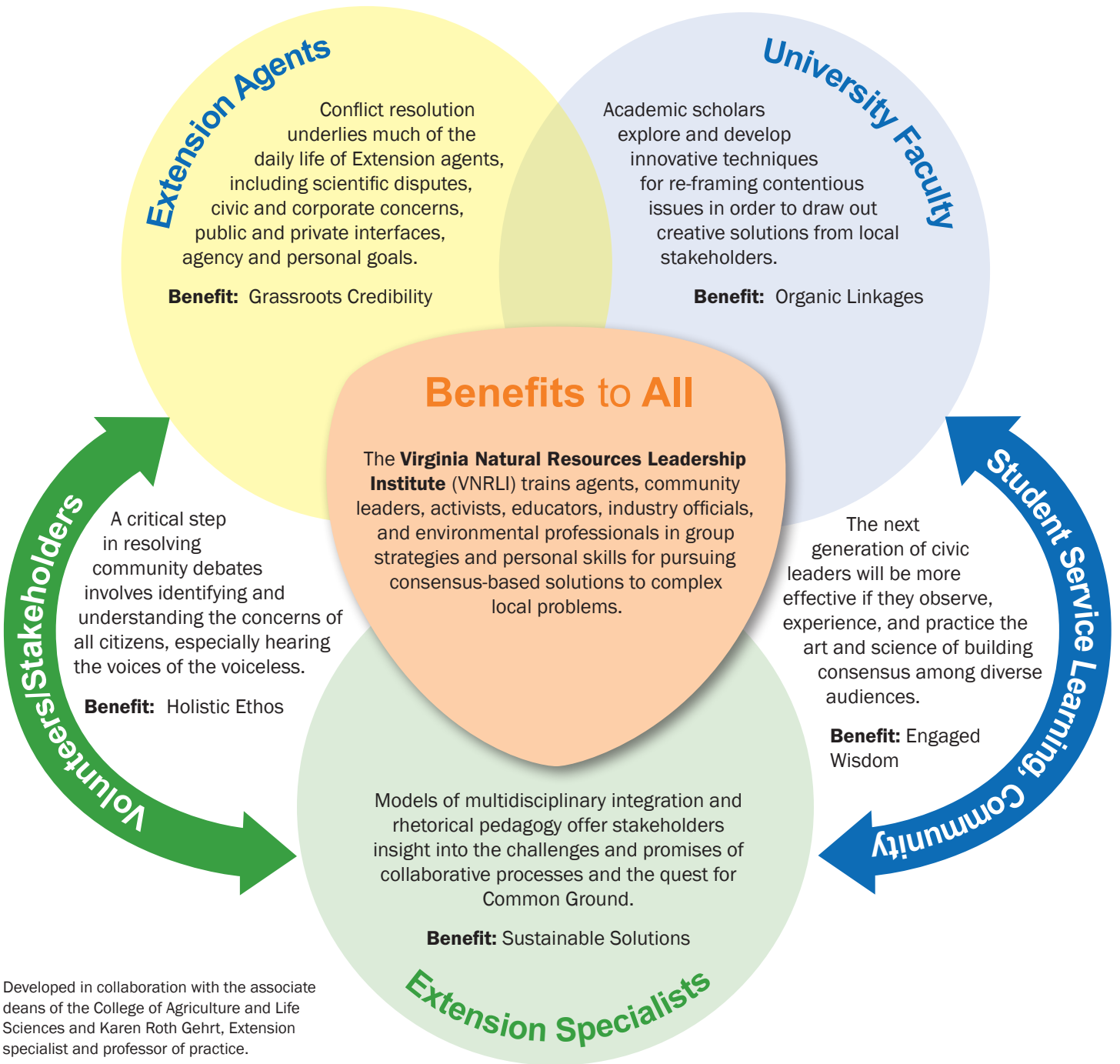


# Common Ground: How Can Virginia Cooperative Extension Promote Civic Harmony in Our Polarized World?



Developed in collaboration with the associate deans of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and Karen Roth Gehrt, Extension specialist and professor of practice.

