

# **Building Collaborative Entrepreneur Programs/Ecosystems**

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# Danville, VA Demographics At-A-Glance

Population in 2019: 40,044 (96% urban, 4% rural).

Population change since 2000: -17.3%



Males: 18,423 (46.0%)

Females: 21,621 (54.0%)

Median resident age: 41.2 years

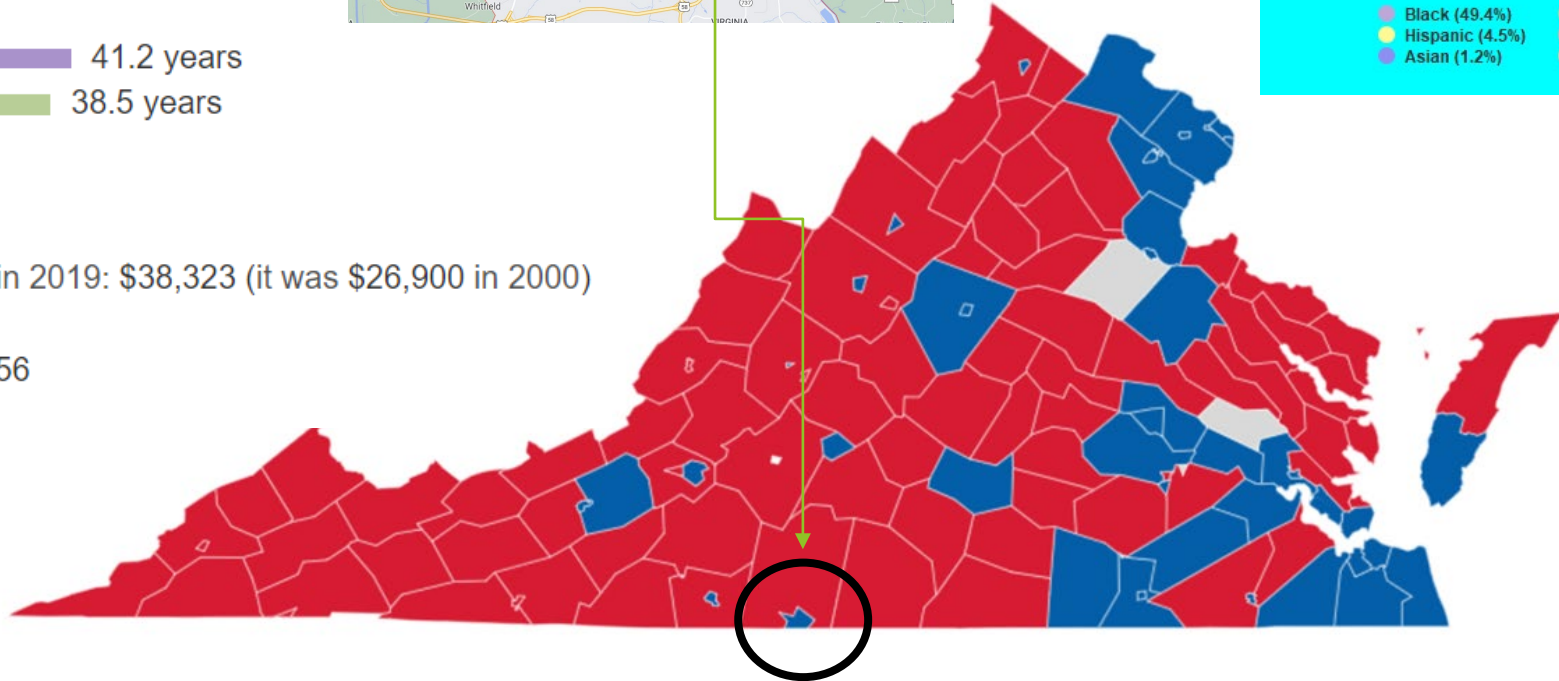
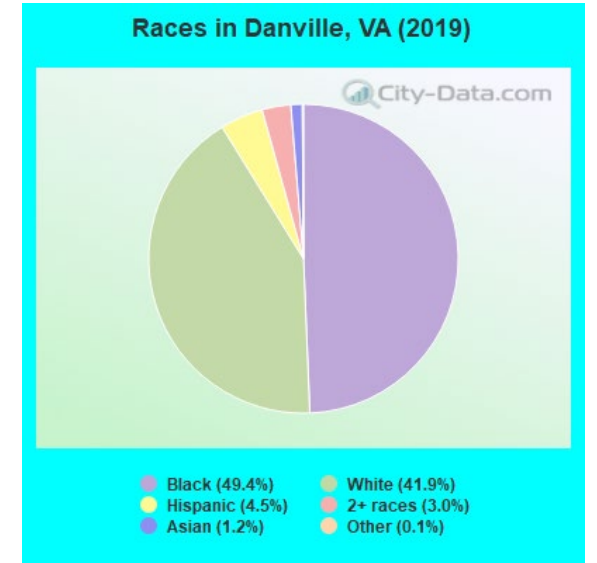
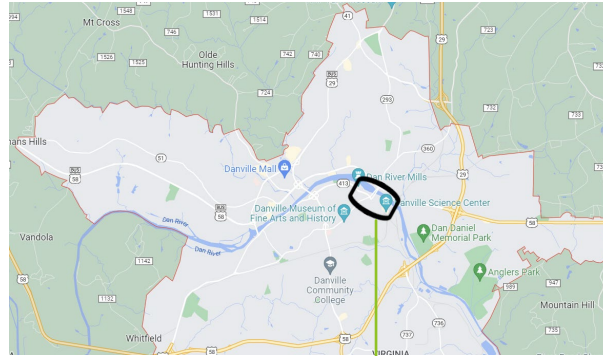
Virginia median age: 38.5 years

