



Charting the Way Forward

Building upon a foundation of bi-directional
university-community investment

OUCP/CHECE 2024-25 ANNUAL REPORT

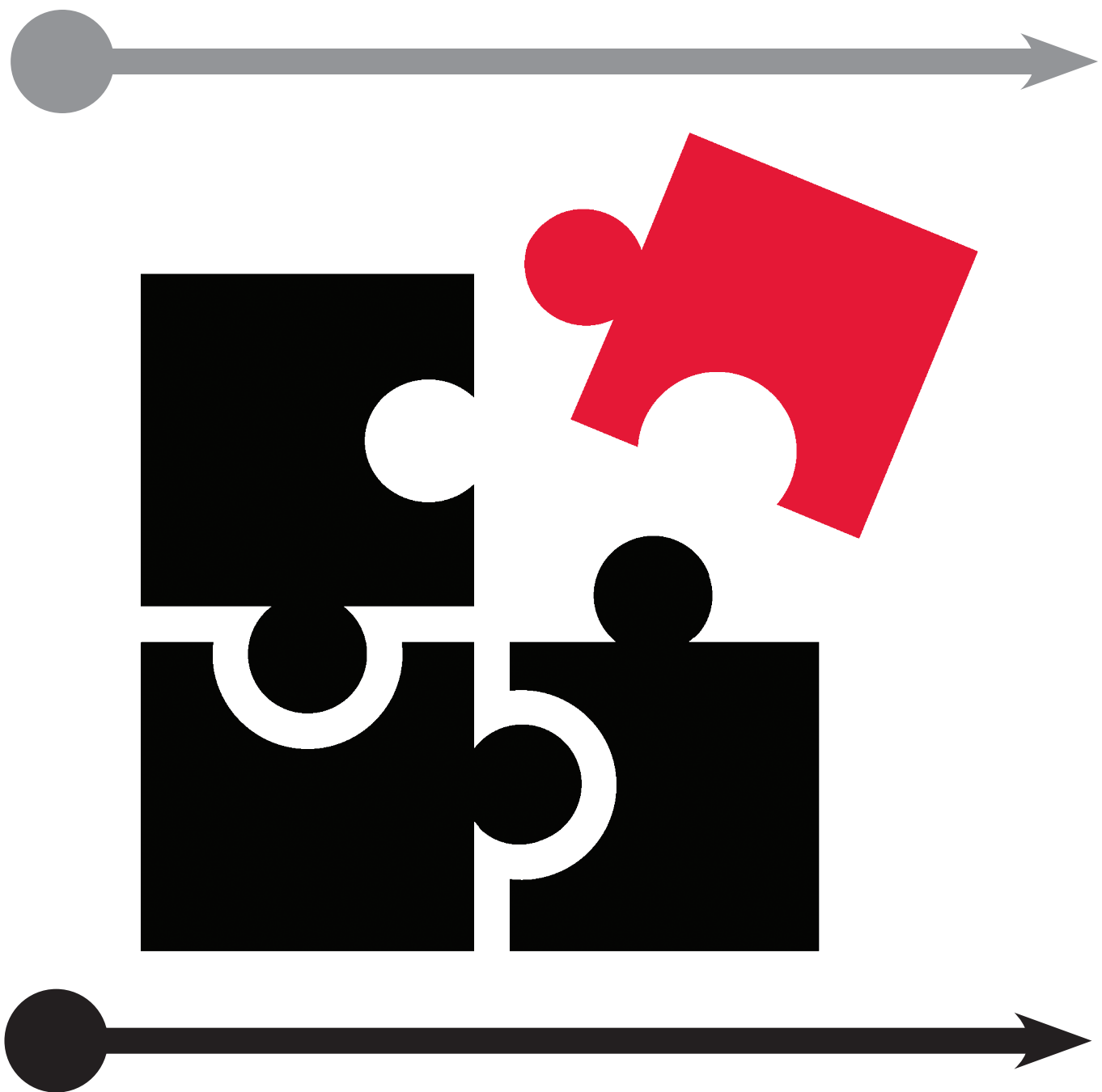




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Introduction

OUCP/CHECE 2024–25

In 2019, the Office of University-Community Partnerships (OUCP) at Rutgers University-Newark founded the Center for Health Excellence and Community Engagement (CHECE) which set forth a bold agenda to engage community members as clinical and investigational research participants, train and position community stakeholders to meaningfully participate as partners in the design and execution of mutually beneficial research, and to support researchers in developing and sustaining community partnerships. CHECE develops dynamic community-connected experts to achieve fluency in traditional research methodologies and prepares them to help recruit research participants, and to serve as advisors to help contextually refine research processes, interpret outcomes, and share findings. At the same time, it provides researchers with tools to work effectively with communities as trusted and mutually beneficial partners.

CHECE pointedly addressed decades of perceptual barriers that separated researchers and community by promoting transparency, demystifying university research protocols and policies, and by interrupting patterns of unilateral assumption and decision making. Rather, CHECE embraced concepts of community expertise, facilitated bi-lateral communication, built trust, and fostered trustworthiness—treating engaged parties as research collaborators as opposed to adhering to top-down research models where the community was treated as “subjects.” CHECE emphasized the importance of communicating the merits of research participation, encouraging researchers to share findings not only within the academy, but with participants and communities-at-large. This helps to dispel perceptions that communities were “used” for research rather than valued as collaborators in finding solutions to real issues.

