

Rural Beacon Initiative



**2022 INAUGURAL
IMPACT REPORT**

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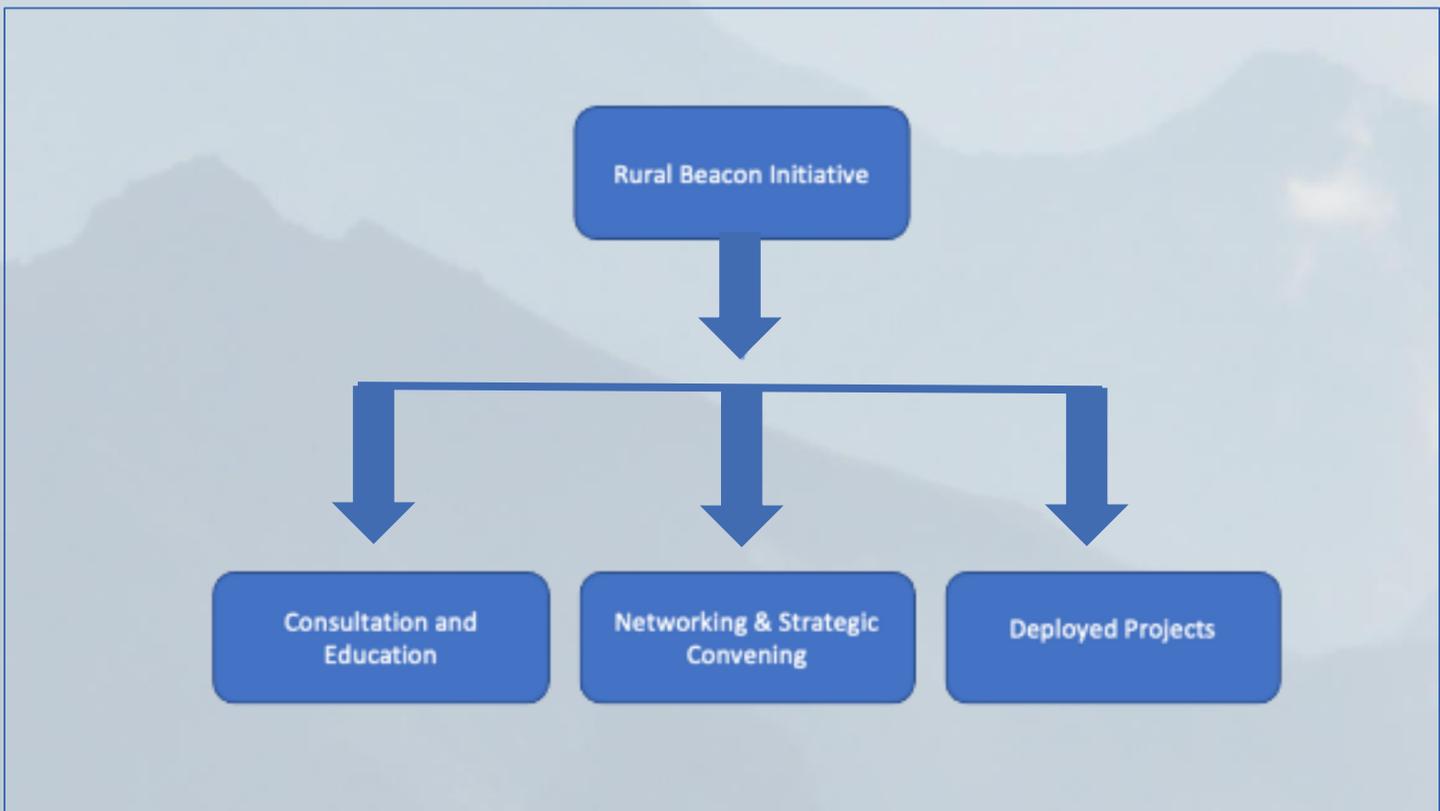
Who We Are

Rural Beacon Initiative (RBI) is a BIPOC-led [social enterprise](#) that leverages deployed projects to increase community ownership in the emerging supply chains of clean energy and regenerative agriculture. RBI's mission is to ensure that BIPOC communities—particularly BIPOC communities in the Southeast—are at the forefront of a just transition that deploys projects which not only lower emissions and electrify communities but create real economic opportunities for those that have too long been siloed from this conversation. At its core, RBI believes that climate finance must be a pathway to social equity, and conducts research, and advocacy rooted in this principle. RBI believes that what is “good for the planet, is good for the people,” and works to this end. Leveraging both a decade of cultivation of community relationships and a proven track record of consulting with industry partners on operationalizing equity in climate solutions, the organization has spearheaded strategic visioning around environmental sustainability, more efficient deployment of clean energy technology to LMI communities, and wealth generation for local communities.



Our Work

RBI's work sits in three focus areas—consultation and education, network and strategic convening, and development and deployment of innovative projects that seek to demonstrate climate solutions deployed for communities by communities.



Consultation and Education

RBI consults with public and private firms to skill up internal organizational expertise on basic concepts of environmental and climate justice and how to better operationalize equity in deployment of real-world solutions.