Zip codes: [24541](#).

Estimated median household income in 2019: \$38,323 (it was \$26,900 in 2000)

Danville: \$38,323

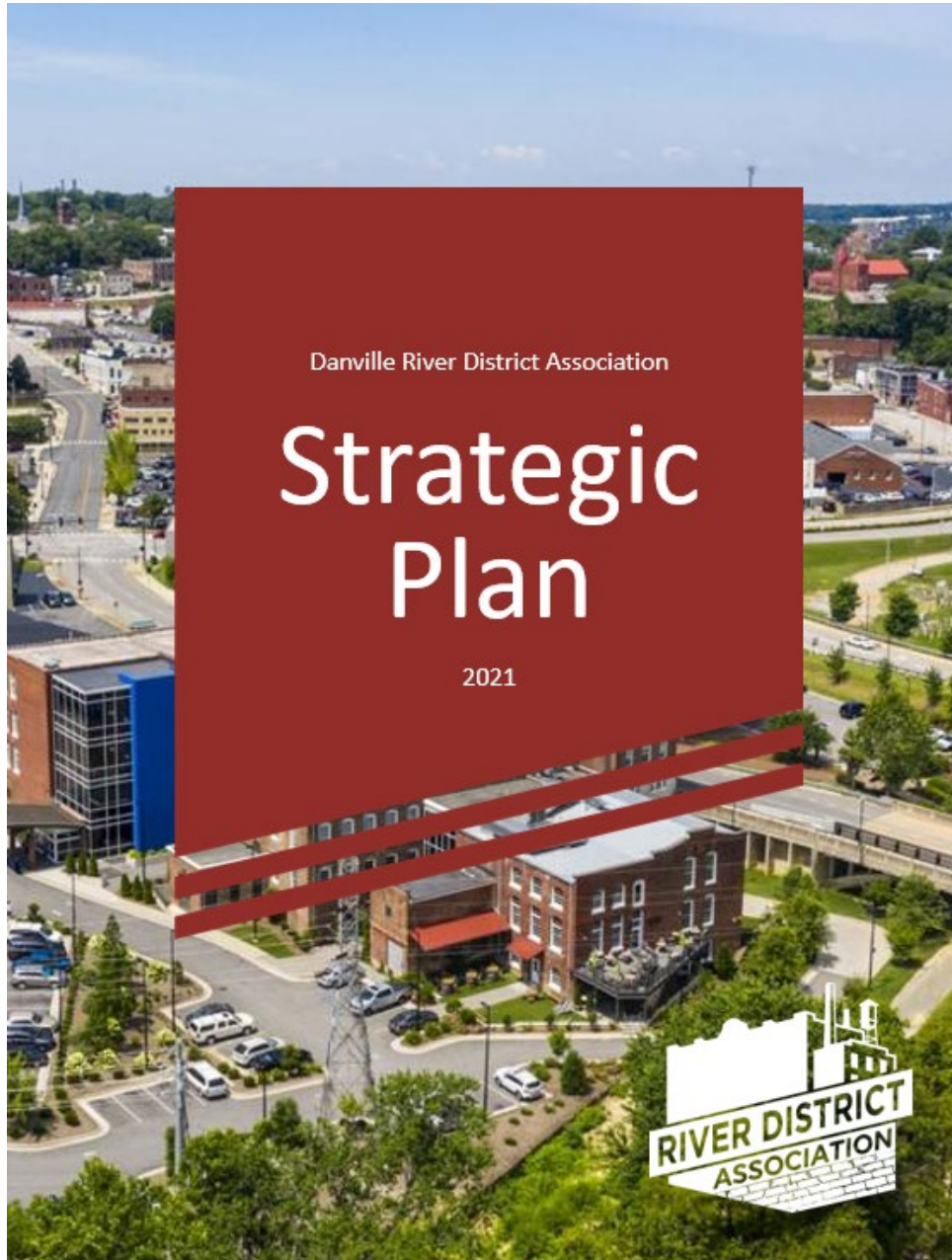
VA: \$76,456











Danville River District Association

# Strategic Plan

2021



The River District Association will continue moving forward in the transformation of Danville's River District as a welcoming and lively place for all, while inspiring and influencing social and economic development for the greater Dan River Region.

VISION STATEMENT

The River District Association's innovative approach strengthens the regional economy, allowing all to experience Danville's high quality of life.

MISSION STATEMENT





**THE PROBLEM - VACANCY**





# PROGRAMMING

RDA currently implements a wide range of programs designed to increase the resiliency of local businesses, attract more visitors to the River District, and strengthen the greater entrepreneurial ecosystem of the Dan River region. These programs have been well-received by business owners and other local stakeholders, delivering tangible results and incrementally growing the reputation of the River District and Danville region as a quality place to shop, eat, play, and do business.

Over the next two years, RDA plans to continue its core business assistance programs to ensure the economic vitality of River District businesses. These programs will be particularly vital throughout 2021, as businesses continue to navigate the challenges created by COVID-19. Our programming will continue to support businesses, take advantage of available resources, and make strategic adjustments to keep up with changing commercial trends that have been accelerated by the pandemic.

Looking forward over the next three years, RDA aims to strengthen our role as an economic development driver of the River District and greater Dan River region. We will explore opportunities to expand our services to commercial areas located outside the River District, leveraging our experience in technical assistance, grant administration, and marketing to continuously work to make Danville a great place to live, work, shop, play, and do business.