Since its founding CHECE has trained scores of researchers, service organizations, government entities, and community members to use its *Transdisciplinary Intergenerational Community Engagement Model (TICEM)* to foster sustainable relationships, improve communication, and to refine shared solution-building processes. TICEM embraces eleven proven community engagement principles and is designed to advance healthy, safe, and thriving communities where collaboration is a shared value. By leveraging established relationships and a strong pres-

ence in communities, TICEM empowers stakeholders to tackle social challenges in the places they live, work, learn, and play.

In FY2024-25 OUCP/CHECE furthered its impact by supporting several fruitful university-community collaborations and by continuing to train and place community stakeholders on various boards and research projects that prove the utility of the bi-lateral communication model. *Charting The Way Forward* offers a snapshot of these achievements and highlights the profound impact of the university-community engaged partnership model.



OUCP/CHECE Integrated Approach

Community Engagement

Prepare & mobilize CE-ready collaborators

e.g., via coaching, Leadership & No Blame Problem Solving Certificate, TICEM & CIRTification

Broker partnerships

Identify & connect potential collaborators

Facilitate bi-lateral communication

Promote mutuality & sustainable relationships

Promote community-based participatory research & clinical trials

e.g., Community surveys, focus groups, community conversations, salons

Curate & execute CE projects & programs

e.g., Community-focused activities, demonstration & pilot projects; outreach & educational events/forums

Teaching & Training

Expert consultation & advisement

Researchers; community partners; state, local and regional government

Transdisciplinary Intergenerational Community Engagement Model (TICEM)

Researchers, community partners

CIRTification (Community Scientist Program)

*Partnership w/ NJ Alliance for Clinical and Translational Science (NJACTS)
Community residents & stakeholders*

Professional development conferences & convenings

e.g., Academic, professional, foundations, community

For-credit courses

*RU-N School of Public Affairs & Administration
Building Bridges to the Community (SPAA 20:834:330)*

Community Engaged Scholar (CES) Internships

*via Federal Work Study (FWS)
Place and monitor students at community partner sites*

Research & Scholarship

Implement community-relevant applied &/or investigational research

Self-initiated, collaborative, or sub award

Publishing & Academic Dissemination

e.g., Scholarly journals, professional publications, reports, data repositories

Conference & Forum Presentations

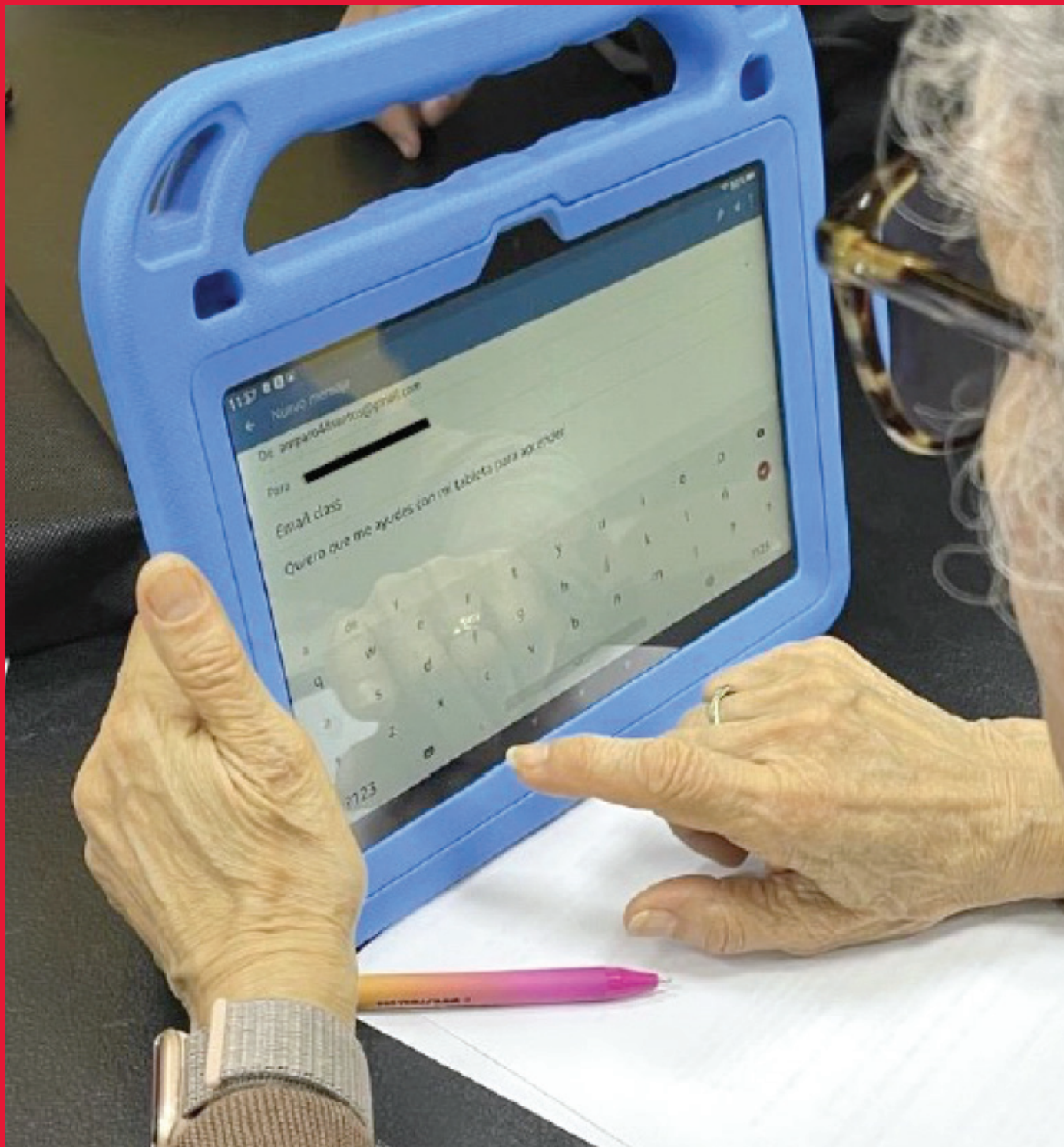
e.g., Academic, government, professional