RBI maintains an impressive track-record of clients we've worked with, including Everlane, Wells Fargo, and the NC Department of Environmental Quality.

Networking and Strategic Convening

RBI continuously leverages a robust—and diverse network of community advocates and practitioners in the clean energy and sustainability industries. By bringing these two constituencies to the table, each with the goals of advancing equity and community accountability, we expedite achieving positive outcomes for communities.

Deployed Projects

RBI's team wields a critical mass of scholarship and experience in advancing equity and environmental justice through deployed solutions. In addition to the work to increase our clients' organizational awareness on how to better achieve environmental justice and equity internally, we also work to co-develop with our partners solutions that can be scaled externally.

RBI's flagship project is our Free Union Farm—a 52-acre sustainability hub comprised of elements of regenerative agriculture, agri-voltaics, and sustainable agroforestry. The site will eventually serve as an educational and training center to increase community awareness of opportunities in the green economy.



Free Union Farm Sustainability Hub:

Using Integrated Capital to Address Black Land Loss and Support Regenerative Development in Eastern North Carolina



The site will sit as a model of sustainability and a demonstrative site for sustainable economic development in rural areas where climate finance, clean tech, and regenerative practices are collectively leveraged to increase climate resilience in rural communities.



Agri-voltaics is defined as agricultural production, such as crop production, livestock grazing, and pollinator habitat that exist underneath solar panels and/or in between rows of solar panels.



RBI believes that those closest to the problem are also those closest to the solution. As such frontline communities most impacted by climate change must be seen as more than just consumers in the green economy— they must be active participators.

We designed the Free Union Sustainability Hub to be a model of conservation finance, rural development, and resilient community-based solutions to the climate crisis. This includes deploying community-based renewable energy generation as well as a local site for sustainable agriculture.

Beyond this, Free Union Farm will serve as a hub for the exploration of leading social, economic, and scientific solutions to address the climate crisis. This research includes sustainable agroforestry, the deployment of agri-voltaic

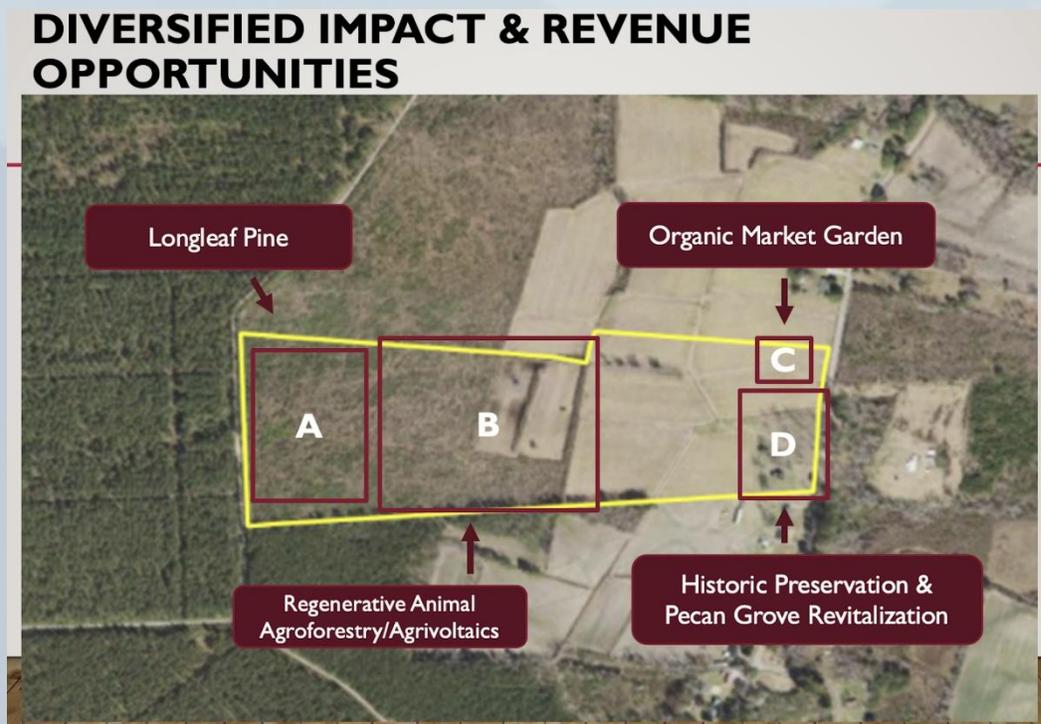


strategies, economic opportunities in the context of place-based rural development, and culturally competent learning materials for minority landowners, farmers, and frontline communities.

Seed Sanctuary

In addition, we are working with our partners, the Alliance of Native SeedKeepers, to investigate the deployment of a fully sustainable seed sanctuary that serves both Black and Indigenous communities as we cultivate and preserve ancestral seeds as well as present-day culturally relevant foods.

For us, a seed is a living, sacred being that is to be revered. Seeds hold the stories and dreams of our ancestors allowing us to access their love and care over thousands of years. We strive to impart this relationship to all who are ready to learn.



