

Joseph P. Riley Jr. Center for Livable Communities

2025-2026 Impact Report

**Supporting Communities Through
Research, Leadership, and Partnership**



About the Riley Center

Our Mission

The Joseph P. Riley Jr. Center for Livable Communities is an interdisciplinary initiative of the College of Charleston whose mission is to leverage the intellectual resources of the College to support the economic, social, and cultural vibrancy of the Lowcountry and other communities across South Carolina.

What We Do

The Riley Center brings together research, facilitation, planning, and leadership development to help communities address complex challenges and build capacity for the future.



Governance & Leadership

Supporting public-sector leaders and governing bodies



Nonprofit Capacity Building

Strengthening organizations through planning, training, and technical assistance



Research & Engagement

Using stakeholder input to inform decisions



Leading Practices

Turning research, insight, and collaboration into community impact



Strategic Planning

Supporting long-term community sustainability and growth

Areas of Expertise



Community Engagement



Education, Libraries, Arts & Culture



Environment & Sustainability



Organizational Management



Public Safety & Public Health



Rural & Underserved Communities



Tourism & Economic Development



Urban Planning & Housing

The Riley Center Team

The Riley Center leverages a multidisciplinary team of staff, faculty, fellows, executives in residence, graduate assistants, and student interns to deliver high-impact services across South Carolina and beyond.



Kendra B. Stewart, Ph.D.
Riley Center Director



Heather Zeidler, MPA
Director of Operations



Shelby Shumard, Ph.D.
Director of Research



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Graduate Assistant



Arianna Parker, MPA
Graduate Assistant



Emma Botzenhardt
College of Charleston |
Undergraduate Intern



Kate Crotzer
College of Charleston |
Undergraduate Intern

By the Numbers



46

Counties
Served



81

Communities
Served



580+

Public & Community
Leaders Trained



41

Projects &
Contracts



\$519,090

External Grant
Funding Secured



9

Nonprofits
Supported

Organizations Served and Supported

During 2025-2026, the Riley Center partnered with the following public agencies, nonprofits, associations, educational institutions, and community organizations to address local and statewide challenges.

Professional Development

- Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) Leadership Academy
- Local Government Leadership Academy (LGLI)
- Riley Mayors' Design Fellowship (RMDF)
- Athenian Program
- Women in the Civic Arena
- Local Government Supervisory Training

Association Support

- Charleston Academy for Lifelong Learning
- Center for Creative Retirement
- Municipal Clerks Training Institute
- South Carolina Association of Counties
- South Carolina City & County Management Association
- South Carolina Association of Registration and Election Officials
- South Carolina Clerks to County Council

Nonprofit Support

- ArtFields South Carolina
- Charleston Horticultural Society
- Daniel Island Library Society
- Lowcountry Alliance of Model Communities (LAMC)
- My Sister's House
- Orton Gillingham Center of Charleston
- St. Andrews Land Trust
- Trident United Way
- Vantage Point Foundation

Local Government Support

- Berkeley, Charleston, Dorchester Council of Government (BCDCOG)
- Berkeley County Library System
- Calhoun County
- Cash Rural Fire Department
- Charleston County Community Development and Revitalization
- Charleston County Emerging Leaders
- Charleston County Just Home
- Charleston County Public Library
- Charleston County School District
- Charleston County Settlement Communities
- Charleston Metro Chamber of Commerce
- Chester Wastewater Recovery
- City of Goose Creek
- City of Lake City
- City of Lexington Police Dept.
- City of North Charleston
- Columbia Fire Department
- Daniel Island Library Society
- James Island Fire Department
- James Island Public Service District
- Mount Pleasant Tree Task Force
- Richland County
- RISCC: Edisto Island
- SC Assoc. of Special Purpose Districts
- SC Dept. of Administration
- SC Dept. of Commerce
- SC Dept. of Veteran's Affairs
- SC Office of Resilience
- SC Emergency Management Division
- SC Public Employee Benefit Authority
- SC State Firefighters Association

Impact in Action

From strategic planning and leadership development to applied research and community engagement, these projects illustrate the Riley Center's commitment to strengthening communities throughout South Carolina.

