EASTERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF BUSINESS

LIBERTY BANK
Be Community Kind.™

SMALL BUSINESS RESOURCE CENTER

ANNUAL REPORT
2025-2026

The ECSU-Liberty Bank Small Business Resource Center (SBRC) empowers entrepreneurs by providing free and accessible resources, education, and mentorship. Through community-based consulting and entrepreneurial support, Eastern students, faculty, and partner organizations actively engage with local businesses, contributing to the long-term economic vitality of Willimantic and the surrounding region.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During its first year, the Small Business Resource Center (SBRC) at Eastern Connecticut State University focused on strengthening connections between the university, local businesses, entrepreneurs, and community organizations throughout eastern Connecticut. Through educational workshops, networking events, and strategic partnerships, the SBRC worked to expand access to business resources, encourage collaboration, and support regional economic development.

Key initiatives during the year emphasized community engagement, professional development, and experiential learning opportunities for students while building a foundation for long-term economic growth and sustainability for community members.



ECSU–LIBERTY BANK SBRC

Liberty Bank Partnership

"The center will focus on small business development services, with a special emphasis on supporting women entrepreneurs, veterans, and those historically disenfranchised from the local business community."

— Cooperation Agreement between Eastern and Liberty Bank

August 19, 2025
Formalized partnership

ER SC

$25,000
Liberty Bank Foundation grant funding

"The best of public-private partnership with Eastern and the town."

Glenn Davis — VP of Community Development, Liberty Bank



[Eastern partners with Liberty Bank, Town of Windham to boost local businesses]

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Launch Event

September 22, 2025

Eastern Connecticut State University hosted a community networking event on Sept. 22 at the J. Eugene Smith Library for its recently formalized Small Business Resource Center (SBRC).

HIGHLIGHTS

- Co-sponsored by: Northeastern Chamber of Commerce, Women's Business Development Council, and Willimantic Downtown Neighborhood Association.
- "One of the core principles of good business education is to have a positive societal impact" — *Dr. Niti Pandey*
- "We have amazing entrepreneurs in our community and it's great to have these resources from Eastern and Liberty Bank in one place." — *CT State Senator Mae Flexer*
- "At Horizons, we know the growing pains of starting a small business. We want to partner with Eastern students to help us in the areas we are not good at." — *Chris McNaboe, Chair of WDNA & CEO of Horizons*



[Willimantic businesses rally behind new Small Business Resource Center]

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Academy for Small Businesses

October 14 – November 13, 2025

The academy included a series of 10 lectures by an assortment of Eastern faculty members and local industry professionals, designed to assist both local entrepreneurs and Eastern students in developing their small businesses through networking opportunities, financial resources, professional guidance, and more.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The Academy for Small Business was attended by at least 10 local small businesses and entrepreneurs from across the Eastern Connecticut region.
- Following the successful completion of the program, participating business owners can apply for a $5,000 business line of credit from Liberty Bank.
- Featured lectures included *"Is Owning a Small Business Right for You?"*, *"Banking Services and Credit Reporting"*, and *"Risk Management."*



Local entrepreneurs attend Eastern's first Small Business Academy

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Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program

February 7 – April 12, 2026

The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program provided free income tax preparation services to low- and moderate-income individuals and families across the state of Connecticut.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Partnership with United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut and The Village for Families and Children.
- Supported by 11 active ECSU student volunteers and interns who assisted with tax preparation, client support, and program operations throughout the tax season.
- Successfully completed and accepted 291 tax returns, helping provide valuable financial assistance and tax support to individuals and families within the community.
- Served as both an English- and Spanish-speaking VITA site, helping expand accessibility and support for members of the local community.

11	291	2
Student volunteers & interns	Tax returns completed	Languages served (EN & ES)



Eastern students bring tax savings to Willimantic residents

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Marketing Basics for Small Businesses

April 13, 2026

An interactive session where small business owners learned practical marketing tips and strategies to help grow sales and reach more customers.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Co-sponsored with Women's Business Development Council (WBDC) to provide marketing education and business development resources for local entrepreneurs and small businesses.
- Attended by 8 local small businesses and entrepreneurs from across the Eastern Connecticut region.
- Topics covered included the *"4 Levers of Marketing"* — Lever 1: The Solution (Product/Service), Lever 2: The Value Exchange (Price), Lever 3: The Access Point (Place), and Lever 4: The Message (Promotion).

LEVER 1	LEVER 2	LEVER 3	LEVER 4
The Solution *Product / Service*	**The Value Exchange**	**The Access Point** *Place*	**The Message** *Promotion*



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Business Networking Event

May 12, 2026

The Small Business Resource Center and Eastern Connecticut Professionals hosted a business networking event that brought together local businesses, local and regional chambers, and entrepreneurs for an opportunity to connect, learn, and build meaningful professional relationships.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Hosted in partnership with Eastern Connecticut Professionals and coordinated alongside an ECSU finance course, *"Financial Literacy & Our Community,"* helping strengthen connections between students, faculty, local businesses, and community professionals.
- More than 40 local businesses, entrepreneurs, and community members attended the networking event.
- The event expanded the Center's contact list to more than 50 individuals connected to SBRC programs, events, and business resources.

40+	50+	1
Attendees	SBRC network contacts	Course integration



"We were impressed by the range of businesses and their varied expertise, but mostly by their thoughtful questions. Everyone in the class learned from each other's questions and experiences."

JM

John McGrath
Lawyer & former business law lecturer — "Organizational Types" session, Academy for Small Business

"When making connections with other local business owners, we bounce a lot of ideas off each other."

SO

Shea O'Connor
Owner, East Coast Pawz — participant, Academy for Small Business

"Experience in the VITA program helps students bridge the gap between theory and practice in the real world. Students learn what it really means to be in the work environment."

CM

Chelagat Misiko
Accounting Lecturer, ECSU — VITA Site Coordinator

"I was excited to bring the Academy for Small Business's quality and standard to Eastern and to use Eastern's presence in the community to help people feel they are part of the academy."

PD

Pamela Days-Luketich
VP of Community Development, Liberty Bank — ECSU lecturer

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Upcoming Events & Next Steps

The SBRC looks forward to continuing its growth through upcoming workshops, networking opportunities, and community-focused programming, while expanding engagement, strengthening partnerships, and supporting small business growth throughout Eastern Connecticut.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Business Plan Workshop
Summer 2026

Housing Resource Fair
Summer 2026

Small Business Matchmaker
Summer 2026

Academy for Small Business
October 29 *November 12*

FUTURE PRIORITIES & KEY TARGETS

Expand SBRC Community Contact Network	100+
Strengthen Community Partnerships	10+
Increase Student & Faculty Engagement	25% +
Launch Faculty & Student Consulting Support	1+

NOW LAUNCHING

SBRC Summer 2026 Internship

The SBRC is hiring its first-ever student intern within the College of Business — a key step in expanding the Center's reach through event planning, community outreach, and marketing initiatives.

- Event coordination
- Marketing & outreach
- Community engagement
- Research & administration

For more information and additional details please visit our website
https://www.easternct.edu/college-of-business/sbrc.html

Contact us: sbrc@easternct.edu