



Community Ecology Institute

ANNUAL REPORT 2022



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Hello, Community!

It has been a joy and honor to reflect on what the Community Ecology Institute was able to accomplish in 2022. We are grateful to have you joining us in celebrating another year of meaningful growth and impacts, including:

- being highlighted in a national TV segment by the NBC Today Show
- beginning the renovation of the barn at Freetown Farm into our Community Engagement Center (it was completed in February 2023)
- working with more than 900 individual volunteers to complete a tremendous number of projects at Freetown Farm
- our first full year of the Nourishing Gardens program, which offered training to 20 people and installed or enhanced 31 gardens in the community
- our first full post pandemic year of our flagship Families in Nature program, which provided 44 nature-based events throughout the community
- sustaining and enhancing our additional community programs and initiatives
- growing farm fresh food that was made available to community members facing food insecurity through collaborative partnerships
- having meaningful connections with over 2,400 members of our community
- continuing to make strategic additions to our team, to support all of the above!

At the very end of 2022, CEI became the new stewards of the Green Pharmacy Garden, an incredible opportunity made possible by the Maryland and Howard County governments. We are honored and delighted by the opportunity to protect these very special gardens and share them with the community. This will broaden CEI's educational offerings and deepen relationships among people who embrace the health benefits of nature in a variety of ways.

There is so much more to share in the coming pages, all of which was made possible by our tremendous community! Thank you for being a part of the CEI family and helping us to cultivate communities where people and nature thrive together! We are looking forward to wonderful things to come and wishing you all health and happiness for 2023.

In gratitude,

Chiara

Chiara D'Amore, Ph.D.
Founder & Executive Director



MISSION

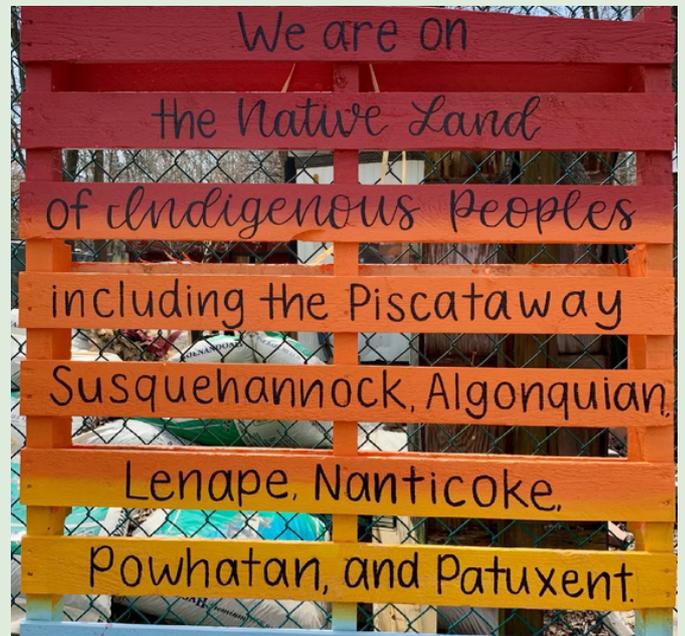
The Community Ecology Institute's mission is to cultivate communities where people and nature thrive together. Our work focuses on tangible, community-level change at the intersections of environment, education, equity, and health. Our initiatives have concentrated on four Cs: Connection to Nature, Civic Ecology, Community Health, and Climate Action.

NATIVE LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Freetown Farm and the Green Farmacy Garden are on land that is the ancestral home of indigenous peoples including the Piscataway, Susquehannock, Algonquian, Lenape, Nanticoke, Powhatan, and Patuxent, among others. Native people have stewarded this land for many generations. We are grateful for their strength, resilience, and wisdom, and we strive to uphold our responsibilities to the natural world according to their example.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION AND JUSTICE

Just as biodiversity strengthens natural systems, the diversity of human experience strengthens our efforts to create socially and ecologically healthy communities. CEI is committed to honoring diversity, prioritizing inclusion, and working towards equity in all we do. We are dedicated to creating an environment free from any kind of discrimination including race, color, religion, age, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, disability, national or ethnic origin, and veteran status. Our land at Freetown Farm was part of the Underground Railroad and is now within Columbia, Maryland—a place explicitly founded by James Rouse to be “a garden for growing people where anyone—whatever their race, wealth or religious beliefs—could reach their full potential.” We continuously work to make this vision a reality and to help other communities do the same. CEI joins the call for a more equitable, inclusive, peaceful, and just future that reaffirms dignity and ensures safety for all.



