

Jeffress Trust Awards Program in Research Advancing Health Equity

2026 Awardees



HEALTH
RESOURCES
IN ACTION

Partnership/Collaborative Establishment Award

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IN ACTION**

For project summaries please view the [Jeffress Awardee Webpage](#)



Partnership/Collaborative Establishment Award

Sarah Jane Brubaker, PhD, MS
Virginia Commonwealth University
In partnership with RISE for Youth

Project Title: Promoting the Health of System-Involved Youth

Impact of Award

“We anticipate that the impact of the Jeffress Trust Award on our project will be significant. RISE for Youth is a small but mighty organization doing great work in the community to support young people and help them thrive, but they have a small staff and limited resources. The project will help them spread the word about their great work, enlist the support and collaboration of other youth-supporting organizations, hire a part-time coordinator, and more fully engage families and young people in their work to ensure that those with lived experience are driving the changes that are needed to shift the focus from punishment to care.”



*Dr. Sarah-Jane Brubaker
Professor of Criminal Justice
and Public Policy, Virginia
Commonwealth University*



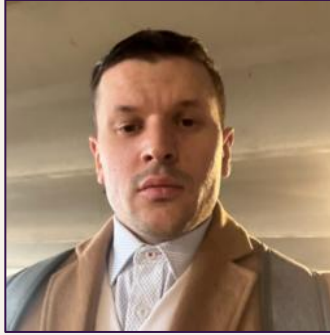
*Valerie Slater, Esq. Executive
Director of RISE for Youth*

Partnership/Collaborative Establishment Award

Sarah Jane Brubaker, PhD, MS
Virginia Commonwealth University
In partnership with RISE for Youth



Antoinette Joseph, Youth Development Specialist



George Joseph, Community Organizer



RISE for Youth staff at Youth Development Academy graduation



Valerie Slater, Esq. (front, center), Executive Director of RISE for Youth, with a group of youth leaders and mentors

Partnership/Collaborative Establishment Award

Wendy Cohn, PhD, MEd

UVA Comprehensive Cancer Center

In partnership with Stone Mountain Health Services

Project Title: Advancing Lung Cancer Screening Equity Through Virginia Partnership & Research

Impact of Award

“A partnership between University of Virginia Cancer Center and Stone Mountain Health System will establish the Lung Cancer Impact Team to improve lung cancer screening rates among Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC) in Virginia. Funding from the Jeffress trust enables the Virginia FQHC Cancer Screening Collaborative to launch the Lung Cancer Impact Team with organizations that serve rural, low access and low-income populations together with lung cancer screening referral sites. Together we will develop and pilot a Lung Cancer Screening Research and Implementation Readiness Assessment and Action Guide, the “Guide”, to target known root causes of low lung cancer screening uptake: data infrastructure, lack of standard workflows and navigation, and community barriers such as transportation gaps and stigma. We will scale the Guide to at least 7 additional FQHCs who will complete the assessment and implement at least one prioritized action. This will enable durable and sustainable capacity for lung cancer screening and implementation research. This funding positions Virginia to be able to close the screening gap while creating a replicable, community-grounded model that can inform future statewide and even national efforts to reduce lung cancer mortality in rural and low-income populations.”



Dr. Wendy Cohn, Associate Director for Community Outreach & Engagement, UVA Comprehensive Cancer Center



Jody Willis Hill, DNP, FNP-BC, Co-PI, Chief Operating Officer, University of Virginia

Partnership/Collaborative Establishment Award

Fern R. Hauck, MD, MS

University of Virginia International Family Medicine Clinic

In partnership with Cville Tulips, International Rescue Committee Charlottesville, Blue Ridge Health District Services

Project Title: Cultivating Health Equity with Refugee Women: A Community-Engaged, Culturally Responsive Research Collaboration

Impact of Award

“The Jeffress Trust Partnership/Collaborative Establishment award will allow us to: (1) Establish a coordinated, action-oriented research infrastructure that includes refugee women and moves beyond informal collaboration, translating community insight into culturally responsive, systems-level change, while also offering a scalable, lower-cost model for supporting refugee health in small communities; (2) Institutionalize collaborations among several partnering organizations by establishing an active Community Advisory Board (CAB) grounded in an asset-based approach that builds on women’s strengths and knowledge; and (3) Learn from an established university-community Minneapolis-based research collaborative, the SoLaHmo Partnership for Health and Wellness, which has united Somali, Latino, Hmong and other historically marginalized communities in this research collaborative. We will work directly with their research team leaders to build our team members’ skills and research infrastructure through training workshops and adaptation of their curricula.”



