



FY26 Annual Report

June 23, 2026

Mission Statement: The Center for Community Research and Evaluation (CCRE) was founded in June 2020 with a mission to **provide interdisciplinary social science research and evaluation support for community-based projects.**

Vision Statement: CCRE's vision is to support the community as:

- (1) The Mid-South's **premier consultancy** for community partners seeking to assess impact, collect and analyze data, and solve problems using data science, statistical analysis, mixed-methods evaluation, economic/demographic analysis, and social scientific methodology.
- (2) A **force multiplier for community partners and University faculty** addressing critical needs in education, public health, criminal justice, and economic development.

CCRE Personnel: As of June 2026, CCRE has a staff size of 22.

- **Wesley James, Ph.D.**, Executive Director
- **Jonathan Bennett, Ph.D.**, Associate Director
- **6 full-time research personnel** including three PhDs
- **2 part-time research employees** and **7 affiliated research interns**
- **4 full-time and 1 part-time economic development specialists** implementing Upskill Mid-South

CCRE is supported by **16 Faculty Affiliates** across the University of Memphis and beyond, providing expertise across 8 academic disciplines. CCRE is further advised by its **Advisory Board:**

- **Sydney Ashby**, Director of Clinic Partnerships and Grants, A Step Ahead Foundation
- **Zoë Beckham**, Tennessee Director, Partners for Rural Impact
- **Jarad Bingham**, Principal, Dragonfly Collective
- **Patrick "Trey" Carter, III**, President, Olympic Career Training Institute
- **Mary Earheart-Brown**, Research Administration Consultant
- **Dr. Susan Elswick**, Faculty Affiliate (Social Work)
- **Dorcas Young Griffin**, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer, Shelby County Government
- **Dr. Katherine Lambert-Pennington**, Faculty Affiliate (Anthropology/SUAPP)
- **Valerie Matthews**, Director, Joint Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement
- **Dr. Timothy McCuddy**, Faculty Affiliate (Sociology)
- **Dr. Gregory Washington**, Faculty Affiliate (Social Work)
- **Brooks Young**, Director, TNWorks, TN Department of Labor and Workforce Development

Summary of Activities of the Last 12 Months

Education & Public Health

- Completed 12th year of providing evaluation services for **Delta Health Alliance**, including ~80 evaluation reports completed/projected during the fiscal year
- Secured a commitment from DHA for an **additional three-year, \$2.5 million grant** to continue services for Delta Health Alliance programming in education and public health
- Supported **Consilience Group** on a community health assessment for St. Louis County, Missouri
- Completed a study for **Urban Institute's Student Upward Mobility Initiative** to evaluate the impacts of non-cognitive skills in early adolescence on economic mobility later in life
- Submitted a proposal to evaluate Tennessee's \$206m **Rural Health Transformation Initiative**
- Submitted **7 papers to academic journals**

Economic Development

- **Enrolled over 1,000 individuals in Upskill Mid-South training programs during the fiscal year to date (over 2,300 total)**, upskilling the workforce for in-demand jobs in advanced manufacturing, logistics, and construction
- Collaborated with the City of Memphis Division of Finance, **advising the Memphis Mayor** on revenue and tax projections for the City's fiscal year 2027 budget
- Completed an **economic impact analysis of specialty crop production investments** in the Mississippi River Delta region in collaboration with ACRE, and contributed to three grant submissions to enhance the agricultural economy

Criminal Justice

- Secured a \$300,000 grant with Shelby County Government to launch the **CLEAR Initiative**, significantly enhancing the reporting infrastructure for the Shelby County criminal justice system, with positive downstream impacts on local public safety research and analysis
- Collaborated with the Shelby County Government to establish the **Interagency Justice Operations Workgroup dashboard**, supporting the county's top leaders in addressing high caseloads during the Memphis Safe Task Force
- Completed a high-profile project to evaluate the Shelby County **bail and pretrial detention** system
- Completed two evaluations for the Memphis Police Department's **crisis intervention team**
- Initiated a new partnership with the **Joint Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement** to support the violence intervention ecosystem with data collection for impact assessment

Public Scholarship Spotlight

In fiscal year 2026, CCRE research was highlighted in *Propublica*, *MLK50*, *The Daily Memphian*, *The Commercial Appeal*, *WREG*, *Action News 5*, and at multiple national conferences.

Strategic Plan

CCRE is aligned with the University's ASCEND strategic plan, most significantly with the University's Goal 4: Strengthen the Research Enterprise:

“Perform life-changing, interdisciplinary research and scholarship that is supported by world-class infrastructure and conducted by highly motivated researchers addressing the community and society's greatest challenges.”

CCRE has developed the following five-year strategic plan (subject to revision at CCRE's Periodic Review in June 2027).

Goal 1: Continue to offer a growing set of research and evaluation services, initiating new partnerships and extending existing collaborations.

Objective 1: Continue to pursue partnerships across the community, emphasizing strengths including cradle-to-career education, maternal health, rural health, agricultural economics, economic development, and data science/engineering.

Objective 2: Establish and maintain a formal proposal development process wherein all previously submitted materials are stored and collaborations can be solidified in timely, high-quality proposal submissions.

Goal 2: Successfully implement the final year of Upskill Mid-South, sustaining the successful partnerships established throughout the program towards new bold and impactful collaborations.

Objective 1: Maximize the opportunities available for the final several months of Upskill funding to upskill over 2,000 participants into higher-paying good jobs in advanced manufacturing, construction, and logistics.

Objective 2: Continue to foster partnerships with successful training providers and supportive service partners, applying for additional grant or creative funding opportunities in core areas of community need.

Goal 3: Improve public safety in Shelby County by enabling government to employ evidence-based decision-making through targeted infrastructural innovations in criminal justice data interoperability and transparency.

Objective 1: Fully implement the **Criminal and Legal Evaluation using Administrative Records (CLEAR)** Initiative, utilizing CCRE data science capacity to support cross-agency data interoperability, fulfilling a top-five and long-standing public safety priority in Shelby County.

Objective 2: Establish a high-profile public dashboard for case outcomes data that is neutral, trusted, accurate, enables evidence-based decision-making, advances shared cross agency objectives, and motivates further agency-supported research.

Objective 3: Support agencies in using CLEAR data products to pursue external funding for successful initiatives, as well as pursue further innovation within the public safety ecosystem through expanded partnerships.

Goal 4: Pursue operational excellence in back-office functions, expanding marketing and development efforts while clearing administrative burdens on CCRE research staff.

Objective 1: Identify a method to pay for and recruit a permanent, full-time, Center-wide staff member to provide dedicated support and innovative solutions for grant development, financial management and forecasting, compliance, marketing and brand management, human resources functions, office and technology management, event management, communication/decision support, and issue/project tracking.

Objective 2: Expand efforts to advertise CCRE's accomplishments using CCRE's burgeoning messaging platforms including social media, email/Substack, and other marketing.