AWARDS + PRESS

RISE TO THE CHALLENGE AWARD



CEI was one of five Howard County organizations to receive a non-profit innovation award from the Howard County Government recognizing our collaborative response to the Covid-19 pandemic. We are grateful for our sustained collaboration with the county and community partners during these challenging years.

CORNERSTONE AWARD

CEI and Howard County Extension's Watershed Stewardship Academy were awarded a prestigious **Cornerstone Award** by the University of Maryland College of Agriculture and Natural Resources for our Freetown **Walkable Watershed** project's achievements in "Optimizing Urban Environments."



THE NBC TODAY SHOW



In August of 2022, NBC came to Freetown Farm to film CEI's work for the Today Show! More than 150 community members joined us for the filming and we could not be more proud and grateful that our collective story has been shared so far and wide. Please **[click here](#)** to watch how hours of farm footage were condensed into four powerful minutes of storytelling about how CEI cultivates community.

Visit communityecologyinstitute.org/awards-and-press for more!

ANNUAL IMPACTS

ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

In 2022 CEI **engaged more than 2,400 diverse members of our community** in meaningful ways: as participants in our core educational programs, as attendees of our community workshops, as visitors to Freetown Farm to purchase plants, and as tremendous volunteers! The following pages detail and highlight community engagement in each of these areas.



CEI PROGRAMS

A COMMUNITY OF FAMILIES IN NATURE



The mission of the Community of Families in Nature (CFIN) program is to provide frequent, fun and friendly nature-based experiential education that can be enjoyed by the entire family -- children of all ages and their caregivers. By connecting families with nearby nature, CFIN aims to:

- foster greater connection with nature and the community
- increase environmental awareness and action
- support the well-being of participants, including strengthening family relationships



CFIN began in 2014 (prior to the creation of CEI) as Columbia Families in Nature. As of the end of 2022, CFIN has offered more than 325 events for more than 760 families (reaching more than 9,350 participants)! Collectively we have enjoyed more than 27,000 hours of time exploring and learning in nature. CFIN celebrated its eighth birthday in March 2022. This year, with a new seasonal membership approach, the program offered 40 events (10 per season) as well as two camping trips and two special events open to the general public. These **44 events were enjoyed by 88 families**. Our events included guided hikes, native tree plantings, nature scavenger hunts and art projects, garden stewardship, and more!

“It has been wonderful to get outside and enjoy thoughtful and meaningful time in nature with our own and other families.”

CEI PROGRAMS

ROOTS & WINGS LEARNING COMMUNITY

The mission of the Roots & Wings Learning Community is to offer supplemental experiential education for home-schooled children that nurtures a deep connection to self, community and the environment through programming that emphasizes creativity, social and emotional learning, and hands-on, nature-based exploration. The goals of Roots & Wings are to:

- Offer a flexible yet consistent educational community for mixed-age groups of students
- Provide a holistic curriculum that encourages personal connection to topics that support each student's well-being
- Foster clarity around each student's educational joys and encourage a life-long love of learning



The Roots & Wings program launched in 2018 as a two-day-per-week program for elementary-aged students. It initially served 22 students. By the fall of 2019, the program had expanded to four-days-per-week and served 43 students. In the fall of 2020, the program was fully based at Freetown Farm and the number of students served increased to 62 as families sought alternatives to the online schooling situation created by Covid. In the fall of 2021, we added an upper level to the program to serve the children ages 11-13 who had grown up with this innovative educational community. As of the fall of 2022, **the program supported 84 students ages 5 to 13** and we are exploring incorporating a program element for older teens.

"It's hard to put into words how amazing Roots & Wings is. The program was a beacon of light for our family during the pandemic and just keeps getting better every year. We feel so blessed our children get to have this enrichment with incredible staff, all while getting fresh air and sunshine. And there's something about those chickens!"

CEI PROGRAMS

GREEN SEEDS INTERNSHIP



In the fall of 2020, CEI launched what is now known as our Green SEEDS (service, experiential education, & design for sustainability) student internship program. The program mission is to provide experiential education and work experience for high-school, college, and graduate students across a range of social and ecological themes. The goals of the internship program are to:

- Offer students an opportunity to transform academic and career knowledge and interests into solutions to various community challenges.
- Connect environmental, agricultural, and community building strategies that contribute to the successful operation of Freetown Farm to academic and career development.
- Strengthen understanding and respect for personal discovery, connection to nature, food security, and land stewardship.