## Successes to Date

- **Developing Danville’s entrepreneurial ecosystem and supporting local startups through the popular Dream Launch Program.**
- **Improving the quality of retail signage and storefronts through the implementation of the Façade Improvement Grant Program.**
- **Increasing visibility, awareness, and customer traffic of River District businesses through Business Retention programs.**
- **Developing a COVID-19 Assistance Program to help businesses survive and thrive throughout the pandemic.**

### Develop partnerships and collaborations to build capacity to manage and implement programming that creates vibrancy in the River District and serves local businesses.

	Priority	Target Delivery	Task Lead	Partners	Impact on RDA Expenses/Capacity		
					2021	2022	2023
» Continue to make introductions and develop collaborations with new area businesses and upcoming Caesars Casino	High	Ongoing	Staff & Board	Caesars Casino & others	↑	↑	↑
» Leverage talent to provide technical assistance to businesses, assist in promotional initiatives, and volunteer for applicable events.	Low	Ongoing	Staff	Longwood SBDC	↔	↔	↔

### Grow downtown events through partnerships and collaboration while decreasing RDA staff involvement.

» Ensure RDA staff works to collaborate in logistics, marketing, and organization of community events in order to focus on long-term economic development priorities.	High	2021	Staff & Board	Various	↔	↔	↔
» Identify local partner(s) to play leading role in the organization of River District Festival	High	2021	Staff & Board	Various	↔	↔	↔
» Continue organizing annual Christmas on the Plaza event	Medium	Ongoing	Staff & Board	Various	↔	↔	↔

### Expand entrepreneurship program impact while empowering strategic partners.

» Continue showcasing Dream Launch as a central piece of RDA’s brand and mission and expand entrepreneurship programming	High	Ongoing	Staff	Various	↔	↑	↑
» Identify local partners that can utilize existing Dream Launch programming to support additional entrepreneurship efforts.	High	2022	Staff	DRBDC; DCC; Chamber of Comm.	↔	↑	↑
» Assess feasibility of development of new small-scale manufacturing incubator/accelerator	Medium/High	2022	Staff	Local development partner(s)	↑	↑	↑