Community-focused dissemination

e.g., Local methods that include mass and/or social media; public meetings; research debriefings &/or data sharing & feedback opportunities; policy briefings; informational videos; virtual forums; interactive forums; educational outreach



Collaborations



Senior Connect participant at Newark's Ironbound Senior Citizen Center practices sending an email to a student trainer during a session. Translation from Spanish to English: "I love that you helped me with my tablet to learn."



Campus-Wide Collaboration

OUCP Leads 2026 Carnegie Community Engagement Classification Application

• RESEARCH | • ENGAGEMENT



The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's Community Engagement Classification

is an elective designation that indicates institutional commitment to community engagement. It is used by institutions to show collective impact and relevance in their respective communities.

This important classification is awarded following a process of institutional self-study and is assessed by a national review committee led the American Council on Education. Rutgers University–Newark (RU-N) earned the elective classification in 2010, 2015, and 2020.

Having led the successful 2020 application, OUCP was again chosen to organize and develop the 2026 submission. Comprised of more than 70 narratives, the application captures the depth and breadth of community engagement activities at RU-N through the end of 2024. The application organizes information and data on RU-N's campus and community, partnerships, faculty and staff,

curriculum engagement, co-curricular engagement, civic learning and life, and other initiatives. Because RU-N had previously received the designation, the application required a description of how its efforts have expanded and deepened over time. The resulting document provides a rich tapestry of the many ways RU-N continues to embrace its commitment as an anchor institution.

The Carnegie elective classification presents an opportunity for departments and units to highlight community-engaged programs and projects, and to honor the innovative and impactful work of the faculty, students, and staff who move these efforts. Over 8 months OUCP developed processes; surveyed deans and directors from the 5 RU-N schools; and conducted interviews and/or solicited details from more than 40 individuals from various administrative units, student affairs, institutes, and centers. Additionally, OUCP identified 12 community partners to be independently surveyed by Carnegie to support both the application and its ongoing research to improve community engaged work in communities.

Successful institutions are notified in December 2025, with a public announcement in January 2026.

Faculty Collaborations



Intergenerational Fight Against Menthol (IFAM)

• RESEARCH | • TEACHING | • ENGAGEMENT

Funding Source: Rutgers Equity Alliance for Community Health (REACH)

PI/Affiliation: Kevin Schroth JD (PI), Associate Professor, Rutgers Institute for Nicotine & Tobacco Studies
Rutgers School of Public Health, Department of Health, Behavior, Society & Policy

Project Summary: A two-year grant-funded project addressing targeting disparities and health impacts of menthol tobacco products among African American/Black Newark adults, where the adult smoking rate is 56.8% higher than the adult smoking rate for all of NJ. IFAM examines the intergenerational impact of menthol tobacco, while working towards a healthier future for all communities. Strategies include education and awareness programs; collaboration

with community partners; advocacy; and historical context of targeting menthol product marketing to Black communities. Through a subaward CHECE helped develop culturally appropriate and community supported project implementation, including partner recruitment, onboarding assistance, and outreach throughout the project; grant and focus group management; and preparing outcomes for community dissemination.

NJ ACTS Community Engagement

• RESEARCH | • TEACHING | • ENGAGEMENT

Funding Source: New Jersey Alliance for Clinical and Translational Science (NJ ACTS)/Rutgers Health via National Institute of Health (NIH) Clinical and Translational Science Awards (CTSA) Program (grant number UM1TR004789)

PI/Affiliation: Diane Hill, PhD—Co-PI (along with Drs. Manuel Jimenez and Alfred Tallia, Rutgers Health)

Project Summary: Assigned to CTSA Grant Goal 2-Community Engagement, OUCP/CHECE fosters inclusive translational science by empowering community engagement and building trust through education and innovation. OUCP/CHECE develops/enhances partnerships between community stakeholders & researchers; trains community members; expands the Community Scientist program (CIRTification); convenes and engages a PARTNERS Community Advisory Board, and identifies community scientists or residents to help with research as advisors and to participate in Community Engagement Virtual Salons (CEVS), focus groups, etc.