Lowcountry Workforce & Educational Blueprint

As the Charleston Metro region grows, the need for a skilled workforce ready to take on roles in numerous new and growing industries has expanded.

The Lowcountry Workforce and Education Blueprint was an initiative led by the Charleston Metro Chamber of Commerce, Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments, and the Charleston County Public Library to bring together more than 40 senior leaders representing K-12 and higher education, local government, major employers, and workforce organizations from across the three counties to understand the strengths and challenges facing the region's current talent pipeline.



The Riley Center served as the facilitator for this project, designing surveys and focus groups, convening local leaders, crafting the landscape analysis, and supporting development of the framework for the future coalition that this Blueprint laid the groundwork for.

Local Government Supervisory Training

As local government leaders advance in their careers into supervisory roles, little in-depth training is designed to support them in this transition. That need is what the Local Government Supervisory Training is designed to address, covering topics ranging from the supervisor's role to team building to performance management to leading in challenging times.

In the last year, the Riley Center hosted two opportunities for local leaders to participate in this four day training, once in the fall and once in the spring. More than 60 supervisors from cities, counties, and public service districts across Berkeley, Charleston, and Dorchester participated and provided overwhelmingly positive feedback on their experience.



My Sister's House Community Survey

My Sister's House is dedicated to breaking the cycle of domestic violence by offering comprehensive support, services, and educational resources to individuals across the Tricounty region. As part of its ongoing commitment to understanding and responding to the evolving needs of the community, My Sister's House worked with the Riley Center to design, field, and analyze its 2025 Community Awareness Survey.

Drawing on more than 500 survey responses, the study explored perceptions of the prevalence of abusive behaviors, definitions of domestic violence, personal experiences, and barriers to accessing resources. The findings provided actionable insights for how My Sister's House could continue to advance its mission in the region. The public report was featured in multiple news stories across the Tricounty and included in the organization's podcast.



Charleston County Public Library Needs Assessment

As Charleston County Public Library (CCPL) began implementing its new strategic plan, it commissioned the Riley Center to conduct a deep dive needs assessment to understand how the community was currently using its resources and services, the barriers residents faced in taking advantage of those offerings, and staff perceptions of how those offerings varied across the unique branches CCPL serves throughout the county.

Through surveys of public residents and staff members combined with a series of community and staff focus groups held across the county, the Riley Center collected input to inform both where CCPL is today as well as how it might best pursue its new goals. The Needs Assessment showed that CCPL is a trusted, essential community hub offering safe space, social connection, learning, and access to critical services. Across all data sources, the dominant challenge was awareness of its diverse offerings that extend well beyond books to include hundreds of programs every year and access to numerous databases.



Calhoun County Strategic Plan

With the appointment of a new county administrator, Calhoun County engaged the Riley Center to support the development of a new strategic plan. The Riley Center collected input from Council members, Department leaders, and staff, combined with demographic information on trends in the county to inform the identification of the organization's strengths and opportunities for growth.

Combined with a series of facilitated discussions with County leadership, the Riley Center supported the County in identifying its strategic priorities for the next five years, aligned goals and strategies, and clear measures for success. The County Council weighed in on these components and eventually approved the County's new strategic plan, providing direction and coherence to the administration for years to come.



Risks, Impacts & Strategies for Coastal Communities (RISCC)

The RISCC project is a \$1.5 million National Science Foundation (NSF) grant conducted in collaboration with the College of Charleston's GIS Hazards Lab and partners at the University of Delaware and University of Rhode Island. The project is designed to address flooding risks and strengthen climate resilience in disproportionately affected coastal communities in Delaware, Rhode Island, and South Carolina.

As part of this project, the Riley Center is supporting purposeful engagement with local communities in South Carolina, in areas such as Edisto Island. Participants' input on the challenges they face with increased flooding will directly inform the supports offered to increase long-term resilience across RISCC partner communities.