### Increase scale and geographic footprint of business assistance programs.

» Implement Bricks & Clicks program as funding allows while continuing to add other business support workshops	High	Ongoing	Staff	Local businesses	↔	↑	↑
» Continue COVID-19-related assistance and help businesses adjust to shifting commercial trends	High	Ongoing	Staff	Various	↔	↓	↓
» Implement expansion of Façade Grant Program	High	Ongoing	Staff	City of Danville	↑	↑	↔
» Apply for VA Tourism Corp.’s DRIVE 2.0 grant funds to leverage Danville’s designation as a Tourism Zone	Low	Ongoing	Staff	VA Tourism Co.	↔	↔	↔
» Move forward with opportunities to expand business assistance programs to commercial areas located outside of the River District	Very High	2022	Staff	DRF, City of Danville; community orgs;	↑	↑	↔

“DRF” refers to Danville Regional Foundation



# Solution: Virginia Community Business Launch



Sugar Hill Cidery – City of Norton

## OVERVIEW

The Community Business Launch (CBL) is a place-based entrepreneurial development strategy that fills a critical mass of vacant storefronts with expansion or start-up ventures. Local CBL programs train entrepreneurs, creatives and small business owners about business-planning practice. This training culminates in a group of finalists pitching their ideas to a panel of judges, with winners receiving grant funding and support services from the community to kick-start their new venture.

A CBL grant from DHCD leverages other financial and in-kind resources to prepare multiple entrepreneurs to operate successful businesses, regardless of the pitch competition. Additionally, many CBL grantees are able to leverage the CBL experience to continue their start-up programs with local and regional resources to amplify both job and business creation. When preceded by thorough market analysis and relentless outreach, and followed by ongoing business retention efforts, a CBL program is an important building block to creating a coordinated, comprehensive, and sustainable ecosystem of community-based entrepreneurs and small businesses.

Through its seven years of work, CBL has completed eight rounds of funding, assisting 33 communities, creating 170 businesses and over 365 jobs, and injecting over \$3 million in additional investment across Virginia. Businesses participating in the program have an overall success rate of 84%, higher than the national average of 80%.

## FUNDING PRIORITIES



Critical mass of vacant storefronts clustered together



Research-based target business types



Safe, maintained pedestrian infrastructure



Ongoing cohesive promotion and management of the district



Deep outreach to homegrown potential entrepreneurs

## THE SEVEN CRITICAL FACTORS OF ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEMS

We think of Ecosystem building through the lens of seven (7) critical Factors. Given the diversity of needs to support the launch, growth/scaling, and even the exiting of businesses, it is important to understand that Ecosystem building takes the alignment of many organizational stakeholders, grounded through input from entrepreneurs, in order to be successful and sustainable.



**The Place Factor** acknowledges that the external environment in which a business operates is extremely important relative to overall success. In addition, much of the programming and real estate components that serve to assist entrepreneurs and small businesses

tend to have a spatial element, commonly centered in a downtown, where commerce, civic functions, housing, and recreation converge. Place Factors largely consist of the following examples:

- Real Estate — unique buildings (think breweries); move-in ready spaces; affordable start-up spaces, diversity of housing
- Launch support spaces — maker spaces, incubators/accelerators, shared-use food kitchens, night kitchens, mobile retail/food trucks, co-work spaces; entrepreneur hub centers
- Programming — pitch contests, pop-up programming, soup events
- Third Spaces — breweries, coffee houses, libraries – places that allow for entrepreneurs, remote workers, and small businesses to interact and accidental collisions.



**The Social Capital Factor** examines the ecosystem at the relationship level, primarily focused on mentorship and networking. We also examine the formal or informality of how entrepreneurs and small businesses make connections, find information, and interact with stakeholders and fellow business owners. The Social Capital Factor largely consists of the following examples:

- Networking events
- Entrepreneur and/or small business network groups
- Access to Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE)



**The Financial Capital Factor** looks at the availability and diversity of capital resources available to small businesses at all points of their life cycle; from early formation and launch, scaling and growing, maturity, and ultimately an exit or transition. Financial Capital for most communities needs to be evaluated locally, but also regionally, as many programs and tools tend to develop at a broader geographic scope than our own communities. The Financial Capital Factor largely consists of the following examples:

- Personal equity (home, credit cards, personal savings, friends and family)
- Government loans and grants (local, state and federal)
- Bank lending tools
- Nonprofit entities (CDFIs, façade loan programs, low-interest loans from economic development groups)
- Private equity (angel and venture capital investors)



**The Culture Factor** is more qualitative and appears in local attitudes about entrepreneurship, support of small businesses, celebration of new business openings, and even our willingness to accept the risk of failure with new business ideas and concepts. The Culture Factor largely consists of the following examples:

- Media features on small business and new business announcements
- Presence of buy local and promotions like “Shop Small” campaigns
- New residents opening businesses
- Small business owners engaged in local civic organizations



**The Government/Regulatory Factor** evaluates the policies, ordinances, and the experience of entrepreneurs and small businesses as they work with the public sector to launch and scale their business operations. In an unhealthy support system, entrepreneurs find the process for getting permits difficult and an environment focused on what you can't do rather than how do we find a solution. It also examines the prioritization of entrepreneurship as an economic development strategy. Examples of Government/Regulatory Factor to be evaluated include:

- Community-specific web resources on how to start a business
- Economic development resources and capacity targeting small business development
- Zoning practices that provide for protections while allowing for a broader mix of uses and functions



**The Education and Training Factor** examines not only access and availability of educational resources for small businesses and entrepreneurs but should also evaluate these aspects from the perspective of the business life cycle. As such, there may be a great deal of workshops and on demand content for business planning or even digital commerce, but very little for how to think through business model shifts, succession planning, or even dealing with supply chain issues. Thus, examples of the Education and Training Factor consist of the following:

- Involvement and engagement from a Small Business Development Council (SBDC), Women's Business Center (WBC) and/or Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA)
- Annual small business needs assessment
- Diversity of access to education and training: traditional onsite, virtual, and on-demand
- Local colleges and universities with entrepreneurship training programs



**The Human Capital Factor** is multi-faceted. As such, it examines a far range of human capital related variables including access to talent that might start and grow a business, the workforce necessary to support launching and growing businesses, and even the attraction of remote workers. Importantly, Human Capital also evaluates the level of equity and inclusiveness that enables women and minority businesses to engage in entrepreneurship. The Human Capital Factor consists of the following examples:

- Levels of minority and women-owned businesses as compared to local demographic profiles
- Youth entrepreneurship programming
- Engagement of local universities and colleges in workforce development matched to local market needs