NJ ACTS CIRTification • RESEARCH | • TEACHING | • ENGAGEMENT

Funding Source: NJACTS/CTSA

PI/Affiliation: Diane Hill, PhD



Project Summary: *CIRTification* is a “free, web-based human research protections training program that was developed by Dr. Emily Anderson (Center for Clinical and Translational Science, University of Illinois) and tailored specifically to the needs and roles of community research partners.” Partnering with NJ ACTS Community Scientist program, CHECE offers a web-based program along with a 6-module lecture/discussion series that provides added context to help participant cohorts use content in both

research and their own work. The program readies stakeholders for participation on advisory boards, community salons, etc. and to serve as knowledgeable ambassadors that help recruit constituents for focus groups, clinical trials, and related research activities. In 2024-25 OUCP/CHECE trained NJ Freedom School site staff to prepare them to assist with research and data collection for the 2-year evaluation and beyond.

Assessing Engagement & Recruitment Messaging Using Kiosk Videos • RESEARCH | • ENGAGEMENT

Funding Source: New Jersey Alliance for Clinical and Translational Science (NJ ACTS)/Rutgers Health via National Institute of Health (NIH) Clinical and Translational Science Awards (CTSA) Program (grant number UM1TR004789)

PI/Affiliation: Diane Hill, PhD, OUCP/CHECE & Manuel Jimenez, MD, MS, FAAP, Associate Professor and Chancellor’s Scholar, Department of Pediatrics & Family and Community Health Director of Research, The Boggs Center on Disability and Human Development, RWJMS

Project Summary: OUCP/CHECE conducted focus groups with AA/Black & Latinx community to gauge the efficacy of a pilot 60-second video intended to increase awareness of clinical research and trials, its importance, and how to

become involved. The output will help to address current strategies, revise video content, and provide valuable input to improve similar messages for this project and other engagement campaigns both locally and nationally.



Community-Based Collaborations

Senior Connect Digital Literacy

• RESEARCH | • TEACHING | • ENGAGEMENT

Funding Source: National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA)

Connecting Minority Communities Pilot Program (Award #34-09-C13042)

Grantee: Rutgers University-Newark, OUCP/CHECE Sub Award

Project Summary: OUCP/CHECE partnered with the City of Newark Department of Recreation, Cultural Affairs and Senior Services to provide the Senior Connect Digital Literacy program which addresses chronic digital exclusion among seniors. The program was implemented at all five community-based senior centers and focused on building

practical competencies needed to navigate digital devices (Fire 10 Tablets) and online services, communicate digitally, and manage personal information securely. The program was funded by Rutgers Newark's NTIA Connecting Minority Communities Pilot Program grant dedicated to increasing broadband connectivity and digital equity.



Connected Seniors Health & Wellness Initiative

• ENGAGEMENT

Funding Source: Health Care Foundation of the Oranges

Project Summary: OUCP/CHECE provides interactive health & wellness events and demonstrations geared to reinforce principles of healthy living among older adults. OUCP/CHECE, in collaboration with the Advocates for Healthy Living Initiative (AHLI) brings together residents, healthcare professionals, and community partners to design and implement programs that engage older adults. These programs will encourage simple, enjoyable, and effective strategies and lifestyle changes to enhance health and wellness outcomes.

Major themes include nutrition, exercise, emotional health, preventive care, and chronic health management. Programs are delivered through both in-person and/or virtual formats, extending added opportunities to those who have completed the Senior Connect Digital Literacy program. OUCP/CHECE also collaborates with the School of Public Affairs and Administration and the Health Care Foundation of the Oranges executive director to plan professional development opportunities for community-based organizations.



New Jersey Freedom School Evaluation • RESEARCH | • TEACHING

Funding Source: New Jersey Department of State–Office of Faith-Based Initiatives

Collaborator: Joseph C. Cornwall Center for Metropolitan Studies

Project Summary: The New Jersey Freedom School evaluation assesses growth and impacts of 19 Freedom School programs across the state. The evaluation will document historical context; conduct site visits and qualitative assessments; quantitative data collection, and impact analysis.

The program contextualizes the underpinnings & pathways; compares original program design vs. contemporary adaptations; and explores and quantifies secondary benefits, such as interpersonal skill development and community impacts.



Advocates for Healthy Living Initiative • ENGAGEMENT

Funding Source: Rutgers University-Newark Cultural Committee (partial)

Event Summary: OUCP/CHECE in collaboration with The Advocates for Healthy Living Initiative (AHLI) hosted *Living Your Best Life: A Cultural, Health, and Wellness Event* at the Branch Brook Park Cherry Blossom Welcome Center. AHLI board members coordinated the event that featured a healthy meal; music; health screenings; fresh produce bags & other giveaways; fitness demonstrations; and step team, hula hoop, and Double Dutch team exhibitions. Partners included the Althea Gibson Community Tennis Association, Branch Brook Park Alliance, CareSparc Community Connections, East Orange Senior Volunteer Corporation,

RU-N Gourmet Dining, Greater Newark Health Care Coalition, Interfaith Action Movement, Jazz 4 Prostate Cancer Awareness, New Hope Now Community Development Corporation, Newark Community Health Centers, Programs for Parents, Township of Hillside Recreation Department, University Hospital Newark, Women in Media Newark, and RU-N Police Department Community Service Officers.