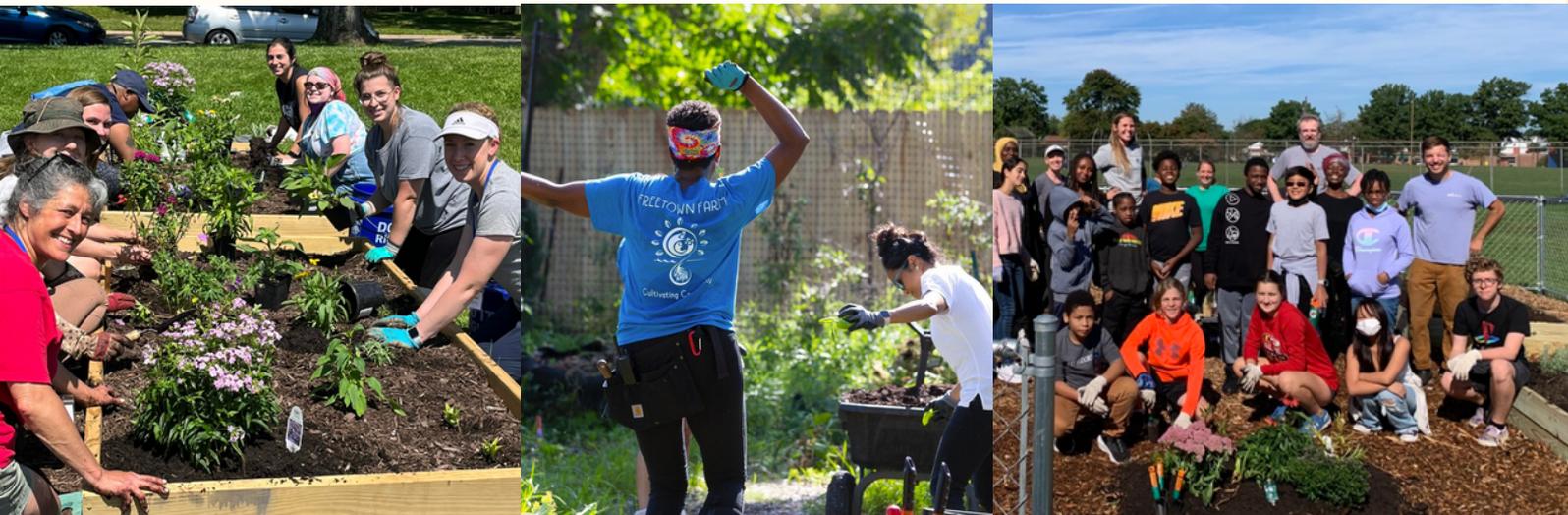
In 2022, **35 high school and college students interned with CEI**. They helped install nourishing gardens in the community, worked with HCPSS Project SEARCH students, saved milkweed seeds from the pollinator garden, cared for the gardens at Freetown Farm, and began work on a historical walking tour of Freetown Farm. **A special thank you to Lauren Villa and Brandyn Geist for completing their doctoral research with us!**

"I discovered CEI during the pandemic while looking for opportunities to earn service hours. I quickly learned that CEI provides ample opportunities for youth like me to work on projects that involve organization, planning, problem-solving, financial management, communication, science and math skills. Spending time at CEI surrounded by nature is not only good for our physical and mental health, it also teaches us how to be part of the community and show compassion and empathy through care for all living things."

CEI PROGRAMS

NOURISHING GARDENS

In 2022, CEI celebrated the one-year anniversary of the Nourishing Gardens program. The mission of the program is to transform lawns into gardens that nourish our families, the community, and the environment. The goals of the program are two-fold: (1) installing food and pollinator gardens in yards, community spaces, and with community-based organizations and businesses, and (2) providing a green-infrastructure jobs training program. The program brings the benefits, learning, and experience of Freetown Farm directly to the front doors of our neighbors.



This year, more than **20 trainees** participated in the Nourishing Gardens program - taught by experts Erica Jones and Gary Pilarchik. Trainees collectively devoted more than **1,000 hours to installing 31 gardens** throughout Howard County. Local organizations that have adopted Nourishing Garden installations on their properties together serve more than 80,000 people. These partnerships are building a more visible case for local food systems and for the transformation of lawns for ecological benefit. More than 500 community members were directly involved in the planning, installing, and caring for Nourishing Gardens this year. More than **1,300 food and pollinator plants** are now adding to the biodiversity of our ecosystem. Five of our Nourishing Gardens trainees from 2021 and 2022 have since joined CEI's paid team, fulfilling our goal to provide flexible and meaningful green infrastructure jobs in our community.