# **Bootcamp Training Program Creation: Bridging Barriers to Access and Participation**



# Building the Pitch Opportunity for Business Feasibility and Sustainability



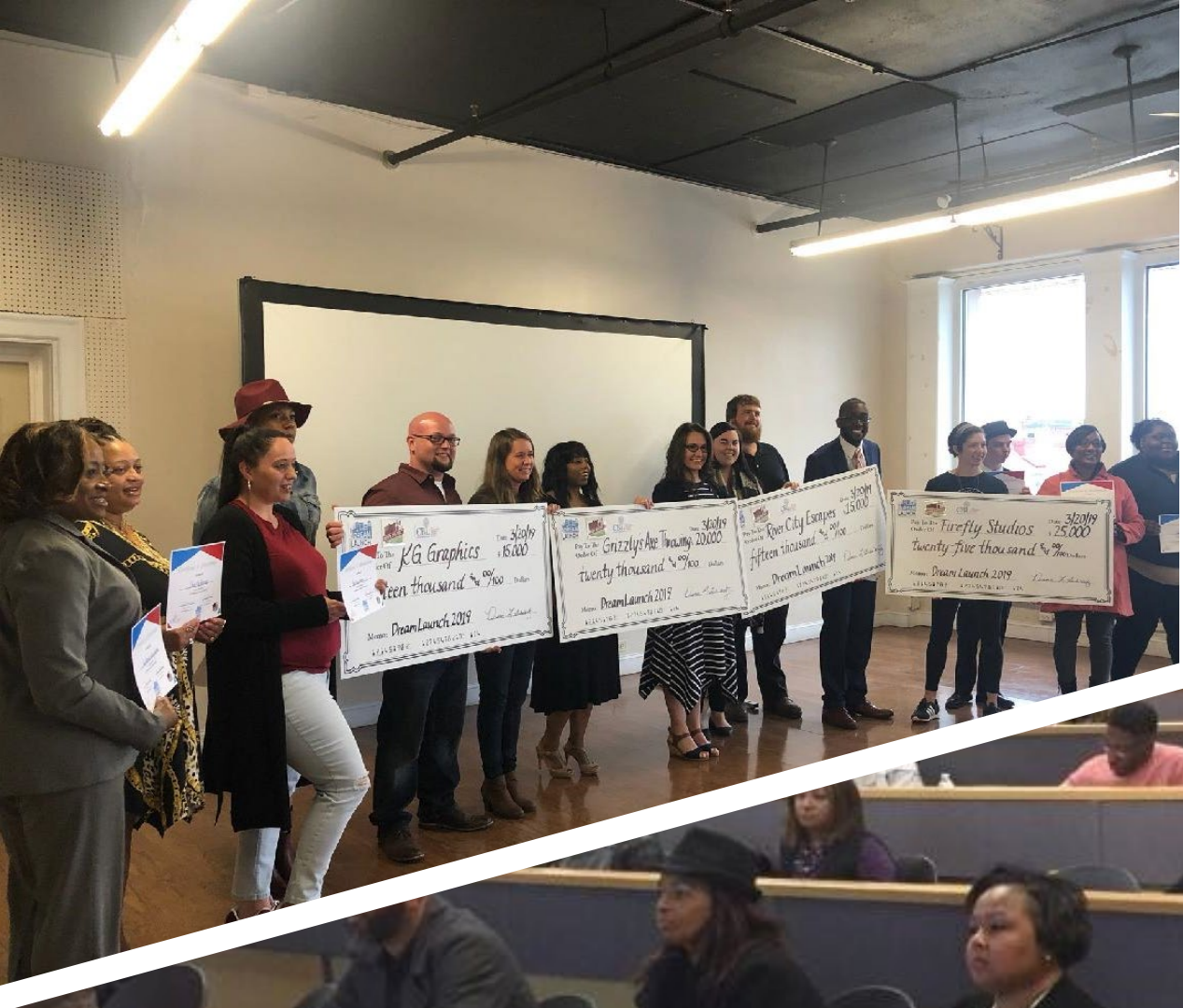
# RDA Dream Launch 2019 - Year 1

85 Bootcamp Participants

26 Bootcamp Certificates

8 Dream Launch Pitch Participants

4 Dream Launch Grant Awards



Year 2

RDA brings the Dream Launch Bootcamp In-House  
COVID & the Year of the Pivot

zoom







Dominion  
 CrossFit  
 "Take control of your  
 Health and wellness  
 through physical activities"  
 Benefits of CrossFit  
 - Strength - weight loss  
 - Endurance - muscle building  
 - Confidence - Core  
 For Eye

Welcome  
 COTTONTAIL  
 WEDDINGS & EVENTS

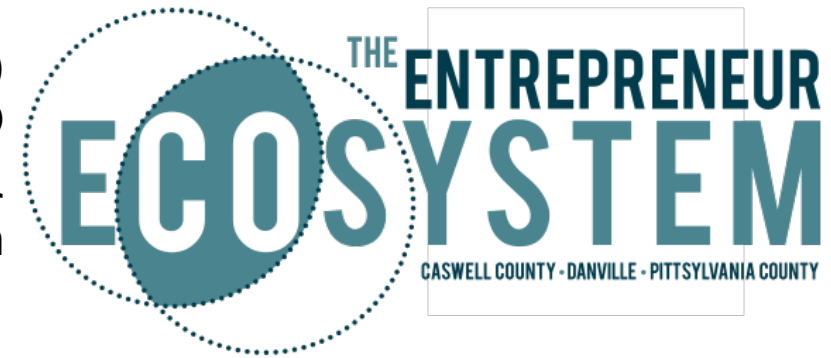
57 Bootcamp Participants  
27 Bootcamp Certificates  
8 Dream Launch Pitch Participants  
5 Dream Launch Grant Awards

# RDA Dream Launch 2020 - Year 2

## Year 3:

- Regional Ecosystem Development and Funding
  - Addition of the Rev-Up Pitch
- Addition of new resources to access traditional capital

The Dan River Region Entrepreneur Ecosystem (DRREE) began as a formal grant-funded and staffed entity in 2019 to support the work of a three-county region; the initial grant of \$750,000 from the Danville Regional Foundation was for a three-year project term.



## Danville/Pittsylvania Rev-Up

For all Dream Launch Bootcamp Certificate holders That are interested in opening a business outside of the River District but within the City/County boundary. The program is funded through and managed by the Danville/Pittsylvania County Chamber of Commerce.





