



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING  
AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
*Partners for Better Communities*

# COMMUNITY BUSINESS LAUNCH

GRANT YEAR 2025  
ANNUAL REPORT



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## CBL Overview

**Community Business Launch (CBL)** is a place-based entrepreneurial development program that fills a critical need in a community's market by filling commercial vacancies, reactivating white elephant buildings, or underutilized properties with expansion or start-up ventures. Local CBL programs train local entrepreneurs and small business owners about business planning practices, culminating 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 ventures.

CBL programs generate excitement and create opportunities for local entrepreneurs. A CBL grant from DHCD leverages local financial and in-kind resources to prepare entrepreneurs to operate successful businesses, whether they win or lose the pitch competition. With very few financing opportunities for entrepreneurs or businesses with less than 2 years of revenue generation, CBL funds mitigate the risk to localities and organizations interested in funding these new businesses, while resulting in high-impact outcomes for each dollar invested (\$1 public: \$4 private). Many local CBL programs continue to replicate the holistic strategy even after DHCD funds have been spent. When preceded by thorough market analysis and relentless outreach, followed by ongoing business retention efforts, a CBL program is a key building block in a coordinated, comprehensive, and sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystem of community-based entrepreneurs and small businesses.

# Projected Community Outcomes

Fiscal Year 2025

## Hillsville, Virginia

### BUSINESS HIGHLIGHT | UP N DOWN CAFÉ

Originally opened by owner Aniello Palumbo in October 2023, Up n Down Café offers everything from your morning coffee fix to your evening glass of wine. In addition, they specialize in homemade gelato, fresh-baked pastries, and delicious meals. Palumbo joined the Hillsville CBL cohort in early 2025 and won \$9,500 in the pitch competition to expand Up n Down Café. He intends to use the award funds to create additional dining space and expand their menu offerings, including beer and wine.



**\$67,500**

Private investment\* (to date)

**15**

Entrepreneurs  
trained

**15**

Jobs  
created/retained

**5**

Businesses  
created/expanded

**1**

Buildings  
filled



**\$7,500**

Private investment\* (to date)

**15**

Entrepreneurs  
trained

**12**

Jobs  
created/retained

**5**

Businesses  
created/expanded

**5**

Buildings  
filled

## Lynchburg, Virginia

### BUSINESS HIGHLIGHT | SCRAPPY ELEPHANT

The Scrappy Elephant keeps unwanted art and craft materials out of landfills and circulates them back into the community at affordable prices through a retail store and studio. Originally opening in Charlottesville, founder Sarah Sweet decided to open a pop-up shop in Lynchburg to see if the market could support a second location. After completing the Downtown Lynchburg Association's Launch LYH program, the Scrappy Elephant was selected as a pitch winner and awarded \$20,000. Scrappy Elephant plans to make their current pop-up location its permanent location in downtown Lynchburg.



# Mount Jackson, Virginia

## BUSINESS HIGHLIGHT VALLEY TRAIL BIKE AND RUN

Valley Trail Bike and Run was born from a simple idea: to create a welcoming space for everyone – whether a competitive athlete, a weekend warrior, or someone just looking for comfortable and supportive gear to enjoy life at their own pace. With deep roots in the Shenandoah Valley, founders (and cousins) Trey and Brice Nelson saw an opportunity to serve their community with expert service and a passion for the outdoors. After receiving \$20,000 from Mount Jackson's Mount Jackson Five pitch competition, Tray and Brice opened Valley Trail Bike and Run, conveniently located along the future Shenandoah Rail Trail, ready to assist all outdoor enthusiasts who find themselves exploring the beauty of the valley.



**\$137,500**

Private investment\* (to date)

**12**

Entrepreneurs  
trained

**12**

Jobs  
created/retained

**4**

Businesses  
created/expanded

**4**

Buildings  
filled



# Community Success Story | Launch LYH

Downtown Lynchburg Association (DLA) has been a designated Virginia Main Street community for 25 years. While many business districts saw doors shutter and disinvestment during the COVID-19 pandemic, Lynchburg was presented with an additional obstacle from 2020–2023: a full-blown reconstruction of its Main Street from a one-way into a two-way street. Coupled together, Lynchburg ended up with a 27% vacancy rate. DLA decided to address the setback proactively by recruiting and training entrepreneurs to fill the vacancies left by the pandemic and transform the downtown into a tourist destination, focused on restaurants, retail, and experiential businesses.