Promoting & Expanding University-Community Partnerships in Greater Newark

• ENGAGEMENT

Event Summary: OUCP/CHECE hosted a community partnership introductory meeting between various community organization leaders and incoming Dean of the School of Public Affairs and Administration (SPAA), Rutgers University–Newark, Dr. Kaifeng Yang and Dr. Briana Huett, Assistant Professor of Professional Practice & Director, SPAA Office of Community Engagement.

In January, Dr. Hill invited community partners to discuss the OUCP/CHECE Building Bridges to Community conceptual framework and related programs at SPAA’s weekly Collaboration Day.



Community Engaged Scholars

• TEACHING | • ENGAGEMENT

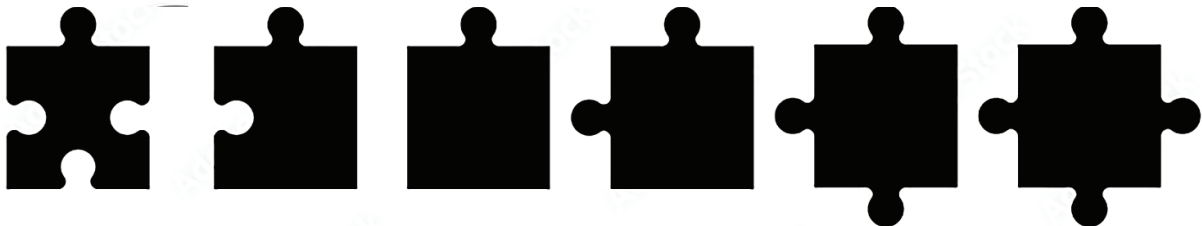
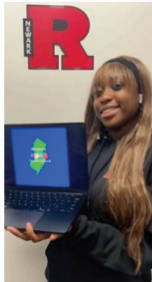
Funding Source: Federal Work Study Program; OUCP/CHECE Projects

OUCP/CHECE’s Community Engaged Scholars (CES) program provides students with opportunities to channel their passions, talents, and skills into meaningful service that uplifts and empowers the Greater Newark community. Through a range of one-time and ongoing engagements, OUCP/CHECE connects students with community partners for internships, events, and special projects of varying durations.

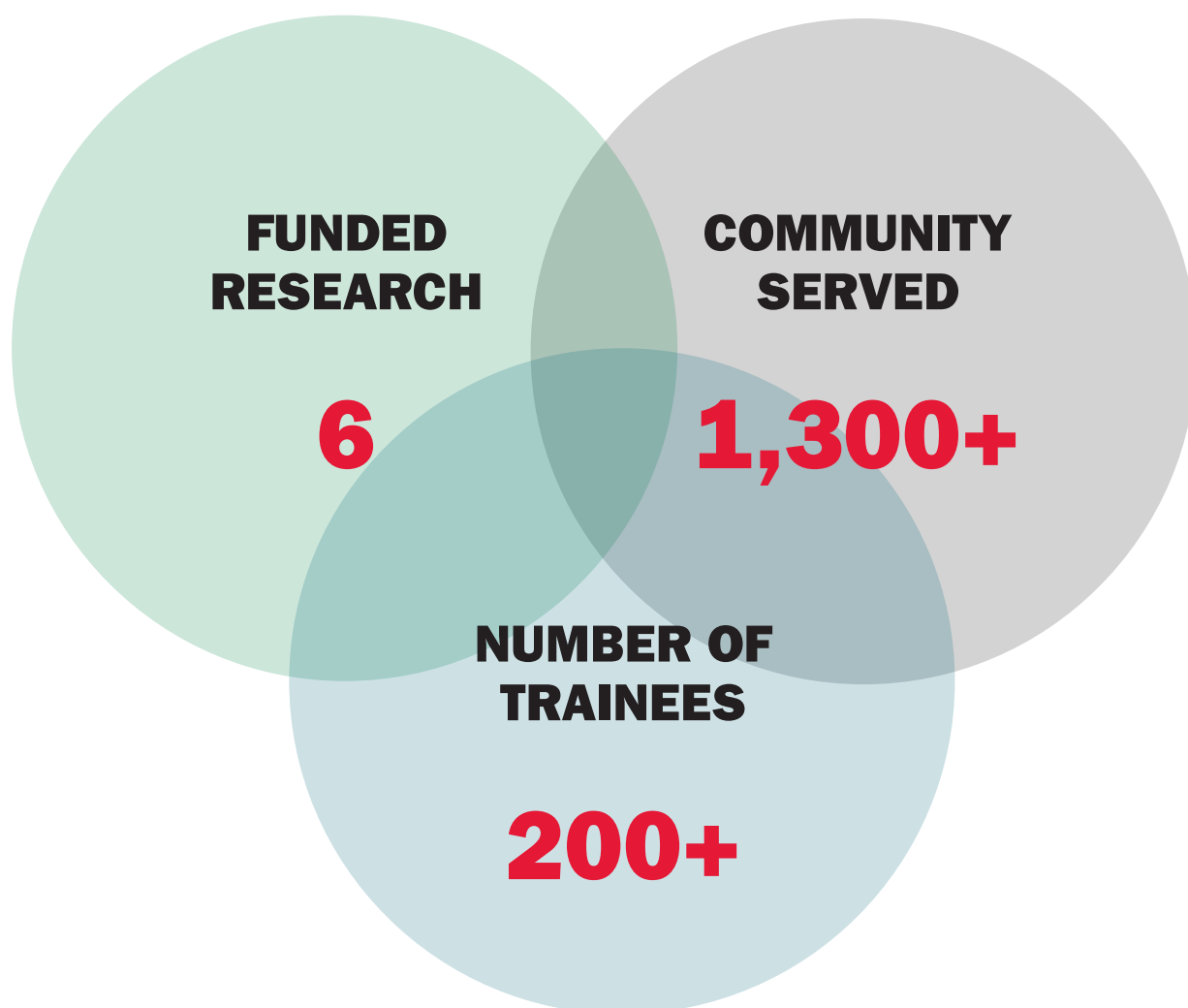
In the 2024–25 academic year, OUCP/CHECE supported 29 students who were placed at six community sites as well as at several campus locations. Community partners included CareSparc Community Connections, Focus Hispanic Center for Community Development, The Newark Public Schools, Programs for Parents, and Youth Advocate Programs, Inc.