"I am thrilled to be a part of CEI's movement to bring together our community in ways that support the health and well-being of all life. I think all people should have the opportunity to experience healthy foods fresh from the garden, as well as access to the knowledge and resources to grow it, and Nourishing Gardens is making that possible."

WORKSHOPS & THE MAKER SPACE

In 2022, CEI sustained and expanded our community workshop offerings for a **cumulative reach of 325 participants!**

We continued our celebration of the changing of the seasons at the solstices and equinoxes with gatherings at Freetown Farm that included fire-side activities, food and music. We also continued our virtual seasonal book club with selections from Robin Wall Kimmer, Doug Tallamy, and Aimee Nezhukumatathil.



The Maker Space at Freetown Farm continued to be a hub of our workshop activities at the intersections of creativity, conservation, and exploration.

- Six monthly Repair Cafes were hosted to help community members fix items that would have otherwise made their way to the landfill.
- The Community Gear Closet continued to support outdoor exploration by providing donations of equipment to the community and workshops on topics such as bike maintenance and repair, camping basics, and nature orientation.
- Our arts-focused workshops included carving, woodworking, visible mending, block printing, felting, walnut ink nature art kits and more!



With the support of grants from Live Green Howard and Planet Aid, CEI installed two sweet, cottage-like sheds in the Maker Space. One will be home to our fiber arts programming, supporting workshops on sewing, knitting, crocheting, natural fiber plants, natural fiber dyes, and more! The second is home to our recycle and reuse workshops where we envision activities such as transforming plastic bottles into garden mobiles, broken tiles into mosaic, or the making of musical instruments from discarded items.



FREETOWN FARMING



CEI continued our transformation of Freetown Farm to increase our capacity to grow and share delicious food. We completed fencing around all of our produce gardens, extended our watering infrastructure, and enhanced our greenhouse.

From our greenhouse we grew and sold **4,500 plants** - helping hundreds of families cultivate fresh, healthy food in their own gardens. Our greenhouse also provides all of the plant starts for our Freetown Farm and Nourishing Gardens needs.

Working together, CEI staff, interns, volunteers, and community partners grew more than **a ton** of produce from the Market Garden. We also celebrated the launch of a partnership with LARS (Laurel Advocacy and Referral Services), providing access to fresh produce to families and individuals with limited income.



HELPING HANDS

In 2022, more than **900 people volunteered at Freetown Farm**, lending thousands of hours of their time, energy, and love. These fantastic numbers represent both the contributions of long-term, returning volunteers as well as volunteers new to our community. We saw volunteers support so many exciting projects, including harvest days for donation to Columbia Community Care, seed saving from our beautiful milkweed and flowers, and the installation of our new Peace Garden. We also saw the completion of 18 Scout projects, encompassing infrastructure improvements like new sheds, fencing, and even a bottle brick bench! More than their physical contributions, our volunteers form an integral part of our community; whether it was a deep conversation over weeding in the Market Garden or quiet bonding while lugging another cart of mulch to the Youth Garden, our volunteers make Freetown Farm a vibrant and welcoming home for so many.



A significant part of our volunteer community comes from non-profit organizations that have a presence at Freetown Farm. The NAACP has a big and beautiful garden plot that highlights delicacies like leafy greens, tomatoes, and okra. Hopeworks has a healing garden that nourishes survivors of domestic violence, and The Third tends to an herb spiral that will be feeding into their cafe and community workspace in downtown Columbia.

NAACP

HOPEWORKS

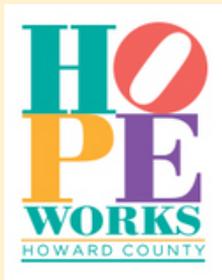
THE THIRD



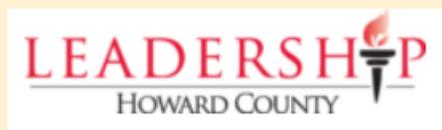
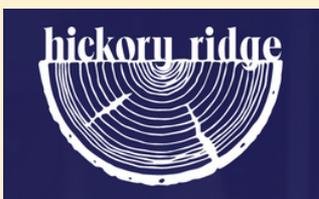
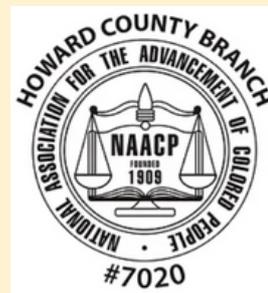
COLLABORATIONS



The Jain Family Foundation



The Brown Family Foundation



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CENTER

BUILDING OUT THE BARN!