Interested in Donating to Free Union Farm? [Click here.](#)



RBI'S CORE TEAM MEMBERS

Founder & CEO



William J. Barber III, J.D.

William J. Barber, III is an environmental climate justice scholar and advocate, with nearly a decade of social justice organizing experience and deep academic training in both the science and the law behind environmental and climate issues.

His work has been featured and in PayPal's Rising Leaders Series and he was recently named in NextGen America's 30 Around 30: Young Black Changemakers working to build a more just and equitable society. As Founder and CEO of Rural Beacon Initiative, he has overseen the successful growth of the team and serves as the principal visionary for RBI's flagship project, Free Union Farm.

William received his B.S. in Environmental Physics from North Carolina Central University and earned his Juris Doctorate from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Law, where he focused on environmental law and policy.



Our Team Members



Randy Lucas

Director of
Compliance

Randy Lucas is an accredited accounting professional, specializing in Federal Tax Accounting and Change Management consulting. He serves on several community and professional organization boards, including the Board of Directors for the North Carolina Renewable Energy Association (NCSEA) based in Raleigh, and the General Circle of the North Carolina Chapter of the US Green Building Council (USGBC). He also serves on several alumni advisory boards at his alma mater, Virginia Tech, including the Pamplin Advisory Council, the Alumni Advisory Council for the Department of Accounting and Information Systems, and the VT Black Cultural Center and Office of Multicultural Programs and Services



Michael McLean

Director of
Operations and
Technology

Michael McLean is an award-winning, ITIL-certified program manager currently based in the Washington D.C. area. He specializes in requirements gathering, capabilities assessing, project management, prioritization, and stakeholder engagement. With RBI, he passionately enables the organization through his expertise to ensure the right people and partners have the right tools at the right time. He holds a bachelor's degree in Computer Engineering from North Carolina A&T State University.





**Vanessa
Barksdale**
Director of
Communications

Vanessa Barksdale is an accredited marketing and communications professional, specializing in marketing automation and social enterprise storytelling. Building upon her experience in helping political campaigns obtain buy-in for policy and candidates, Vanessa founded a digital marketing agency, Modernist Communication Strategies, as a means to help social impact organizations obtain buy-in for their ideas. Vanessa has earned her designation as a Professional Certified Marketer from the American Marketing Association, and as a Certified Digital Marketing Professional from the internationally accredited Digital Marketing Institute.



**Benjamin
Barber**
Director of
External Affairs

Benjamin Barber is a researcher and writer who is heavily interested in voting rights, democracy, and Southern history. His work focuses on projects that link history, advocacy, policy, and civic engagement to promote equity, democracy, and social justice. He has written and spoken widely on Southern politics, voting rights, history, and movements for change across the region.

He is a graduate of the School of Social Policy & Practice at the University of Pennsylvania. Benjamin also holds a bachelor's degree in history from Barton College in Wilson, North Carolina.





Stu Dalheim
Senior Fellow,
Impact Investment

Stu Dalheim has two decades of experience working at the intersection of responsible investment, corporate governance, and environmental and human rights NGOs. His executive experience includes research department management, responsible investment industry leadership, and non-profit board service, including serving as Board Chair for Bethesda Green and currently as Executive Director for Shareholder Engagement at Calvert Research and Management.



A'Jae Grisby
Fellow

A'Jae Gisby is a Raleigh-based community advocate with a specialty in outreach to environmental justice communities and communicating with community stakeholders. Passionate about education and advocacy, A'Jae organizes to reach underrepresented community members and analyze policy to connect communities with equitable information, opportunities, funding, and resources.

A'Jae holds a B.A. in Political Science from Howard University and a M.S. in Educational Studies from Johns Hopkins University. In addition, A'Jae currently teaches English as a Second Language (ESOL) at Wake Tech Community College, and uses these unique skills and strategies when doing outreach in the environmental justice communities.