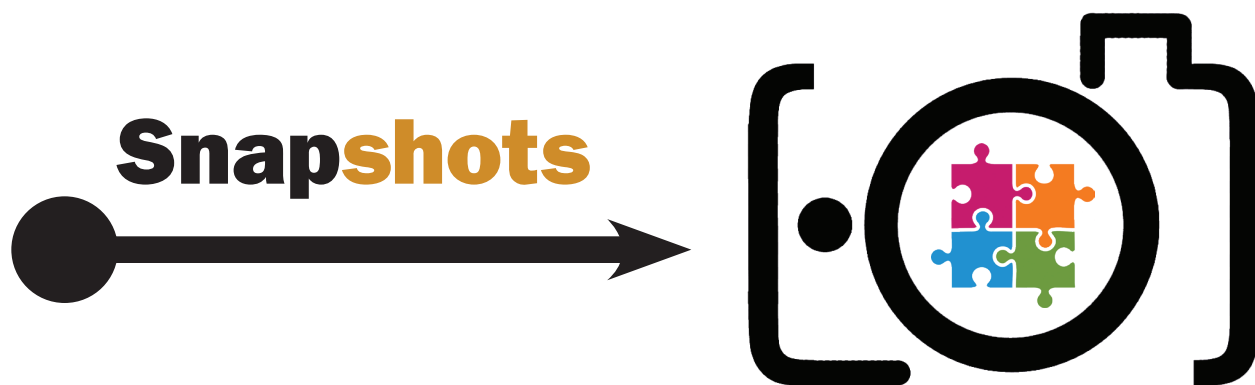
Students also contributed through placements at the School of Nursing and OUCP/CHECE.

CES students took part in a wide range of impactful projects. They supported RU-N’s Carnegie Community Engagement Classification efforts, coached older adults in learning digital literacy skills, created original artwork that distinguished New Jersey Freedom School trainees in Tennessee, and helped organize the 2024 Winter Blessing Drive by sorting and wrapping gifts. At community partner sites, students engaged in activities such as database development, parent engagement initiatives, and food distributions. Altogether, CES students logged nearly 4,000 service hours in 2024–25—with an estimated value of almost \$60,000 in community impact!



2024–25 By the Numbers





Top: Left to right: CES Intern Anish Bolli at CareSparc Community Connections (CCC) Annual Networking Breakfast; Dr. Hill greets a community member at CCC Breakfast; 2024 Association for Clinical and Translational Science conference with community partners. **Bottom:** Left to right: *Building Bridges to the Community* class final presentations; Dr. Hill with Governor Murphy at release of Wealth Disparity Taskforce report; CES Intern Michelle Boateng wraps gifts for RU-N's 2024 Winter Blessing Drive.



Staff Awards, Service & Scholarship Highlights

Diane Hill, Ph.D.