## WHAT IS AN ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM?

By most definitions, entrepreneurial ecosystems refer to the strategic alignment of a variety of public and private efforts—including government policies, funding and finance, human capital, and regulatory frameworks—to provide necessary financial, social, and human capital to foster entrepreneurship in innovative and creative ways. Frequently overlooked in these definitions is **the value of place and the physical environment as central factors in creating and growing successful enterprises.**

By emphasizing the creation and support of great places and spaces for people to live and work, commercial districts can attract new businesses and new ideas, thus contributing directly to the development of the local entrepreneurial ecosystem.



Source: “Entrepreneurial Ecosystems and the role of Commercial Districts” Guidebook by Main Street America (Available in ‘Resources’ at [mainstreet.org](http://mainstreet.org))

# Partners & Affiliates

This highly collaborative work includes a stakeholder group of 12 resource provider organizations in the Dan River Region that support entrepreneurs and small businesses..

## Entrepreneur Ecosystem DAN RIVER REGION







OG-EARED PAGE

— BOOKSHOP —

• Dream Launch & Rev-Up 2021 - Year 3

- 112 Bootcamp Participants
- 26 Bootcamp Certificates
- 5 Dream Launch Pitch Participants
- 3 Dream Launch Grant Awards
- 7 Rev-Up Pitch Participants
- 3 Rev-Up Grant Awards



## Year 4:

- Supporting Existing Businesses
- Supporting Research & Market Testing
- Back to Virginia CBL for Funding

**CATALYST GRANT**  
RIVER DISTRICT ASSOCIATION



Catalyst Grants are small grants of up to \$5,000 for Ignite Pitch Participants to do market testing on a new concept or additional market research before moving to a brick-and-mortar storefront.



GET Boosted grants are for up to \$5,000 (no match required) to implement a new, different, or creative project that will meet at least one of the following objectives:

Growth - New product or service lines/add E-Commerce  
Expansion - New Physical Space, Second Locations, More production  
Training - Specialized trainings, Google for Business, Certifications, Consultants



# Year 4 - Dream Launch Bootcamp, Pitch & DPCC Rev-Up

- ▶ 96 Registered Dream Launch Boot Camp Participants
- ▶ 50 Dream Launch Bootcamp Certificates
- ▶ 9 Dream Launch Pitch Participants
- ▶ 6 Dream Launch Grant Recipients
- ▶ 12 Rev-Up Pitch Participants
- ▶ 3 Rev-Up Grant Recipients





# RIVER DISTRICT ASSOCIATION START-UP TOOLKIT

## RDA Programs 2019-2022

Ideation	Business Planning	Concept Testing	Start-Up Grants	Existing Business Grants

## Business Resources

Business Planning	Access to Capital

## \$475K in Impact

350 Dream Launch Bootcamp Participants  
 129 Dream Launch Certifications  
 18 Dream Launch Awards totaling \$375K  
 2 New Business Catalyst Awards totaling \$17.5K  
 10 GET Boosted Awards, totaling \$45K  
 30 Dream Launch Pitch Participants  
 32 Start-up Slam attendees, and 9 presenters



Pitch Programs in Partnership  
 with Dream Launch: Rev-Up  
 (2021-2022)

8 Rev-Up Awards totaling \$100K



# Year 5

### Program Additions/Changes

- RDA Pitch - Name Change to Ignite
- Begin Start-Up Slam
- Funding Changes as needs Evolve
- Exploring the Addition of a third community pitch as Fee for Service

### The Year so Far

- 175 Registered Dream Launch Participants
- 2 Pitch Opportunities
- \$100,000 in funding available



# Upon Closer Examination: The Challenges



## **Entrepreneurship on Main Street, Quality of Place and Regional Economic Development are Tied Together**

- **Quality of Life (QoL) is not some passing fad in economic development, but a half century long behavioral shift in household location decisions.**
- **Jobs follow people to higher QoL locations, using judgement about where those places are, as well as population growth as a proxy for QoL.**
- **The market-based measure of QoL is great for researchers and trying to explain the need for QoL investments to taxpayers, but that isn't its big benefit.**
- **QoL correlates with amenities, and some of which you affect in your cities and towns.**

**Source: "Measuring Quality of Life" presented April 27, 2021 Amanda Weinstein, Michael Hicks and Emily Wornell at the Home of Future Thinking conference.**













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