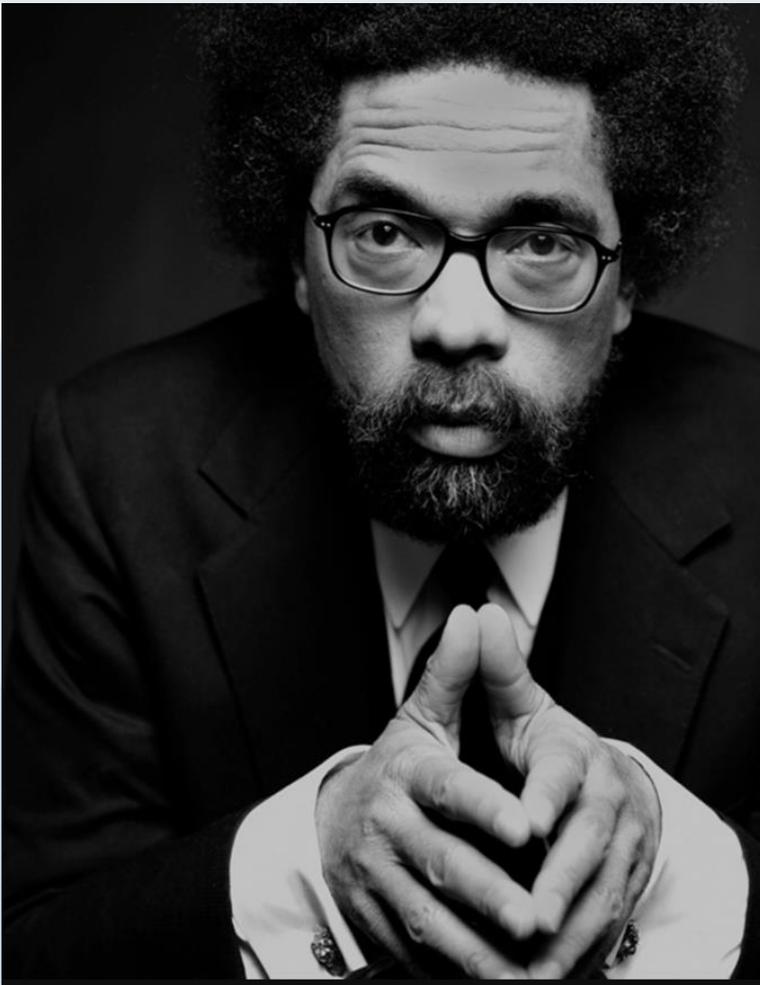
RBI's Inaugural Advisory Board

In January of 2023, RBI officially onboarded its inaugural Advisory Board. The Board, comprised of an esteemed group of practitioners, will provide invaluable expertise to RBI, as we seek to answer the call to build a truly just transition.



Dr. Cornel West, RBI Board Member

“RBI is a crucial next step in the Black Freedom movement - self-determination and dignity! Let us support this marvelous new project!”



Dr. Cornel West, affectionately known to many as Brother West, is the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Chair at Union Theological Seminary. Dr. West teaches on the works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, as well as courses in Philosophy of Religion, African American Critical Thought, and a wide range of subjects -- including but by no means limited to, the classics, philosophy, politics, cultural theory, literature, and music. He has a passion to communicate to a vast variety of publics in order to keep alive the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. – a legacy of telling the truth and bearing witness to love and justice.

Dr. West is the former Professor of the Practice of Public Philosophy at Harvard University and Professor Emeritus at Princeton University. Cornel West graduated Magna Cum Laude from Harvard in three years and obtained his M.A. and Ph.D. in Philosophy at Princeton.

Having written 20 books and edited 13, he is best known for his classics: *Race Matters* and *Democracy Matters*, and for his memoir, *Brother West: Living and Loving Out*

Loud. His most recent book, *Black Prophetic Fire*, offers an unflinching look at nineteenth and twentieth-century African American leaders and their visionary legacies.

Dr. West has partnered with MasterClass.com to provide teachings on several influential courses including a class with Pharrell Williams on Empathy, MasterClass’ first-ever multi-instructor class on Black History, Black Freedom & Black Love, as well as Dr. West’s standalone class on Philosophy.



Dr. Yolanda Banks Anderson, RBI Board Member

"RBI demonstrates an innovative way forward in the pursuit of environmental justice, climate justice and sustainable land ownership. It is a model which needs to be widely replicated."

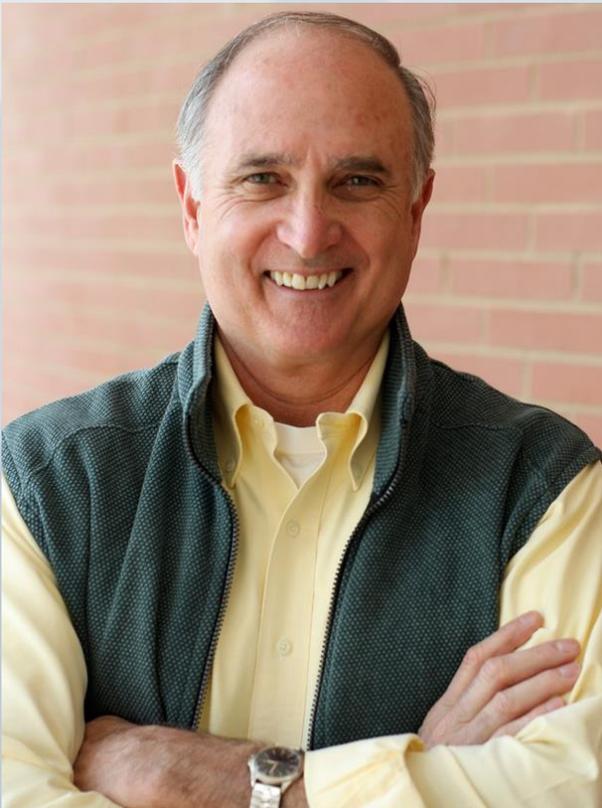
Dr. Yolanda Banks Anderson is Associate Vice Chancellor for Faculty Development and Resources at North Carolina Central University (NCCU). Having earned over \$4.5 million in grants, doctor banks Anderson has served as the principal investigator for numerous bodies of work, covering environmental health and justice, environmental monitoring, sustainable communities, and science education. In addition, doctor banks Anderson serves on the External Advisory Committee for the Center for Advancement of STEM Leadership. She was then named Co-Chair of the Project Kaleidoscope STEM Leadership Institute and worked with Grassroots Energy Alliance. She was an institutional participant in the Preparing Critical Future Faculty Program and served on the Board of Directors of the Land Loss Prevention Project, the Board of Trustees for North Carolina Environmental Defense, and the Board of Directors of the North Carolina Environmental Education Fund.

