Updated February 2023

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Welcome to the Community Ecology Institute (CEI)!

We are excited to have you volunteer with us. We provide volunteer opportunities for people of all backgrounds, abilities, and ages. Our volunteers are vital to the wellbeing and success of our community and our organization. The CEI Volunteer Handbook serves as a formalized, strategic resource to communicate organizational and volunteer program information to volunteers. It includes information on CEI's mission, vision, values, and policies; the historical significance of the land and the legacy of its diverse stewards; information on regular volunteer opportunities; and expectations for volunteer engagement. If you have any questions regarding the manual please reach out to our volunteer coordinator at volunteer@cei.earth.

A note from CEI's Executive Director Chiara D'Amore:

Hello!

Since CEI purchased what is now Freetown Farm in the summer of 2019, thousands of volunteers have helped us to transform the property into a place where diverse members of our community can come together to learn from hands-on experience about how they can lead happier, healthier, more connected and sustainable lives. Many of our volunteers have become deeply connected parts of the CEI community that we look forward to seeing on a regular basis. It has been an honor to literally and figuratively grow with the community over the past few years and we are excited to see where we go and grow together in the years ahead. This volunteer handbook is an important part of our commitment to our volunteers to make the time you share with us a very positive and productive experience. I hope you take the time to read it closely so you can learn more about who we are, what we do (and why) and how we work with volunteers to help us achieve our mission to cultivate communities where people and nature thrive together. Thank you for sharing your time with us - we deeply appreciate it!

In gratitude,

Chiara D'Amore
Founder and Executive Director
The Community Ecology Institute

CEI Organizational Information

Mission, Vision, Approach

Mission

The Community Ecology Institute (CEI) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization with a mission to cultivate communities where people and nature thrive together.

Our work focuses on tangible, community-level change at the intersection of environment, education, equity, and health. Our initiatives have concentrated on **four Cs**:

- **Connection to Nature**: We create engaging opportunities for people to develop meaningful connections with nearby nature to enhance personal, social, and ecological well-being.
- **Civic Ecology**: We design community-based projects that benefit the local environment while helping people develop competence and confidence around caring for the world.
- **Community Health**: We foster awareness and opportunity around the direct relationship between ecosystem health and human health; when the environment is healthier, people are too.
- **Climate Action**: We help communities harness local opportunities to become more resilient to the effects of climate change and to act strategically to reduce our climate impacts.

Vision

Our vision is that communities are healthy, resilient, abundant, and rooted in regenerative relationships that honor the inherent interdependence between people and the ecosystems of which we are a part.

CEI's Commitment to Equity

Just as biodiversity strengthens natural systems, the diversity of human experience strengthens our efforts to create socially and ecologically healthy communities. CEI is committed to honoring diversity, prioritizing inclusion, and working towards equity in all we do. We are dedicated to creating an environment free from discrimination including race, color, religion, age, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, disability, national or ethnic origin, and veteran status.

Overview of CEI's Work

CEI is an organization that is home to a range of programs, each with a distinct yet complementary educational purpose to accomplish our mission. To learn more about each of the programs, click the link and explore their page on our website.

- Our Community of Families in Nature (CFIN) has a mission to provide frequent, fun and friendly nature-based experiential education that can be enjoyed by the entire family - children of all ages and their caregivers.
- Our Roots & Wings Learning Community has a mission to offer supplemental experiential education for home-schooled children that nurtures a deep connection to self, community and the environment through programming that emphasizes creativity, social and emotional learning, and hands-on, nature-based exploration.
- Our Green SEEDS internship program has a mission to provide experiential education and work experience for high school and college students across a range of intersectional socio-ecological themes.
- Our Nourishing Gardens program has a mission to transform lawns into gardens that nourish our families, the community, and the environment by: (1) installing food and pollinator gardens in yards, community spaces, and with community-based organizations and businesses, and (2) providing a green-infrastructure jobs training program.
- Freetown Farm has a mission to empower people to improve the health of the community (people and ecosystems) by growing and sharing food and knowledge.
- CEI recently acquired the Green Farmacy Garden, the former home and property of renowned ethnobotanist Dr. James Duke. Please check our website for updates on activities and opportunities for engagement with this new and exciting space!

