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RESEARCH ON RESILIENT CITIES,
RACISM, AND EQUITY

Spring 2026 Newsletter



Greetings from the Director

Happy New Year! As we begin the new year, I find myself reflecting on 2025 as a year defined by complexity, and difficult times. Across Hartford and across our campus, we are navigating economic uncertainty, rapid technological shifts, and continuing demands for equity and access in higher education. We face these in a society that continues to be increasingly hostile toward social change(s) and an ever-expanding definition of DEIx. These challenges are real, and they shape the daily experiences of our students, faculty, staff, and community partners.

Yet within these pressures and within what may seem to be daily chaos, we also see something unmistakably hopeful: the resilience of our city, the creativity of our researchers, and the strength of our partnerships. At RRCRE, we have always understood that our greatest progress comes when we work with our community, not merely for it. This academic year, we are deepening that commitment—expanding collaborative research initiatives with our emerging UConn Hartford CoLAB (in partnership with RRCRE, UConn Hartford Library, and the Department of Social and Critical Inquiry; co-directed by myself and Karen Tatarka), collaborating with units across UConn to offer programs (e.g. learning ArcGIS Storymaps) and conferences centered on community engagement.



In this new year, you will learn more about new applied research efforts, community-engaged learning opportunities, and cross-campus partnerships designed to make our work more impactful, transparent, and inclusive. We will also be launching new platforms to ensure that community voices guide our priorities and shape the questions we ask as scholars. This includes the Hartford Project, our attempt at creating a centralized hub that we hope will function as a “one-stop shop” for anyone seeking information on the historical and cultural records and collections within the City of Hartford. We hope to also revitalize our affiliates program and will be reaching out to former (and potential) faculty and staff to update and/or add their information to our database. Finally, we hope to take advantage of our growing campus and the new dorms to elevate student-centered projects that respond directly to community needs and strengthening relationships with local organizations who share our vision of a more connected and equitable Hartford.

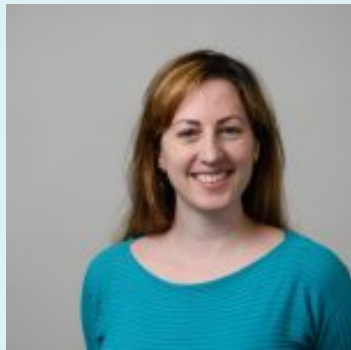
The years ahead of us may continue to be challenging, but perhaps the pendulum is soon to swing the other way. Perhaps we can also envision a year rich with opportunity—an opportunity to innovate, to listen, and to build together. I am grateful for every student, faculty member, staff colleague, and community partner who continues to show up with curiosity, generosity, and a belief in what we can achieve.

Thank you for being part of this work. I look forward to all we will accomplish together in the year ahead.

David G. Embrick
Director of Research and Community Engagement at UConn Hartford
Director, RRCRE



A Note from the Assistant Director



As a child, I always loved reading giant paper maps on family road trips; it felt exciting and empowering to know exactly where we were and to confidently look ahead to where we were going.

These days, GIS (geographic information systems) mapping software can apply that same utility to community-based research – an approach we are fully embracing here at RRCRE. Well-designed maps are excellent tools for both insightful analysis and effective communication. Additionally, our early forays into the use of GIS have been enthusiastically received by our research and community partners, and GIS research seems encouragingly resilient in a volatile national funding environment. While GIS certainly isn't the only analytical skill set at our disposal, we're actively exploring new

ways it can help us meet community needs and forge new partnerships: from the map-based Hartford Project prototypes, to our new GIS workshop series in partnership with UConn Library, to creating a multimedia-rich showcase of urban neighborhood revitalization projects and beyond.

We're looking forward to the journey ahead - and hope you'll join us along the way!

Rachel Smith Hale
Assistant Director, RRCRE



RRCRE News

New Space for Hartford TechBridge Participants Opens at RRCRE

Hartford teens pursuing career opportunities and mentoring in IT and computer science have a new downtown hangout spot: The BEACH! Located in RRCRE's new suite at 229 Trumbull St, the BEACH (the Belonging, Engagement, and Affinity Computer Hangout) is equipped with workstations and 3D printers for Hartford TechBridge participants to learn and practice new skills at their own pace, with UConn professionals on hand to answer questions and provide mentoring opportunities. (There's also a game console or two and plenty of snacks to encourage some well-deserved downtime and camaraderie.)



Hartford TechBridge is [a multi-pronged program for Hartford high schoolers interested in computer science](#) funded by a \$2.9 million NTIA grant. Hartford TechBridge aims to equip Hartford students with skills for college and career success by providing resources like laptops, internet access (mobile hotspots), networking opportunities, coding camps, and more throughout the year.