She is a member of the Society of Toxicology, the North Carolina Society of Toxicology, and the American Public Health Association. Dr. Anderson received her PhD degree in Environmental Science and Engineering from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, her Master of Science degree in Environmental Health Science from the Harvard School of Public Health, and her Bachelor of Science degree in Medical Technology from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.



Dr. David W. Orr, RBI Board Member

"The Rural Beacon Initiative stands at the crossroads where issues of economic justice, land stewardship, and climate change converge. It is also where a future much better than that in prospect begins, one powered by sunshine and grounded in fairness, neighborliness, ecological competence, and chastened by the knowledge that we are kin to all that ever was, is, ever will be. RBI's methods are practical, grounded in a historic place but its vision is in that great prophetic tradition extending from Isaiah through Martin Luther King and beyond."



A Professor of Practice at Arizona State University, Dr. David Orr is the author of eight books and 250 articles, reviews, book chapters, and professional publications on the subjects of climate change, democracy, and environmental justice. His current work at Arizona State University and Denver is on the repair and strengthening American democracy.

In addition to his work at Arizona State University, Dr. David Orr serves as a Trustee of the Alliance for Sustainable Colorado and Children and Nature Network. A recipient of nine honorary degrees, Dr. Orr has also been awarded the Lyndhurst Prize, a National Achievement Award from the National Wildlife Federation; a "Visionary Leadership Award" from Second Nature; a National Leadership award from the U.S. Green Building Council; a Lifetime Achievement Award from the North American Association for Environmental Education; the 2018 Leadership Award from the American Renewable Energy Institute; and a Lifetime Achievement Award from Green Energy Ohio.



RBI IN ACTION

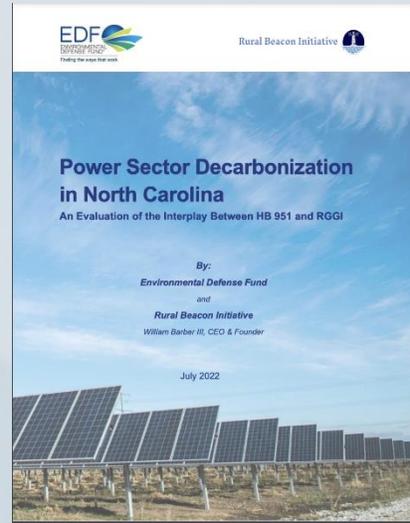


*Interested in requesting an interview/public relations opportunity? [**Click here.**](#)*



Environmental Defense Fund + RBI Analysis on Power Sector Decarbonization in North Carolina

RBI's team worked with the Environmental Defense Fund to evaluate the connections between NC HB 951 and the state's current conversation on joining the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative. The analysis found that RGGI could be an integral tool for NC to reduce emissions and meet the state's carbon reduction goals, but only if protections to ratepayers and commitments to environmental justice were maintained.



[Click here to access the report.](#)

RBI Goes to NREL



In October of 2022, RBI was hosted at the [National Renewable Energy Laboratory](#) to join the Office of Clean Energy Demonstrations and discuss Energy Improvements in Rural Areas. There, our team joined a group of experts and innovators to discuss solutions to our current climate crisis and discussed RBI's model that blends nature-based solutions and technology deployment as a way to achieve real results.



Specifically, RBI explored how regional economic development can be integrated with clean energy projects, such as financing, local and regional economic development planning and impact, project management structures, and the potential and pathway for community ownership—particularly in rural America.

Operated by the Alliance for Sustainable Energy, LLC, The National Renewable Energy Laboratory is a national laboratory of the U.S. Department of Energy, Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy.

Our Story Featured in The Nation Magazine

Our flagship project, the Free Union Farm Sustainability Hub was profiled in a dual feature by The Nation and The Margin magazines. The article, entitled *Rebuilding the Homestead: How Black Landowners in Eastern North Carolina are Recovering Generational Wealth Lost to Industry Encroachment*, focused on the deeper story of the tri-



How Black Landowners in the South Are Recovering Lost Generational Wealth

www.thenation.com • 17 min read

racial isolate of Free Union, the local history of self-determination and land ownership by free people of color, and how RBI’s project plans to ensure the preservation of this history even as it plots a plan to bring the community forward into a sustainable future. Through the creation of a low-carbon, self-sustaining, regenerative food system,—powered by clean energy—the project will work to address food access and demonstrate energy resilience, all while being done in a way that is replicable for BIPOC landowners across the region. [Click here to read the full story.](#)