Dr. Fern R. Hauck, Professor of Family Medicine & Professor of Public Health Sciences; Director of Research and Faculty Development; Director, International Family Medicine Clinic



Marjan Omranian, Co-Director Cville Tulips, Co-Investigator



Elizabeth (Liz) Wittner, Cville Tulips English Training Coordinator, and Bonnie Gordon, Cville Tulips Co-Director; both are Co-Investigators on this project

Partnership/Collaborative Establishment Award

Fern R. Hauck, MD, MS

University of Virginia International Family Medicine Clinic

In partnership with Cville Tulips, International Rescue Committee Charlottesville, Blue Ridge Health District Services



Medicine Clinic, International Rescue Committee, and Cville Tulips. - IRC staff with Dr. Hauck



Cville Tulips Gatherings: End of year celebration



Lynette DeLong (IRC, Co-investigator) and Raisa Mahmoud (IRC staff)



Classroom instruction



Classroom instruction

Partnership/Collaborative Establishment Award

Sheri Shannon

Southside ReLeaf

In partnership with University of Richmond & Virginia Department of Health (VDH)

Project Title: Workplan Action Towards Environmental Resilience (WATER): Co-Creating/Building Capacity for/Working with the Community To Resilient Health Systems in Flood-Impacted Communities

Impact of Award

“This grant award from the Jeffress Trust will allow Go with the Flow to expand from a community-led flood mapping initiative into a deeper, multi-year effort connecting flooding, infrastructure, and health. Over the next three years, Southside ReLeaf, the University of Richmond, and the Virginia Department of Health will use resident-generated knowledge to better understand the impacts of flooding, strengthen the evidence available to policymakers, and ensure community experiences inform solutions. Just as importantly, the project will develop a replicable research and engagement model that can help other communities facing flooding challenges build on what we learn in Richmond.”



Sheri Shannon - Co-founder of Southside ReLeaf

Partnership/Collaborative Establishment Award

Sheri Shannon

Southside ReLeaf

In partnership with University of Richmond & Virginia Department of Health (VDH)



Stephanie Spera - Associate Professor of Geography, Environment, & Sustainability



Todd Lookingbill - Professor of Geography, Environment, & Sustainability



Beth Zizzamia - Spatial Analysis Lab GIS Operations Manager



Hemali Oza Headshot - Assistant Professor of Health Studies



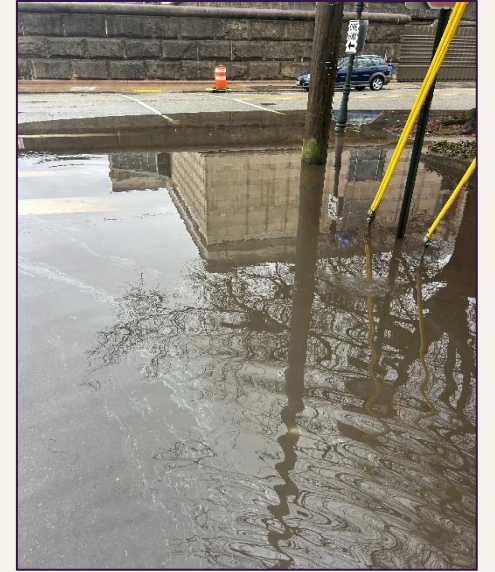
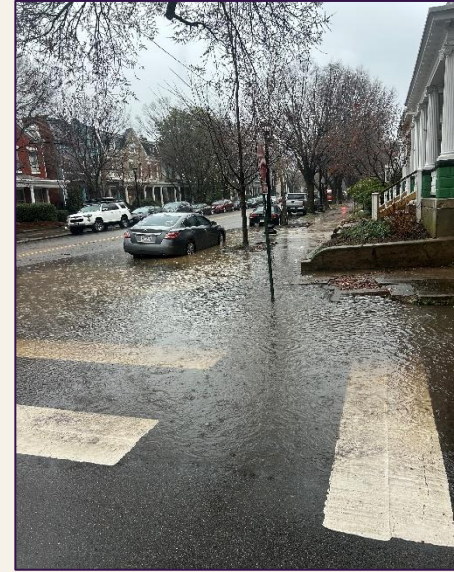
Photo of three students with Dr. Stephanie Spera of the University of Richmond and Sheri Shannon, Lisa Aikins-Afful, and Sarah Wilkinson from Southside ReLeaf after a planning meeting for Go with the Flow on campus at the Carole M. Weinstein International

Partnership/Collaborative Establishment Award

Sheri Shannon

Southside ReLeaf

In partnership with University of Richmond & Virginia Department of Health (VDH)



Flooding Pictures

Partnership/Collaborative Establishment Award

Keisha Taylor, PhD, MA

Norfolk State University

In partnership with Minority AIDS Support Services, Inc. (MASS)

Project Title: Advancing Health Equity: Development of Community-informed Tools to Lower Risks Associated with Marijuana-related Sleep Problems and Sexually Transmitted Infections among HBCU college students

Impact of Award

“The Jeffress Trust Award funding will expand capacity at Norfolk State University (NSU) to address the intersecting risks of marijuana use, sleep disruption, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among Black college students. By operationalizing a health equity framework, the grant supports campus-wide baseline research, culturally responsive educational campaigns, and non-punitive, supportive intervention pathways. It also funds on-site clinical sleep professionals to treat sleep deficiencies. Furthermore, the grant strengthens the operational reach and infrastructure of Minority AIDS Support Services (MASS) by establishing a formalized, data-informed referral and screening pipeline. Ultimately, this comprehensive initiative is designed to reduce health risks, decrease stigma, and support academic persistence and student success.”