Assistant Chancellor, Assistant Professor of Professional Practice, School of Public Affairs & Administration



Honors

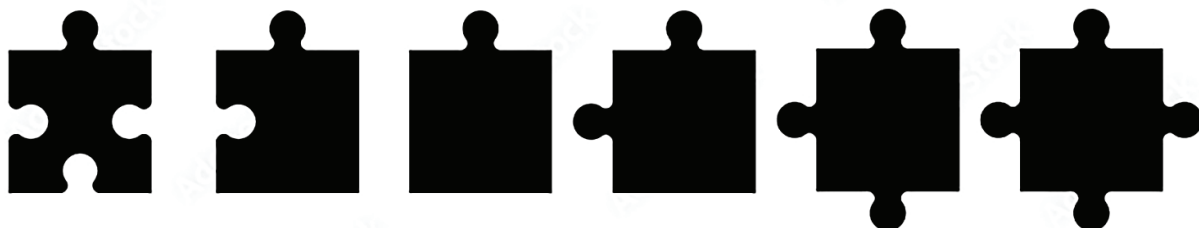
- Essex County Black Women's History Month—*Servant-Leader*
- Communities in Cooperation—*Champion Award*
- Madam Louise Scott Legacy Brunch—*Humanitarian Award*
- Sustainable Health and Wellness Village—*Festival Ambassador*
- Vizion Foundation—*Honoree*
- Odyssey International Productions Community—*Service Award of Excellence*

Service (selected)

- Bloomfield Township Planning Board
- Governor's Wealth Disparity Task Force—*Health Committee*
- New Jersey Black Legislative Caucus Foundation—*Co-Chair, Education Committee*
- Parker Health Group—*Board of Trustees*
- NJ Martin Luther King Jr. Commemorative Commission
- NJ Kids Initiative Community Advisory Board, Communications & Marketing Working Group
- Newark Rotary Club
- Rutgers University Community Engaged Scholarship Planning Committee
- University Hospital—*Community Oversight Board*

Publications:

- Menifield, CE., Damas, K., Chen, T., Hudson, S., Van Ryzin, G., Song, M., Hill, D., Harris-Neal, N., Alsbrook, K. "Health Literacy and Patient Compliance: Implications for Public Health Interventions from a COVID-19 Study." *Journal of Health and Human Services Administration* 47, no. 3-4 (2024): 104-115.
- Tallia AF, Ferrante JM, Hill D, Jimenez ME, Pellerano M, Ciminelli MF, Jahn E, Hudson SV. Building Family Medicine Research Through Community Engagement: Leveraging Federal Awards to Develop Infrastructure. *J Am Board Fam Med.* 2025 Mar 24;37(Supplement2):S133-S137. doi: 10.3122/jabfm.2024.240007R1. PMID: 39824640.



Yvette Ortiz-Beaumont, MPA

Associate Director

Service

- Calvary Gospel Church—*Deaconess Board*
- Office of Organizational Leadership Alumni Council
- Rutgers University-Newark Staff Council—*Treasurer*



Donita Devance, MCRP

Associate Director

Honors

- Rutgers University African American Alumni Association 2024 Hall of Fame Honoree
- Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. International President's Seven Pillars Award—Social Action. 60th Biennial Meeting, August 2024

Service

- Pivotal Ventures 2024 *Action for Women's Health* Open Call—*Evaluation Panelist*
- Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc.—*United Nations Liaison*
- Divine Nine Day in Trenton: Young Leaders Conference—*Planning Committee*
- Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey TELEhealth Shared Decision-making Coaching and Navigation for Lung Cancer Screening in Primary Care (TELESCOPE)—*Community Advisory Board*
- Rutgers Scarlet Service Internship (RSSI) Summer 2025 Program—*Reviewer*



Epiphany Munz, MPA

Graduate Research Associate

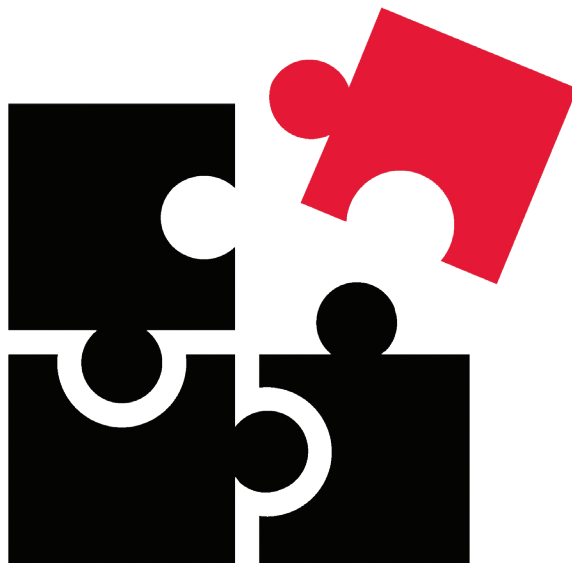
Scholarship

- Master in Public Administration, School of Public Affairs & Administration, Spring 2025

Service

- Rutgers Global Health Institute Student Council
- Moderated a panel for community college students interested in applying to the School of Public Affairs and Administration





OUCP/CHECE REPORTS

- Promoting Digital Skills Acquisition Among Older Adults: Senior Connect Digital Literacy—Digital Skills Evaluation Report. National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) Connecting Minority Communities Pilot Program (Award #34-09-C13042) with Greg Porumbescu, Ph.D.
- Assessing Engagement and Recruitment Messaging Using Kiosk Videos—Final Report. New Jersey Alliance for Clinical and Translational Science (NJACTS) Pilot Grants Program 2024 (UM1-2024) with Jennifer Hemler, Ph.D.