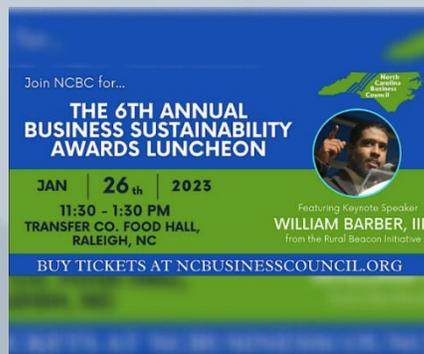


Op-Ed: Ensuring Climate Justice in North Carolina



In December of 2022, our founder, William J. Barber, III co-authored an op-ed in the Charlotte Observer with Ethan Blumenthal, founder of Good Solar. The article, entitled Ensuring Climate Justice in North Carolina, discussed the North Carolina Utilities Commission's review of the state Carbon Plan, and opportunities to advance environmental justice through the promotion of inclusive clean energy programs. Read more [here](#).

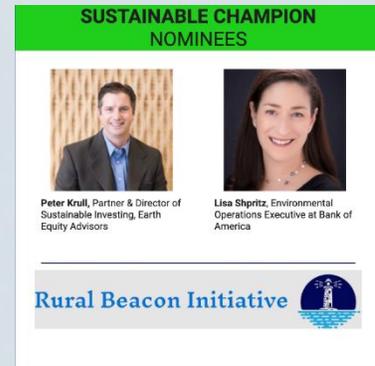
North Carolina Sustainable Business Council's 6th Annual Business Sustainability Awards Luncheon



On January 26th, the North Carolina Business Council will host its 6th Annual Business Sustainability Awards Luncheon in Raleigh, North Carolina. The luncheon seeks to convene business leaders who are paving the way to **Transforming How We Do Business For Good!** Attendees will hear innovative entrepreneurs tell how their sustainable and triple bottom line business practices have propelled them to success while enhancing our communities and protecting our environment.



This year, our founder and CEO, William J. Barber III will deliver the keynote address for the Luncheon, focusing on opportunities for local businesses to contribute to addressing the climate crisis. Additionally, RBI has the honor of being nominated to receive the Council’s Sustainable Champion award. The **North Carolina Business Council** is a statewide coalition of businesses and business partners who have a passion for creating purpose-driven businesses. Founded in 2014, its membership represents businesses from a wide range of industries. We believe that together businesses have the power to influence business policies today that ensure long-term profitability, protect the environment, and sustain communities.



RBI Joins the Council for Inclusive Capitalism

RBI was welcomed as a new member into The Council for Inclusive Capitalism at the start of 2023. The Council is a global movement of leaders doing business in ways that benefit people, our communities, and the planet. Members commit to engaging in business in ways that lead to a more inclusive and sustainable economy.



Meredith Sumpter, CEO, said this of RBI’s new membership: “[RBI’s] mission to advance community ownership in the new clean energy economy and commitment to advancing local climate training to increase community resilience is truly inspiring. I am grateful to you for sharing your leadership with the Council community.

The Council for Inclusive Capitalism includes a just energy transition framework includes four focus areas: universal net-zero energy, workforce evolution, community resilience, and collaboration and transparency. Learn more [here](#).

SUPPORTING OUR WORK: OUR CURRENT 2023 PARTNERSHIPS

Our work is made possible through the generous support of our funders and investors. RBI sits as a social enterprise, while our flagship project, the Free Union Farm Sustainability Hub is fiscally sponsored by Croatan Institute, a 501(C)3 organization.



Interested in discussing foundational investments and/or partnership with Rural Beacon? [Connect here](#)



Wallace Global Fund Catalytic Grant

Wallace Global Fund

RBI was honored to have received a \$30,000 catalytic grant from [Wallace Global Fund](#) to ground and jumpstart our work at the Free Union Farm Sustainability Hub.

Historically, philanthropy has often operated through siloed program strategies that dilute impact and stifle transformative change. Wallace Global Fund is committed to breaking that cycle by driving people-powered solutions. Doing so requires an integrated and holistic approach that supports movement-based organizing and advocacy, drives strategic litigation, convenes leaders and funders across sectors, and funds critical research tied to movement outcomes.

Wallace Global Fund supports people-powered movements that advance democracy, protect human rights, and fight for a healthy planet.



**Featured Partnerships:
The Bullard Center for Climate and
Environmental Justice, Sandia National
Laboratory, & Foodshed Capital**



The Bullard Center for Climate and Environmental Justice



Bullard Center for Environmental and Climate Justice

Last year, RBI was excited to announce a partnership with the [Robert D. Bullard Center for Environmental and Climate Justice](#). The partnership seeks to ensure the advancement of climate justice through the deployment of climate and energy solutions that involve frontline communities as active partners in increasing community resilience.

Founded in 2021, The Robert D. Bullard Center for Environmental and Climate Justice at Texas Southern University was launched to address longstanding issues of systemic inequality and structural racism that cause disproportionate pain, suffering, and death in Black and other people of color communities.

Regarding the partnership, Dr. Bullard stated:

“It is a great honor for the Bullard Center for Environmental and Climate Justice at Texas Southern University to partner with Rural Beacon Initiative (RBI) to advance both of our organizations’ mission to confront systems that create and perpetuate environmental, climate and racial injustice.