Orientation to Freetown Farm

Farm History

As the stewards of this historic, 6.4-acre farm on Harriet Tubman Lane in Howard County, CEI is committed to understanding and sharing the social and ecological history of this land.

The Name of the Farm
The property was known as Shaw Farm for almost 40 years, named for its prior owner, Mr. David Shaw. When CEI purchased the farm in 2019 we invited the community members who helped us protect this land to share name ideas - we received close to 100 different suggestions! To honor the important history of this land, which was along the Underground Railroad, as well as the ways in which our “in-town” farm will support the journey to a "carbon-free" future, we chose the name FREETOWN FARM.

Indigenous Land History
We are on the traditional land of the Piscataway Conoy Tribe as well as the Susquehannock, Algonquian, Lenape, Nanticoke, Powhatan, and Patuxent. In 1634, colonists came to the area via the Ark and Dove ships, and colonization of tribal lands was started by Leonard Calvert, Maryland’s first colonial governor. Conflict began to rise as the colonists continued to encroach on tribal lands, culminating in the first treaty in 1666 to establish the Piscataway reservation. This was followed by subsequent treaties, all of which would be broken in the coming years, resulting in the loss of native homelands.

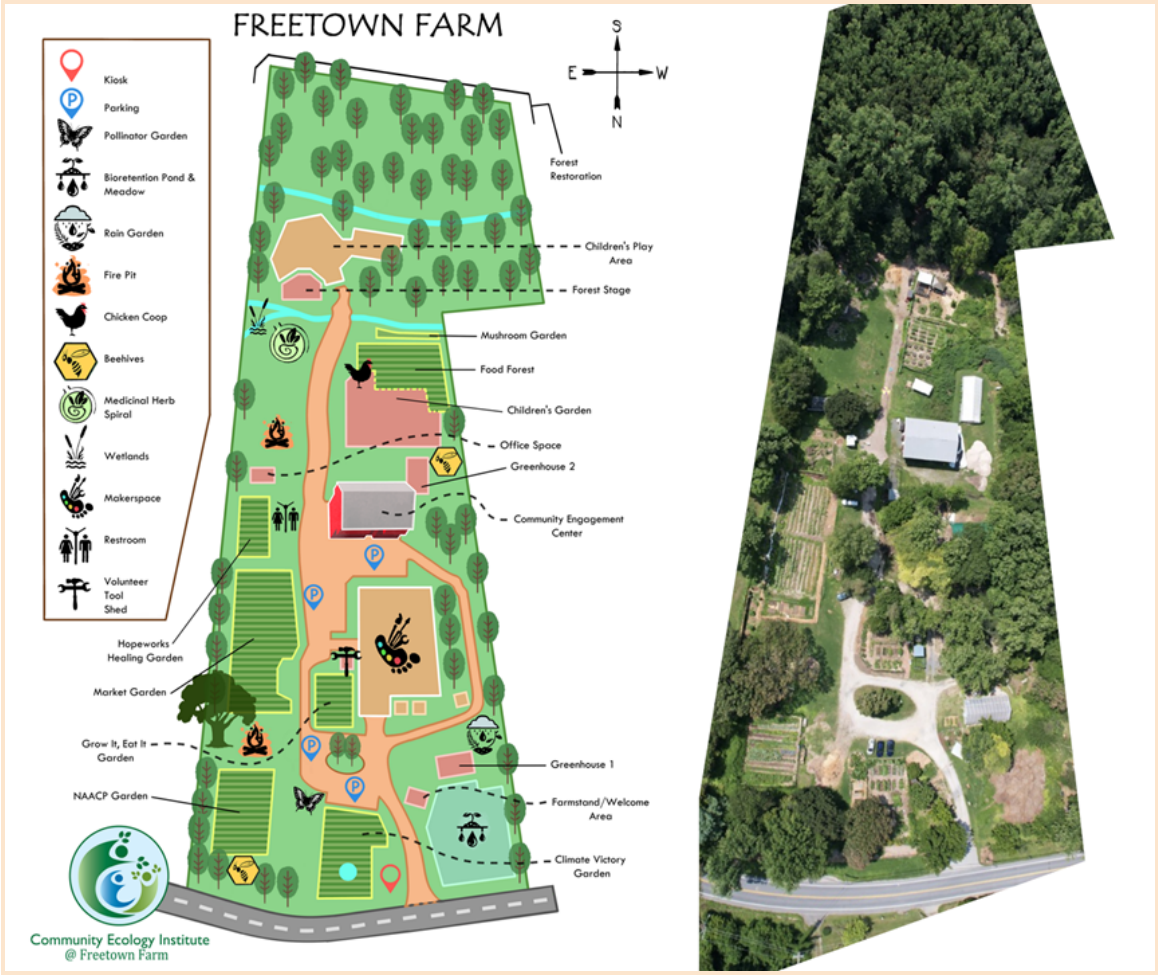
Legacy & Importance of Black & African-American Communities
The labor of enslaved people is documented in Howard County as early as 1690, often for the growing and harvesting of tobacco and mining iron ore. After more than 150