In 2020, CEI began work with CommONEcology Architects to develop a plan to renovate the unfinished barn at Freetown Farm into CEI's office and community engagement space. In 2021, we hired a construction company, Wilhelm Commercial Builders, and submitted our construction permit application to the County. We broke ground on the project in August of 2022 and look forward to welcoming the community into the space in the spring of 2023!

IN 2022, WE RAISED \$188,000 IN DONATIONS TO MEET OUR PHASE 1 FUNDRAISING GOAL !

Gray-Howell Community Engagement Center



The renovated building includes a variety of features that make it a model for green building - **it uses 66% less energy and 33% less water than a standard building of its size!** We have a goal to be zero net energy in the building and at the farm overall by 2024.

Thank you to the **Reis Foundation** for being the naming sponsor of this project and to the **State of Maryland, the Howard County Government, France-Merrick Foundation, Lillian Bauder, Oakland Mills Nursery School, John Overdeck,** and the **Miller Family** for their leading donations! We are grateful to all community members who gave their support and helped us meet our phase one fundraising goal for our Community Engagement Center!

GREEN FARMACY GARDEN

CEI BECOMES NEW STEWARD OF GREEN FARMACY GARDEN

In December 2022, CEI became the new owner and steward of the Green Farmacy Garden, a unique teaching garden based on the work of world-renowned ethnobotanist Dr. James A. Duke (1929–2017), who curated more than 300 plant species traditionally used and/or researched for their medicinal properties. The garden beds are organized by the medicinal properties of the plants each contains, as described in Jim Duke’s bestselling book, *The Green Pharmacy* (Rodale, 1997). The 6.08-acre property is in Fulton, Maryland, approximately 5 miles southwest of CEI’s Freetown Farm location.

Made possible by tremendous support from the Howard County and Maryland state governments, CEI’s care of this land will bring significant environmental protection, as the property is not only a recognized sanctuary for myriad plants, but also home to streams, ponds, a meadow, and established woods with walking trails—all full of beautiful wildlife.

“I could not be happier with this outcome,” says Helen Lowe Metzman, who served as Director of the Green Farmacy Garden from 2006–2021. “I am confident that CEI will be an exceptional steward of the Green Farmacy Garden, maintain the Dukes’ legacy, and inspire everyone who visits the property....”



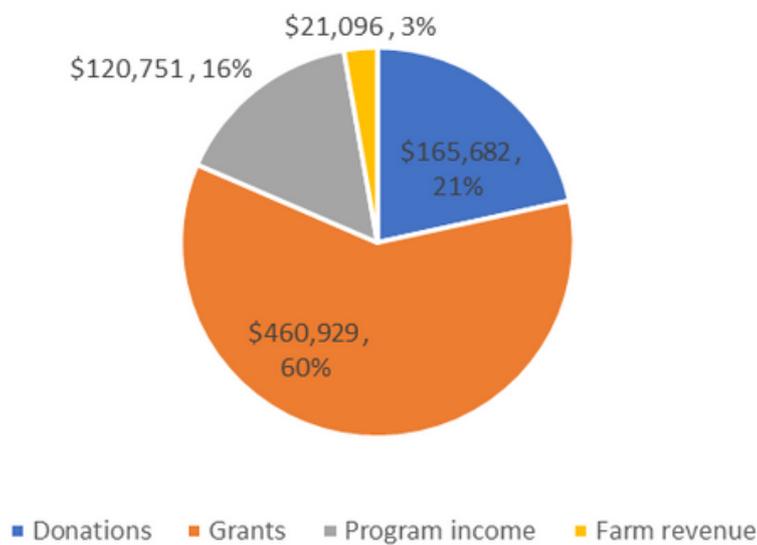
In 2022, the Green Farmacy Garden hosted **36 events**, ranging from Community Days, to foraging walks, to garden tours and more. These events served more than **400 people**. CEI looks forward to sustaining and growing community engagement at the Green Farmacy Gardens in the coming years.