Both of our larger vision aligns with not only fighting the forces that keep Black people and other communities left behind and locked out of opportunities, but working collaboratively and laser focused, RBI and the Bullard Center are committed to fight just as hard to ensure forgotten communities get their fair share of benefits, investments and funds to support transformative environmental, economic, energy, climate, health and



racial justice change—using rigorous science, community-driven research, policy, civic engagement programming, and effective advocacy.

We seek justice for them with the urgency of now. We seek other partners and allies to join us in this quest for justice.”

In response, William Barber III stated:

“Both of our larger visions align with not only fighting the forces that keep BIPOC individuals locked out of opportunity but working in a collaborative, laser-focused way. We’re fighting to ensure forgotten communities receive their fair share of benefits, investments, and funds for environmental, economic, energy, climate, health, and racial justice change.”

Historically, philanthropy has often operated through siloed program strategies that dilute impact and stifle transformative change. Wallace Global Fund is committed to breaking that cycle by driving people-powered solutions. Doing so requires an integrated and holistic approach that supports movement-based organizing and advocacy, drives strategic litigation, convenes leaders and funders across sectors, and funds critical research tied to movement outcomes.”



Sandia Laboratory



[Sandia National Laboratories](#) is operated and managed by National Technology and Engineering Solutions of Sandia, LLC., a wholly owned subsidiary of Honeywell International, Inc. National Technology and Engineering Solutions of Sandia operates Sandia National Laboratories as a contractor for the U.S. Department of Energy’s National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) and supports numerous federal, state, and local government agencies, companies, and organizations.

In keeping with Sandia’s vision to be the nation’s premier science and engineering laboratory for national security and technology innovation, we recruit the best and the brightest, equip them with world-class research tools and facilities, and provide opportunities to collaborate with technical experts from many different scientific disciplines.

Team RBI is working with Sandia National Laboratories as a member of the Department of Energy’s Boost Platform Energy Innovation Board. The Board works to receive and evaluate viable pathways for technologies and solutions considered for startup or direct industry engagement. As a member of the Board, RBI is committed to leveraging its knowledge in the myriad of needs of frontline communities to ensure benefits for communities are prioritized in the most recent round of energy innovation.



Foodshed Capital



[Foodshed Capital](#) is a Community Development Financial Institution that exists to build more equitable, regenerative foodsheds. Foodshed Capital prioritizes borrowers who may have difficulty accessing capital through traditional lenders, particularly low-income, BIPOC, female, immigrant, LGBTQ, or indigenous individuals. In addition, they equally prioritize borrowers who use regenerative practices, foster soil health and biodiversity, and produce nutrient-dense, culturally appropriate food for their foodsheds.

RBI looks is partnering with Foodshed Capital on the implementation of its project: *Increasing Land Security for BIPOC Farmers Through Innovative Financing and Technical Assistance*. This work will provide technical assistance for underserved producers through workshops that increase awareness of opportunities for renewable energy deployment on farmsteads and rural parcels, as well as distributing educational resources to increase the literacy of and access to green investment capital.



Interested in discussing foundational investments and/or partnership with Rural Beacon? [Connect here](#)



Other Partners & Collaborators

Croatan Insitute



[Croatan Institute](#) is an independent, nonprofit research and action institute whose mission is to build social equity and ecological resilience by leveraging finance to create pathways to a just economy. Since its launch on Earth Day in 2014, Croatan has worked collaboratively with more than 125 organizations, including environmental nonprofits, community development organizations, farmers and land stewards, impact investors, foundations, and government agencies, on complex problems at the intersection of finance, social equity, and ecological resilience. The team has prioritized equity and inclusion, building relationships of trust with practitioners in the field and with movements for social and environmental change to expand the footprint and impact of our work.

VertueLab



[VertueLab](#) is a nonprofit fighting climate change by providing funding and holistic entrepreneurial support to climate tech startups. Through fifteen years of work, VertueLab has proven that their model can accelerate climate solutions that are key to reversing the climate crisis while creating shared economic prosperity.



The Alliance of Native Seedkeepers



[The Alliance of Native Seedkeepers](#) (AoNSK) focuses on the revitalization of indigenous cultural identity through the preservation of 1000 year old ancestral seeds. The Alliance seeks out a future where indigenous peoples may live with the security of food, health, culture, environment, unity, and justice. AoNSK seeks to redevelop the spiritual bonds of the indigenous community with the seeds which in return teaches us how to become more environmentally, culturally, economically, and health conscious.

Providence Omnistructure



[Providence Omnistructure](#) is a social enterprise delivering connectivity for abundance. They accomplish this audacious mission by maximizing social impacts, building digital infrastructure, curating content and delivering connectivity necessary for thriving, future-ready communities. Providence works collaboratively to create economic opportunities, build abundant communities, and bring digital freedom to every under-connected human being.