*Dr. Keisha Taylor, Executive
Director of Student Health Services*

Partnership/Collaborative Establishment Award

Philip Wenkstern, MPA, MA

United Way of Henry County & Martinsville

In partnership with The Virginia Department of Health (VDH)

Project Title: Community Based Strategies to Improve Rural Maternal Health Outcomes

Impact of Award

“The goal of the project is to assess the effectiveness of Community Health Workers in addressing maternal health barriers in maternal care deserts in the state of Virginia, during the actual pregnancy and the subsequent 12-month postpartum period. Community Health Workers will work closely with residents that have lived experiences to create a learning collaborative to inform strategies that will improve outcomes in maternal care deserts. One of the primary goals of the two-year collaboration project will be to increase the public impact of community members engaged by the LeX Leader and the learning collaborative. Hearing directly from those that currently struggle to access appropriate maternal care and devising strategies that they believe will address those barriers in a replicable manner will be at the heart of the project. The project will ultimately pilot new intervention strategies in the community that are informed by the learning collaborative. It will also work to train the learning collaborative to improve their ability to confidently identify barriers and advocate for solutions in the communities where they reside.”



Philip Wenkstern, Executive Director, United Way of Henry County & Martinsville

Partnership/Collaborative Establishment Award

Lea Whitehurst-Gibson

Virginia Community Voice

In partnership with City of Richmond Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities & City of Richmond Office of Sustainability

Project Title: Growing Sovereignty: Public Land Stewardship and Community Health in South Richmond

Impact of Award

“Public Land Stewardship and Community Health project's primary goal is to turn underutilized public land in South Richmond, a historic food desert, into viable farmland. This project goes to the very heart of Virginia Community Voice's (VACV) mission-- ensuring all our neighbors have the ability to thrive. This project advances South Richmond's capacity to thrive in a critical focus area, food security. This work is distinct in that it interweaves food production, land remediation, and community stewardship in a research and learning process led by residents and embedded within public systems. Rather than duplicating existing food assistance efforts, VACV—together with the City of Richmond Office of Sustainability and the Department of Parks & Recreation— will examine how public land, community gardens, orchards, and paid stewardship models can create a foundation for food sovereignty and climate resilience. The holistic integration of healing justice, urban agriculture, and municipal partnership distinguishes this effort from parallel initiatives. By the end of this project the community will enjoy the following outcomes:

1. A co-developed community-informed framework for equitable, climate-resilient food systems rooted in public land stewardship.
2. A strengthened relationship between community and City partners to plan, steward, and sustain community-based food infrastructure.
3. Generation of actionable research that informs near-term practice and future funding, policy, and program design.”



Lea Whitehurst-Gibson-Founder & CEO, Virginia Community Voice

Research Award

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Research Award

Sara Rothenberg, MPH

Old Dominion University Research Foundation

In partnership Consortium for Infant and Child Health at Old Dominion University

Project Title: Reclaiming Blactation: Studying the Impact of a Community-Led Mixed-Media Campaign to Shift Breastfeeding Norms and Advance Health Equity

Impact of Award

“The Jeffress Trust Research Award will allow Reclaiming Blactation to move from understanding Black breastfeeding experiences to developing, testing, and disseminating community-driven solutions. Building on the strong partnerships, qualitative research, and products created through our initial Jeffress award, this three-year investment will support rigorous evaluation of culturally grounded storytelling as a tool for shifting breastfeeding knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs; the co-creation of resources with Black families and community partners; and a regional campaign designed to change the broader narrative around Black breastfeeding. Ultimately, the award will strengthen the evidence base for culturally responsive breastfeeding interventions while amplifying Black voices and translating community knowledge into actionable strategies to reduce persistent racial inequities in breastfeeding and maternal-child health.”



Sara Rothenberg, CINCH Assistant Director

Research Award

Sara Rothenberg, MPH

Old Dominion University Research Foundation

In partnership Consortium for Infant and Child Health at Old Dominion University



Tierra Langley and her daughter being filmed for short documentary.

MEET THE RESEARCH TEAM!



TIERRA LANGLEY, BA
CLC



SARA ROTHENBERG, MPH
CINCH ASSISTANT
DIRECTOR



ANDREA WARD, MSN
757BREASTFEEDS
DOULA



NICHELE CLARK, IBCLC
SONSHINE & RAINBOWS
LACTATION



JASMINE KITTRELL, MHS
JAS THE DOULA FROM THE
START HOLISTIC SERVICES