RUTGERS-NEWARK

**Office of University-Community
Partnerships**

The Office of University-Community (OUCP) serves as a nexus that connects Rutgers University–Newark students, faculty, and staff to expand, create and promote reciprocal and mutually beneficial partnerships that support and align with the university’s strategic engagement priorities.



RUTGERS-NEWARK

**Center for Health Excellence
and Community Engagement**

The Center for Health Excellence and Community Engagement (CHECE) builds 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 underrepresented urban constituencies in health research, scholarship, policy and decision-making, service delivery, community engagement, and assessment.



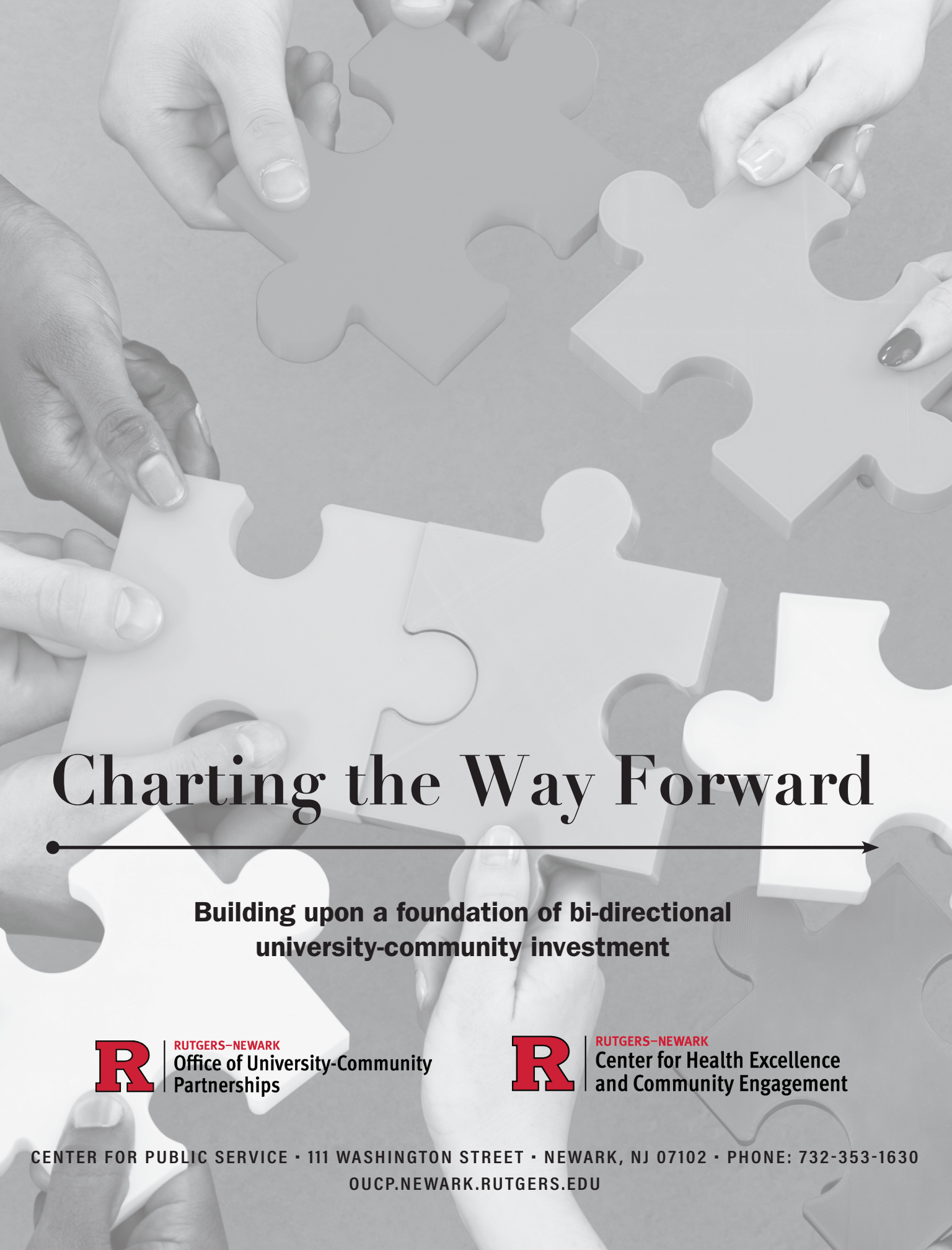
TICEM in Practice—AHLI Living Your Best Life Team: Crystal Gaynor, Epiphany Munz, Donita Devance, Yvette Beaumont, Diane Hill, Mary Dawkins, Francis Dixon. Not pictured: Tania Cajuste.

Transdisciplinary Intergenerational Community Engagement Model (TICEM) ©



Representation. Trust. Leveraging. Reciprocity. Sustainability. Intergenerational. Mutual Respect. Expertise. Transformation. Alignment. Objectivity.





Charting the Way Forward

**Building upon a foundation of bi-directional
university-community investment**

R | **RUTGERS-NEWARK**
Office of University-Community
Partnerships

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Center for Health Excellence
and Community Engagement

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