Optimal Tech



[Optimal Tech](#) intelligently lowers energy costs by up to 60% by identifying, monitoring, controlling, and maintaining your key electrical equipment. Optimal manages any engineering, procurement, and construction for our clients. The Optimal team has managed capital projects exceeding \$600 million USD, developed over 25 commercial and utility scaled solar projects, installed over 1,000 cell towers annually, and developed over 30 unique clean technologies. Their experience spans packaging design, operations and process improvement



RBI: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE



Partnering in Academia to Inspire Student Advocates in Climate Justice:

Duke University's Bass Connection Environmental Justice Oral History Project and DukeEngage

RBI has found a key partner in Duke University via two powerful initiatives— Duke University's Bass Connection EJ Oral History Project and the DukeEngage Program.

Duke University's Bass Connection Environmental Justice Oral History Project



Duke's Bass Connection Environmental Justice Oral History Project is a multi-dimensional storytelling program that aims to elevate and uplift the personal experiences and narratives of historically underserved populations with regard to environmental justice.

This project hopes to document a history of environmental experiences in the American South, injustices and place-based pleasures, through communal storytelling, adding a humanist and documentary perspective on environmental issues while advocating for just, equitable, and anti-racist solutions.



Duke University's DukeEngage Program

A MORE JUST & SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY IS STARTING HERE.

Transformative change is happening in Piney Woods, NC where a coalition of community organizations leverage generational knowledge to lead a sustainability revolution in energy, tech, and food systems. Spend the summer learning and working here and have a profound impact on the political, social, and economic systems in rural America.

INFO SESSION 1/11. SCAN FOR MORE INFO.

DukeEngage

RBI's team is working diligently with a team of student oral historians to capture the narratives of climate justice advocates around the southeast, and also the oral history of Free Union, the host community of the Free Union Farm Sustainability Hub. The oral histories will be compiled and eventually made available to the public via an online archive.

This EJ storytelling hub has five primary components: an oral history collection program and interactive story map; a multi-outlet journalistic endeavor; a series of research projects to develop strategy for impactful, intentional, and meaningful long-term community engagement; a series of nationally-scaled events; and a podcast spotlighting the intergenerational work and motivations of on-the-ground environmental justice advocates.

This project is built upon an ongoing collaboration between Duke's John Hope Franklin Humanities Institute, Duke's Nicholas School of the Environment, and the Center for Rural Enterprise and Environmental Justice.



Duke students will specifically assist with:

- Developing story maps and collecting historical documentary evidence alongside interested community members. Developing educational outreach/programming around all partner projects & efforts
- Supporting the Alliance of Native Seedkeepers' work, including planting native and heirloom crops, plant identification in the native Indigenous languages of the region, tree planting, and all phases of gardening set-up and maintenance
- Supporting & assisting with the redevelopment of Free Union Farm Sustainability Hub, which include a market garden, forestry program, and other regenerative agriculture projects, such as collecting baseline soil and water samples for the site
- Supporting & assisting with renovation efforts of a decommissioned school site with a history as a former all-white segregated high school that became an integrated middle school in Martin County, now being retrofitted for a digital access hub, as well as assisting with developing a satellite location for the hub at the RBI farm site
- Working with the Alliance of Native Seedkeepers to support their seed preservation sanctuary and their expansion gardens at the RBI site
- Conducting programs to assess community members' interest in energy efficiency and/or renewable energy home retrofits (solar panels, energy auditing)

[Click here to learn more.](#)



Partnering to Bring Clean Energy to Historically Black Colleges and Universities



RBI is collaborating with its partner Green Power Ventures and a core of key collaborators in the launch of the Accelerating Climate Resiliency and Renewable Energy (ACRRE) at HBCUs initiative.

The ACCRE @ HBCUs Initiative seeks to lower the cost of electricity by up to 50% for up to 20 HBCUs within the next 36 months. These efforts require no upfront costs. The Initiative will offer engineering, procurement, construction, financing, operating, and maintenance services to selected HBCUs. The solutions will include energy efficiency, energy management, solar power, energy storage, and EV charging based on the customized energy needs of your campus.

Interested **HBCUs** can download our RFP here ([MSFT One Drive](#)) or here ([Google Drive](#)). Once you are ready to submit your proposal, please use the following [online submission form](#)

If you have any questions or comments, please email us at ruralbeaconinitiative@gmail.com.



Our 2023 Commitments

- Conduct a study to quantify the current participation of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) owners in enterprises within the supply chains of regenerative agriculture and clean energy within a 100 mile radius of the Free Union Farm Sustainability Hub.
 - Increase this ownership by 10% over each seven year term.
 - Increase green projects on the part of BIPOC producers by 15 percent
- Develop toolkits that can be dispersed to peer organizations throughout and beyond the region discussing policy incentives for projects. Ensure this toolkit will be utilized by at least 10 users.
- Work with partners to ensure BIPOC growers understand the potential benefits of and financial incentives for Green House Gas (GHG) reductions on their farm. In addition, will provide assistance on planning, budgeting and executing photovoltaic systems on their respective lands requires and the potential reduction in energy costs they could see.
- Train at least 10 BIPOC growers on renewable energy development and strategies to access green investment capital.



Contact Us



 ruralbeaconinitiative.com

 ruralbeaconinitiative@gmail.com