Nothing is more impactful than university faculty using the tripartite mission of discovery, learning, and outreach to impact people and their communities. University and Extension faculty, volunteers, associations, and students have wonderful opportunities to partner through applied research projects and educational programs that foster positive changes in the lives of Virginians. Let's work together for the benefit of everyone!

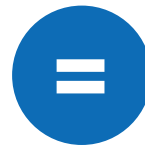
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University  
faculty



Extension agents  
and specialists



A powerful  
potential to change  
the lives of people  
through research, behavior  
change, and economic and  
social impact

Community Conflict Resolution has been traditionally conducted via adversarial and legalistic processes that leave some citizens feeling disenfranchised from helping to shape their community's future quality of life. Founded by Virginia Cooperative Extension Economist Mike Ellerbrock, the *Virginia Natural Resources Leadership Institute* (VNRLI) trains community leaders in developing consensus-based solutions for resolving environmental conflicts. Now in its 14th year, more than 400 fellows have enrolled in the yearlong program, which is held in six environmentally stressed areas across the state. VNRLI was honored by the Virginia General Assembly in *Joint Resolution No. 865*, in February 2009.

### Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Tech, and Virginia State University Faculty Participants

*Mike Ellerbrock, Jim Pease, Bruce Hull, Marcus Comer, Don Orth, Bob Smith, Steve McMullin, Carl Zipper, Jonah Fogel, Mike Roberts, Matt Benson, Brian Benham, Jesse Richardson, Greg Evanylo, Erin James Ling, Katharine Knowlton, Jewell Hairston, Brian Bond, Neil Clark, Jennifer Gagnon, Jason Fisher, John McGee, Greg Frey, Dave Close, Lara Browning, Alycia Crall, Dan Goerlich, Martha Walker*



Since my VNRLI experience, I have left state government, where I served as a regional manager, and joined the nonprofit world as the Virginia director for the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay. I think it's definitely been a move up, and my work certainly requires more collaborative partnerships than ever before. We are currently being sought as a partner in many initiatives in Virginia, and I'd like to think that's due to a lot of the skills I learned and practiced through VNRLI. I continually work on actively listening to our stakeholders and partners and really believe that is key to succeeding at any endeavor.

*Nissa Dean, Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay*



My fellow classmates and I have shared lots of thoughts on program management and "big picture" strategy with regard to Extension programming. I have also found a good "in" with other classes of VNRLI — when I hear that someone else is a graduate, I feel that we have so much in common, knowing that we have been through this great process and have been exposed to a variety of complex issues across the state. I also really value my continued relationship with IEN and seek out opportunities to work with the faculty whenever possible.

*Erin James Ling, Household Water Quality Program, Virginia Tech*



Because of the connections I made in VNRLI, I am better able to navigate complex, interagency projects such as the Chesapeake Bay TMDL. Because of the skills I gained in VNRLI, I am better able to aid my department and fellow staff in daily processes, from meeting facilitation to problem solving to strategic planning as a group.

*Anne Darby, Richmond Regional Planning District*



The skills that I learned in VNRLI have helped me become a better listener, which has improved my ability to understand and integrate different perspectives into community-based planning efforts. I have also developed an increased appreciation for the value of collaboration following completion of the VNRLI course. While a collaborative approach to a task may take more time and energy, I believe it is far more likely to result in a sustained effort due to the investment that multiple partners have in seeing it succeed. VNRLI helped me to slow down and realize that building a strong foundation for community-based planning projects is well worth the additional time and effort.

*Neshia McRae, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation*



My experience with VNRLI has brought me success on many levels and in many projects. For example, a terrific lesson I learned is to be invested in the process, not the outcome. Prior to VNRLI, I prided myself in being collaborative, but after VNRLI I learned what collaborative truly means — giving all partners an opportunity to weigh in without controlling the outcome. It has been a pleasant surprise to no longer be invested in the outcome and to see what takes shape based on the players at the table!

*Jill Jefferson, Sustainable Agriculture Program Manager, University of Maryland*

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