Informing State Policy Through Sharing Research



In December 2024, Assistant Director Rachel Smith Hale presented RRCRE research to the Connecticut General Assembly as a part of the second annual “Moving Beyond Implications: Research into Policy” conference. Alongside UConn Associate Professor of Geography Peter Chen, Hale argued in favor of increased support of GIS-related research projects as a valuable tool for measuring community impact and facilitating public outreach. This presentation and its policy recommendations, highlighted in a [UConn Today article](#), directly led to a proposed bill ([H.B. 6422](#)) in the state legislature that encourages increased collaboration with universities and overall funding related to community-centered GIS projects.

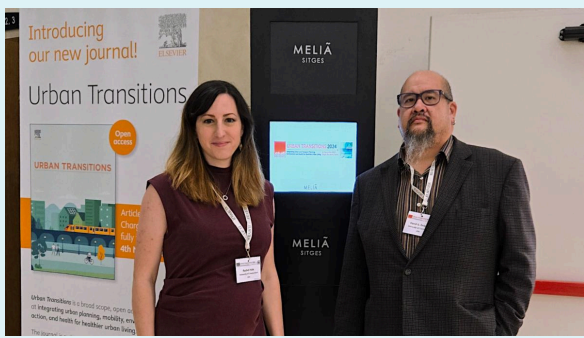
New Workshop Series!

RRCRE is proud to partner with UConn's Map and Geographic Information Center ([MAGIC](#)) to present a series of interactive GIS workshops at UConn Hartford! The first, **Digital Storytelling using ArcGIS StoryMaps**, took place this past March in the newly-renovated UConn Hartford library space at Hartford Public Library. This in-person workshop is an interactive introduction to ArcGIS StoryMaps – the same software used to create [RRCRE's first Love Your Block interactive map](#). These workshops are free and open to all members of the UConn community (students, staff, and faculty) who are interested in learning about this versatile program. Stay tuned for future workshop dates!



International Recognition for Hartford-Based Research

RRCRE was honored to be invited to the [2024 Urban Transitions conference](#) in Sitges, Spain this past



November. RRCRE presented on one of the Initiative's most impactful projects with her talk "[The Hartford Love Your Block Project](#): Using ArcGIS Storymaps to Capture Neighborhood Belonging and Change." The scholarly feedback received on the project will help inform the exciting and expansive next phase of the Love Your Block project.

Welcome Katalina Euraque!

After many years of University service, including several with RRCRE, Kathy Foley has retired as of December 2024. We wish Kathy all the best in her retirement, and extend an enthusiastic welcome to our new administrative assistant: Katalina Euraque!

Katalina has provided operational and administrative support to various social impact organizations over the last 8 years, enhancing cross-collaboration, creative problem solving, and contributing to the development of equitable and inclusive environments. She's excited to join the team, rooted in her love for Hartford and Connecticut.



RRCRE Project Updates



Big news for Hartford parks: Construction will soon begin on the [Joe Marfuggi Riverwalk](#) – a new 100 acre public park running alongside 2.5 miles of the Connecticut River shoreline in Hartford!

RRCRE was chosen to curate educational content for six outdoor "gallery" areas within this new park. With the help of an interdisciplinary panel of UConn experts, we have provided over 13,000 words of text and dozens of images that will be installed in six permanent, weatherproof displays along the park's paved multi-use trail. After construction begins, RRCRE will work alongside the project's Design Team to provide curatorial input on the final design layouts for these galleries. (Concept art courtesy of Riverfront Recapture.)



RRCRE is now several months into a two-year extension of its partnership with the City of Hartford and Hartford Foundation for Public Giving for documenting [Hartford's Love Your Block program](#), which provides small grants to city residents for neighborhood revitalization and beautification projects.

Our newest cohort of undergraduate researchers are busy interviewing project leaders and gathering vital data -- including photographs and stunning drone footage -- about these projects. Meanwhile, RRCRE is building an all-new, multimedia-rich ArcGIS map where users will be able to search for, interact with, and view the impact of several years' worth of Love Your Block projects throughout Hartford.



The conceptual framework for **the Hartford Project** is coming into focus! This project will fill a valuable community need by creating a free, interactive, map-based finding aid for anyone seeking information on the numerous Hartford institutions that hold historical and cultural records and collections. RRCRE continues to solicit community feedback via surveys and email outreach. Preliminary feedback stressed the importance of ease-of-use and access -- which is why we're now prioritizing adding a mobile app version of the Project as well.

You can learn more about the Hartford Project – and find out how to leave a suggestion for a Hartford institution you think it should highlight – on [RRCRE's Hartford Project website](#).

New Semester, New Space!



RRCRE's long-awaited research suite is now open at 229 Trumbull Street, adjacent to PeoplesBank Arena (formerly the XL Center). Our new space contains offices for RRCRE staff, dropdown space for our affiliates, student workstations, and a conference room. RRCRE also maintains a dropdown office at the Hartford Times Building and makes frequent use of UConn Library space at Hartford Public Library's Main Street location. We're committed to meeting our colleagues and partners wherever they are able to join us!

Collaborative Research for Stronger Communities

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