In 2025, DLA received a Community Business Launch grant for \$100,000, the third and final installment of its Launch LYH program. DLA received over 100 applications to participate in the 2025 program. After selecting 20 entrepreneurs, DLA awarded funds and other in-kind services to five businesses, including Dimora, Cast Iron Pizza, Laney Kickz, Scrappy Elephant, and Needle Ninja. Since the program's launch, Lynchburg has trained 56 local entrepreneurs, created or expanded 17 businesses, created or retained 44 jobs, filled over 68,000 square feet of previously vacant spaces, and facilitated over \$1.8 million in private investment for downtown Lynchburg. Additionally, it has decreased vacancy by 6% in just two years.

As vacant buildings were restored and filled with viable businesses, Lynchburg experienced investments in areas that it had not initially anticipated from the Launch LYH program. Downtown building owners recognized the increased interest in downtown commercial real estate as



an opportunity for additional investment. As a result, many upper stories of newly occupied buildings were renovated into residential and business spaces.

# Program Outcomes to Date (since 2015)

Through its 10 years of work, CBL has completed 11 rounds of funding, assisting **35** communities, creating **250** businesses and over **750** jobs, filling over 175 previously vacant properties, and injecting over \$12 million in additional investment across Virginia.

**\$12.58M**  
Private investment leveraged

**1,270**  
Entrepreneurs trained

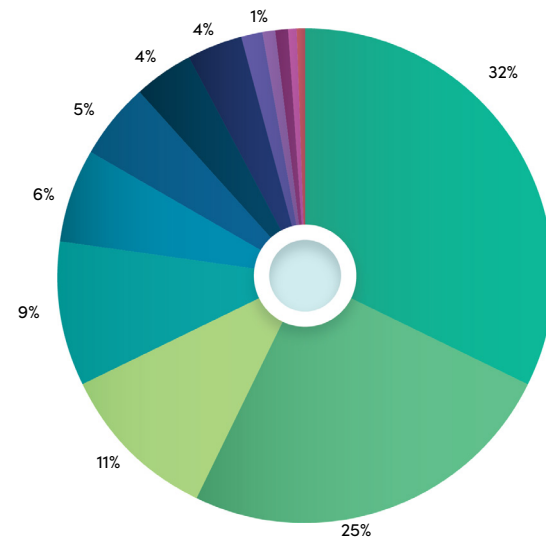
**790**  
Jobs created/retained

**250**  
Businesses created/expanded

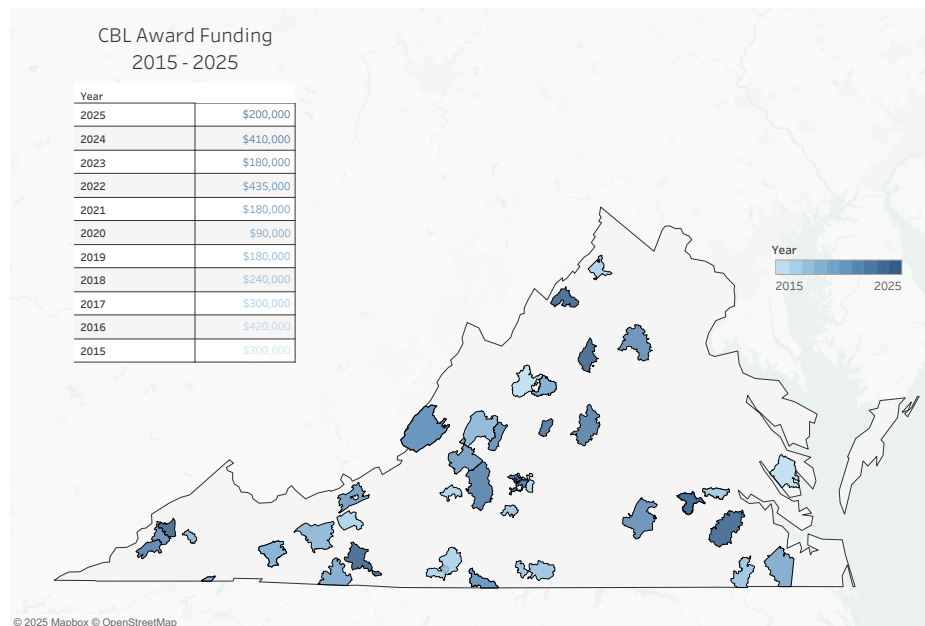
**182**  
Vacancies filled

**35**  
Communities assisted

## Community Business Launch 2015-2025 Business Types



- Retail Trade
- Accommodation & Food Services
- Art, Entertainment, & Recreation
- Manufacturing
- Other Services
- Educational Services
- Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services
- Healthcare and Social Assistance
- Admin, Support, Waste Management & Remediation Services
- Transportation and Warehousing
- Wholesale Trade
- Information
- Construction







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