



Center for Community Engagement
and Service Learning

COMMUNITY PARTNER

HANDBOOK



Welcome to CCESL!

About Us

The WCU Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning (CCESL) strengthens the relationship between the campus and the wider community. We serve as a centralized hub for university and community, providing resources and capacity-building as a catalyst for social responsibility and positive impact. We focus on three main pillars: 1) Community-Engaged Learning 2) Civic Engagement 3) Community Outreach.

WCU staff, faculty, students, and administration are committed to university's mission as a regionally engaged university and the work of creating collaborative connections that address critical community-identified needs. To that end, CCESL has the privilege of cultivating reciprocal partnerships with community organizations doing impactful work across Western North Carolina.

Our Mission

We serve as a centralized hub for university and community, providing resources and capacity-building as a catalyst for social responsibility and positive impact.

Our Vision

We envision community engagement at Western Carolina University as a key component of our regional promise so that all Catamounts contribute to active citizenship and a culture of belonging.

Our Values

- **Reciprocity:** we value the mutually-beneficial exchange of knowledge, expertise, and resources between community and university members.
- **Respect:** we value and embrace diverse ways of knowing, perceiving, and doing that stem from unique lived experiences.
- **Empathy:** we value connections that promote shared humanity and motive socially responsible action.
- **Cultural Humility:** we value the rich cultural heritage of Southern Appalachia, including the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indian, and recognize the assets of our regional communities.
- **Equity:** we value equitable access to engagement pathways for the common good.
- **Innovation:** we value innovative action that collectively addresses community-identified needs.
- **Impact:** we value meaningful partnerships that foster intentional impact.

Our Commitment

To ensure that these values are realized, CCESL is committed to ongoing assessment and evaluation of our priorities, objectives, and outcomes. We recognize the importance of change and are dedicated to adapting in order to better uphold our regional promise.

Meet Our Staff

Dr. Theresa Cruz Paul, *Interim Executive Director*

Theresa oversees the programs, operations, and scope of CCESL. She serves as the liaison between faculty, the collaborator for internal university partnerships, and the representative at local, state, and national conferences.

Email: tcpaul@wcu.edu

Office Phone: 828.227.2643

Julia Heckert, *Associate Director*

Julia acts as the connector between the university and the community. She is the main contact for community partners seeking to collaborate in a variety of ways with WCU. Julia also facilitates initiatives that aim to educate students, faculty, and staff about local, community-identified assets and challenges, spurring them to action.

Email: jheckert@wcu.edu

Office Phone: 828.227.2592

Alyson Umberger, *Civic Engagement Coordinator*

Alyson focuses on nonpartisan civic engagement initiatives, including voter education and registration, civil dialogue events, and WCU polling place support. She collaborates with community partners whose work centers on civic engagement.

Email: aumberger@wcu.edu

Office Phone: 828.227.2842

Ally Schuenke, *Administrative Support Associate*

Ally oversees office operations and details. She offers community partners support with seeking volunteers and advertising educational events. She can also answer general questions and act as a connector to other staff persons.

Email: aschuenke@wcu.edu

Office Phone: 828.227.2091

Connection Opportunities

Community Office Hours

CCESL's Associate Director, Julia Heckert, holds office hours on Thursdays between 10am-1pm to ask questions and/or share your organization's needs and project ideas. Follow this [link](#) to book a time.

Monthly Newsletter

Stay up to date with CCESL by subscribing to our [monthly newsletter](#).

Community Coffee Conversations

CCESL hosts bi-monthly Community Coffee Conversations for community partners to interface with CCESL staff, learn about new ways to connect with CCESL, network with each other, and enjoy light refreshments. Find this semester's schedule on our Community Partner [website page](#).

Community-Engaged Learning Service-Learning Courses

What is Service-Learning?

Service-Learning is a course-based, credit-bearing type of experiential learning in which students participate in an organized service activity with a community partner that meets a community-identified need.

At WCU, students complete 15 hours service during the course and engage in meaningful reflection that increase students' understanding and application of course content. Types of service include direct service, indirect service, and research/advocacy. Community partners serve as co-educators or co-researchers, meeting with their faculty member 3 times during the semester to create syllabi and integrate their service needs into the course.

Establishing new Service-Learning partnerships between WCU Faculty and Community Partners should begin one year in advance to align with WCU's course designation processes.

Deadlines for Service-Learning Course Designations:

February 1: Summer and Fall Courses

October 1: Spring Courses

Interested? To begin a conversation about partnering with a service-learning course, reach out to CCESL's Associate Director for a consultation.

CCESL Terms & Definitions

Community Engagement

The collaboration between the university and communities for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in the context of partnership and reciprocity. It can involve partnerships and coalitions that help mobilize resources, influence systems, and serve as catalysts for initiating and/or changing policies, programs, and practices to address community-identified needs.

Academic Community Engagement

Teaching & Learning

A pedagogical approach that intentionally connects students and faculty with community partners to address community-identified needs through mutually beneficial partnerships that deepen students' academic and civic learning.

Research

A collaborative inquiry process between the university and community partner that creates and disseminates knowledge and creative expression with the goal of contributing to the discipline and strengthening the well-being of the community. The community partner serves as a co-researcher.



Service-learning

Service-Learning is a course-based, credit-bearing type of experiential learning in which students participate in an organized service activity WITH a community partner that meets community-identified needs. Meaningful and intentional reflection on the experience is integrated throughout the course to increase students' understanding and application of course content and to enhance their sense of civic and social responsibility. Community partners serve as co-educators.

Community Outreach

A type of community engagement that provides institutional resources, knowledge and/or services that directly benefits the community, without the expectation of reciprocity or mutual benefit – doing FOR the community. Examples include, but are not limited to music concerts, athletic events, student volunteers, public lectures, or health fairs.

Civic Engagement

A type of community engagement that fosters citizenship and democratic participation through individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public interest. May include, but not limited to, voter education, research, community service, advocacy, activism, philanthropy, leadership and/or governance.

Community Outreach

Volunteer Support & Educational Event Advertising

Volunteer Support Opportunities

CESL is committed to sharing your volunteer opportunities with our students, faculty, and staff. Fill out [this survey](#) to submit information to have your opportunity posted on [Engage](#).

Interested in collaborating directly with registered student organizations? Complete this [form](#) to get connected.

Valley Ballyhoo is a great way for community partners to interact with students during WCU's Week of Welcome at the start of each fall semester. Learn more [here](#).

WCU offers year-round on-campus tabling opportunities for community partners to recruit volunteers. Contact with Campus Activities Guest Services at dguestservices@wcu.edu or 828.277.7222.

Educational Event Advertising

Having an educational event that you'd like students to attend as participants? Fill out this [survey](#) to have your event advertised on Engage. On-campus events will also be advertised on CESL's social media platforms.

Professional Development

Lunch & Learns

CESL will offer two Lunch and Learn professional development opportunities per semester led by experts within WCU. These will be either in-person or virtual webinars. Find this semester's schedule on our Community Partner [website page](#).

Conferences

Community Partners are invited to join CESL at national community engagement conferences as both attendees and presenters. CESL will provide a limited number of scholarships to interested partners. Find this semester's conferences on our Community Partner [website page](#).

Resources & Scholarships

WNC Nonprofit Pathways provides free, public [webinars](#) on a variety of topics. They also offer professional development classes that can be taken individually or in a sequence to complete their Nonprofit Fundamentals Certificate Program. Classes are \$50 for organizations with a budget above \$50,000. CESL offers a limited number of scholarships for qualifying partners on a first come, first serve basis. Fill out this [form](#) to request a scholarship.