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

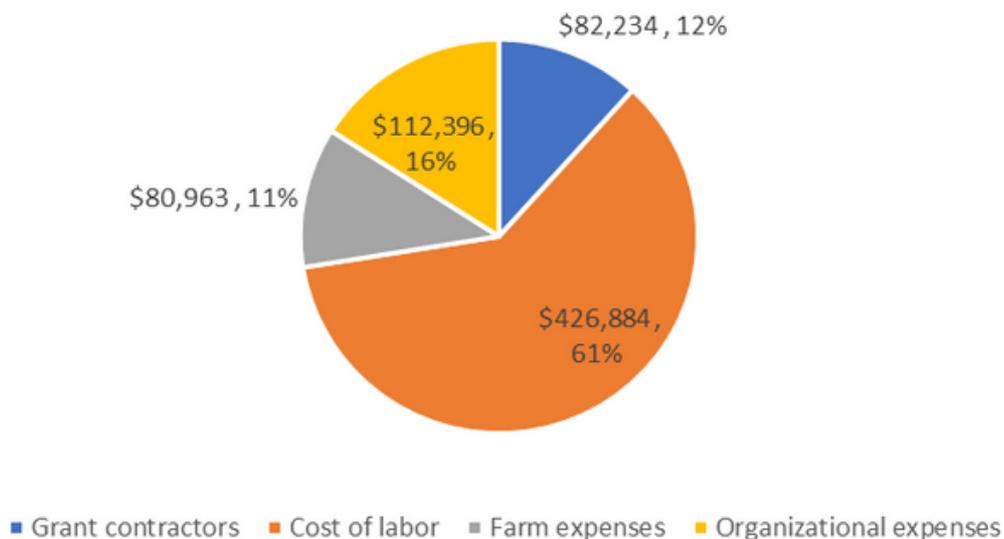
CEI sustained a healthy financial profile in 2022, generating \$768,000 in gross operational income. Grants comprised the largest percentage of our revenue and supported both overall operations and specific programs and initiatives, as described on the next page.

Unrestricted donations and program revenue support the organization's day-to-day operations and community offerings. Rental income and revenue from produce sales were invested right back into the stewardship of Freetown Farm.

Gross Operating Revenue - \$768,000



Operational Expenses, \$702,000

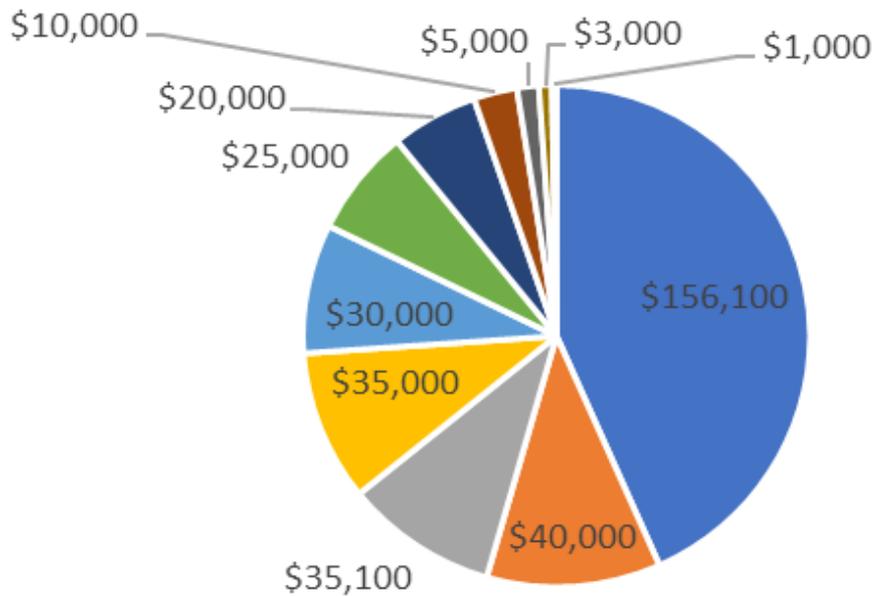


The time and talent of our salaried and contracted team members comprised the largest portion of our expenses (61%) - labor directly connected to our program offerings comprised 50% of the total budget. General organizational overhead comprised 16% of our expenses; contractors hired to facilitate grant work (such as our stormwater management projects) comprised 12%; and direct expenses of stewarding Freetown Farm comprised 11%.

GRANTS OVERVIEW

In 2022, CEI was grateful to receive an array of grants to support organizational operations as well as specific projects and initiatives. **A total of \$397,100 in new (non-capital) grant funding was awarded to CEI in 2022 across 21 different grants.** Of these funds, \$360,200 was dedicated to CEI operations, property, and programs. The other \$36,900 was dedicated to time-restricted community initiatives. The Howard County Government was our largest grant provider, with \$156,100 distributed over four different grants, including operational support, a Plastics Reduction and Environmental Protection grant, an Innovation grant, and a Community Service Partnership grant. The Chesapeake Bay Trust grants also spanned several areas of work, including stormwater management. United Way support included programmatic support and Freetown Farm food production.

