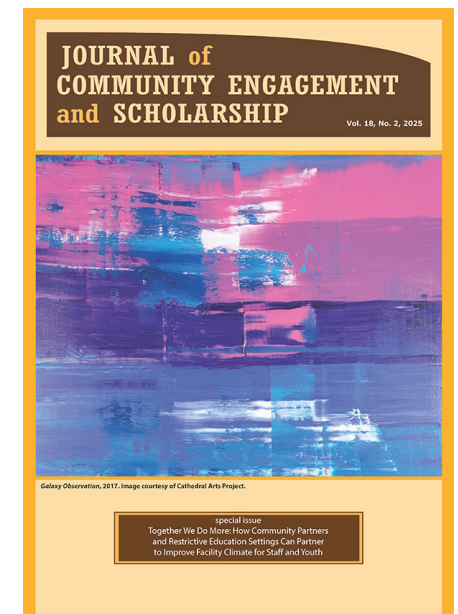
A Model for Boundary Spanning in Education: Insights from University and Community Partnerships

Boundary spanning in educational partnerships requires navigating complex boundaries across institutions, disciplines, and roles. This study explores the activities, roles, and competencies of boundary spanners, particularly liaisons, within university-community collaborations.

Based on semi-structured interviews with liaisons, university faculty, and community partners, the findings highlight the centrality of relationship-building, communication, and systems thinking in managing dynamic boundaries. Liaisons are revealed as

both linking pins and system managers, filling structural gaps while fostering long-term collaboration. Variations in how stakeholders perceive boundaries and competencies underscore the multifaceted nature of liaison roles.

This research proposes a three-stage model for boundary spanners in educational partnerships, emphasizing adaptability and sustainable systems. These insights inform strategies for supporting liaisons and enhancing the effectiveness of boundary-spanning efforts in education.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Student Voices

Gabriela De La Lanza Banos

Major: Public Administration (Spring '27)

Affiliations: Next Generation Leadership Academy; Shelia Y. Oliver Foundation

What drew you to the field of public service and direct community work?

I, like many, grew up with a single parent and so from a very young age I had to learn how to advocate for my household by helping translate for my mother. At four years old my mother and I were blessed to have met a social worker who supported us with public resources as we were undocumented at the time.

At the same time my mother had built a community of women who understood her struggle as a woman and mother and not only helped me with basic needs but also provided beautiful experiences. Inadvertently, my mother and those women shaped me into being the empathetic, generous, and passionate advocate for others today. I am passing down the lessons and generosity that have been bestowed upon me.

What does “community engagement” mean to you?

Primarily, it represents how can we cause an impact “in the now.” It might not be massive, and that is okay. It requires us to ask how the community can be engaged in efforts for the betterment of our community, setting aside our own wants to help those who have unaffordable needs. To be selfless and not selfish.

What public issues are you passionate about, and why?

One of the most important issues that I have seen throughout my time in social work is the lack of funding in inner cities for students’ education and extracurricular activities. And it was one of the first team projects I worked on during my Introduction to Policy Analysis class.

Being that I come from public schooling, I was intrigued as to how state

funding works to provide extracurricular activities. I saw this to be one of the biggest difficulties during my time in child advocacy.

What have you learned from your time as a student here that you’ll carry into your career?

My favorite concept that I’ve learned is “bounded rationality,” and it’s one that I heard in my Introduction to Policy Analysis class. I didn’t understand the meaning at first, but every day I think about it and implement it in my daily life. To think that when creating policy you are going to think of every possible scenario is impossible; it makes me realize and critically analyze that not everything is black and white and that is how we should see life.

What is one lesson, class, or experience that has impacted you the most in your time here?

I think it would be my Organizational Dynamics class with Professor Urvi Shukla. Her curiosity to figure out why we thought the way that we did allowed us to critically ask ourselves why we think that way too. Her class



Gabriela De La Lanza Banos (Spring '27)

shaped the way I look at every organization and why it functions the way it does.

What do you hope to accomplish with your degree and experiences gained while at RU-N? Where do you see yourself in the future?

I absolutely see myself making my own mark in the world. My next goal is to hopefully join the United Nations in some capacity to gain some knowledge in advocacy on an international basis. However, my ultimate goal is to

one day start a non-profit organization that will make it accessible for migrant parents to learn English.

What excites you most about the future of public service?

To know that my personal past will be my book of lessons. My continuous work in the community will be the fiery passion in me. And my higher education will be the knowledge I will need to fiercely advocate for my community and those of others.

“Student Voices” highlights the perspectives of RU-N students who are passionate about serving the Newark community, asking them what draws them to community engagement work, how they connect their academic learning directly to this work, and the future they see for themselves in public service.



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