Operational Grant Funding



- Howard County Government
- Chicago Museum of Science
- Chesapeake Bay Trust
- Jain Family Foundation
- Brown Family Foundation
- Planet Aid
- United Way
- Horizon Foundation
- Community Foundation
- Whole Kids Foundation
- State of Maryland

The Maryland State government and Howard County government each granted CEI \$375,000 for the purchase and protection of the Green Farmacy Garden, which had a \$750,000 full purchase cost.

IN-KIND CONTRIBUTIONS

THANK YOU TO:

- **12 Bees Creative** for fundraising support services
- **BA Auto** for vehicle maintenance
- **BaySun Consulting** for energy efficiency testing
- **Charlie Goedeke** for Maker Space management
- **CommONEcology** for architectural services
- **DARS Law** for legal guidance and the donation of furnishings for our new building
- **EdesiaGurl Enterprises (Erica Jones)** for garden creation and care services
- **Heather D'Amore** for renovation materials
- **IndraLogic** for energy modeling services
- **Jason VanKirk** for land use guidance
- **Kerri Ann Photography, LLC** for farm photos
- **Larry Schoen** for engineering services
- **Mark Kauffman** for truck donation
- **MTK Consulting LLC (Mike Kapusta)** for support establishing WiFi access throughout Freetown Farm
- **Nelson Tree Service** for tree maintenance
- **Rotary of Columbia Patuxent** for infrastructure enhancements at Freetown Farm
- **Rubino and Co.** for financial management support
- **The Rusted Garden (Gary Pilarchik)** for garden and greenhouse services
- **Watershed Stewards Academy** for support of stormwater management initiatives

\$80,000

Value of in-kind
contributions in
2022!



COMMUNITY FUNDRAISING

CEI is deeply grateful to everyone who supported CEI's operations in 2022!

We received **\$138,300** in unrestricted donations from more than **155** donors. We would like to say a special thank you to all of the "stakeholders" listed below who are at the heart of sustaining our general operations, having made contributions of \$240 or more.

Tonya Aikens

Chris Bare

Caela Barry

Katherine Bartter

Lillian Bauder

Paula Bernal

Marny Bruce

Rebecca Bryant

Louise Chawla

Dan & Kelly Chen

Bevin Clare

Lisa Crabtree

Helena Curtis

Pete Doob

Daniel Duesterhaus

Margo Duesterhaus

Katherine Flanagan

Jack Floyd

Pamela Franks

Judith & Charlie Goedeke

Edwin Gould

Alisa Holbert

Bethany Hopper

Erica Jones

Larken Jorgensen

Sylvia Karman

Lindsay Kreisher

April Lee

Lisa Marini

Kenneth McCallister

Danielle Morgan

Jean Moon

Gary Pilarchik

Al Pifugrad

Laura & Marc Salganik

Kurt Schwarz

Heidi Schweingruber

Kathleen Sheedy

Stuart Silver

Jean & Ari Silver-Isenstadt

Gabe Smith

Tammy Freeman

Theresa Taylor

Nancy Tuck

Klohver Tynes

Mike Wager

Ashley Woodward

Phyllis Yigdall

Amy Zezula

Businesses and foundations:

BA Auto

Catalent Pharma Solutions

Emmanuel United Methodist Church

The Rusted Garden

The Women's Giving Circle

Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Columbia

Wilde Lake Community Association



Please join our community of supporters at
www.communityecologyinstitute.org/donate

CEI BOARD

In 2022, CEI's 13-member Board of Directors oversaw the organization with great dedication and talent. Learn more about these team members at communityecologyinstitute.org/board-of-directors



Jean Silver-Isenstadt
President



Monica Lewis
Vice President



Chelsea Clark
Secretary



Patrick Curtis
Treasurer



Tonya Aikens



Akil Cole



Margo Duesterhaus



James Handley



Erica Jones



Leah Miller



Gary Pilarchik



Jason Van Kirk



Jason Zhao



CEI STAFF

CHIARA D'AMORE



Executive Director

CHRISTY FERGUSON



Communications
Coordinator

LINDSAY KREISHER



Roots & Wings
Program Director

NICKI SANDERS



Green SEEDS
Internship Director

JUSTIN CHEN



Farm and Volunteer
Coordinator
(Via AmeriCorps)

THERESA TAYLOR



Nourishing Gardens
Program Director



Thank you to Sophie Silver-Isenstadt and Maddy Bloom for their time working with CEI! We miss them both after the completion of their service years in the fall of 2022.

PETER FATH



Chesapeake Conservation
Corps Member

TAMEKA WALKER



A Community of
Families in Nature
Program Director

SIMON SAUVAGEAU



Chesapeake Conservation
Corps Member

CEI STAFF

MADISON TOWNSEND



Greenhouse Coordinator

ZANETA TRENT



Garden Specialist

LONI COHEN



Nourishing Gardens Coordinator

CHELSEA CLARK



Roots & Wings & CFIN Leader

FRANKIE DAVIDSON



Roots & Wings Instructor

KATHERINE GRASTORF



Roots & Wings Support

HEATHER JOHNSON



Roots & Wings Instructor

SHIREN TEHRANI



Roots & Wings Instructor

DANA BELANGER



Roots & Wings Instructor

CECILIA ITUARTE

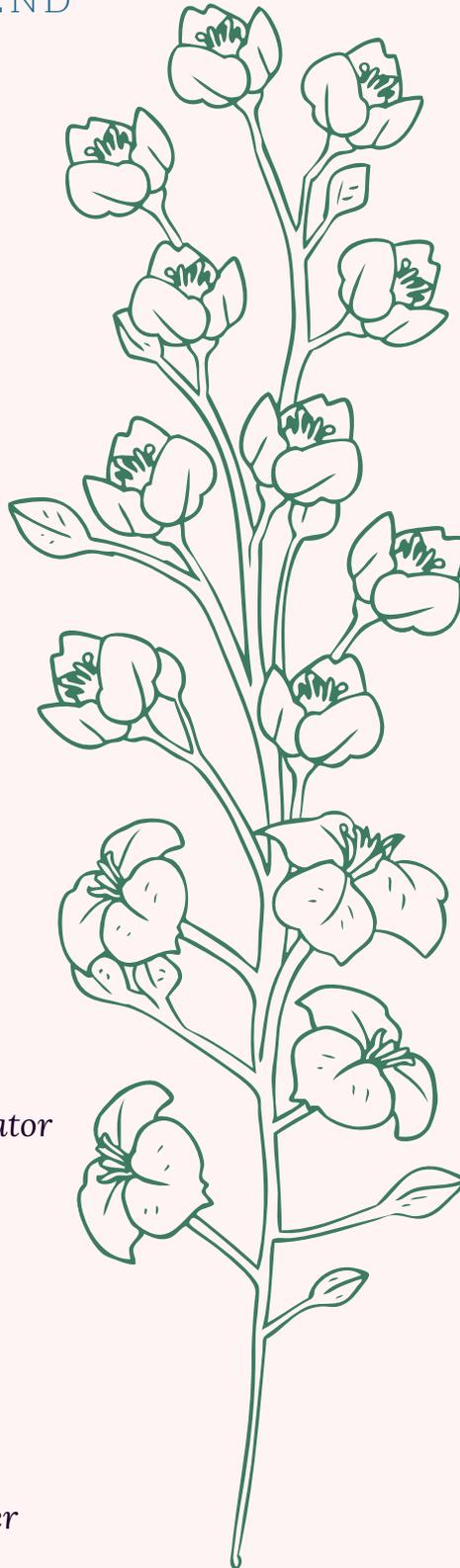


Roots & Wings Instructor

SARA SMITH



CFIN Event Leader



KEEP IN TOUCH!

WEBSITE

Communityecologyinstitute.org



FACEBOOK

The Community Ecology Institute



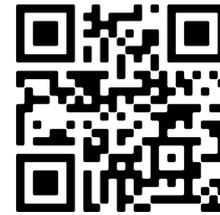
INSTAGRAM

@communityecologyinstitute



NEWSLETTER

(Sign-up at bottom of page)



EVENTS PAGE



DONATE



COMMUNITY BLOOMS PODCAST

In 2022, Community Blooms began Season 2, which focused on the "community" of students, ranging from high school to college and beyond. As with Season 1 (which focused on community leaders in Howard County), Season 2 involved discussions and reflections on current events and personal experiences related to the environment, education, health, and equity. In 2023, our host, Akil Cole, hopes to publish many more student stories before expanding discussion to a new community for Season 3!