years of slavery here, in 1845 a landowner freed seventeen people he had enslaved and gave them access to 150 acres of land—an area that became known as Freetown and later Simpsonville. According to the 1860 Census, more than one in five Howard County residents was an enslaved person; another 10 percent were free black people—double the proportion of the rest of the state. Local historians believe that Freetown and the surrounding community of Simpsonville served as an important stopover point in the Underground Railroad. Research that showed the Underground Railroad thrived in the county because it was in “the tight place” as slaves moved north through Maryland via different waterways, such as the Middle Patuxent and Patapsco rivers. Across the street from the farm is the Harriet Tubman School, a segregated high school for African American students established in 1948. Howard County Schools did not honor the 1954 Supreme Court Ruling mandating racial integration of schools until 1965. The Harriet Tubman School has recently been renovated to be a historic, educational, and cultural center for the community.

Columbia

Freetown Farm is located in Columbia, Maryland—a unique, planned community founded in 1967 by James Rouse, whose commitment to racial integration and openness set an example for the nation. From its inception, Columbia championed integration—across race, class, and faith. The city’s iconic “People Tree” statue embodies this vision of our interconnectedness. Rouse described Columbia as “a garden for growing people.”[iv] At Freetown Farm, we aim to honor all of these rich legacies in our soil.

Site Map



Essential Site Rules

Freetown Farm can be accessed by appointment, event, or program *only*. Please check our website for open hours and for information on how to schedule a visit.

Pets, alcoholic beverages, tobacco, e-cigarettes, illicit drugs, and weapons are prohibited.

Code of Conduct

CEI's community is made up of diverse individuals with a variety of identities. To ensure the safety and wellbeing of our community, all individuals are expected to abide by CEI's code of conduct, which emphasizes a culture of inclusion, respect, and care. This means that each member of our community treats one another according to these

values at all times. The organization does its best to provide safe conditions for visitors to the farm and counts on each individual to be the best protector of their own physical safety. Individuals should always be aware of where they are and what they are doing, and pay particular attention to safety instructions and proper equipment use. Individuals should voice their safety concerns and report any injuries to a staff member as soon as possible. Individuals are required to follow all safety instructions and procedures in order to keep themselves and others safe; this includes following any COVID-19 safety protocols in place.

COVID-19 SAFETY: In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, CEI reserves the right to implement policies to protect the health of staff, program participants, volunteers, and community members at any time. This may include masking, physical distancing, and/or capacity restrictions. In the absence of a policy, we welcome and encourage our community to take measures they deem necessary for their safety. CEI will not tolerate any harassment or coercive action, including that based on COVID safety measures.

Engagement by individuals in the following activities is prohibited while onsite:

- Harassment of any kind, including physical, emotional, verbal, or written
- Bullying, threats, and/or intimidation
- Violence against person or property
- Using, purchasing, transferring, or possessing drugs, alcohol, or prescription drugs in any way that is illegal
- Proselytizing, meaning attempting to persuade someone to share your religious or political beliefs
- Acting as a spokesperson or representative for the organization in any way without prior approval

We each must take responsibility for our awareness of racism, sexism, ageism, xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia, ableism and other forms of discrimination. No one has the right to denigrate another human being on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, national origins, and other identities, and we expect our community members to conduct themselves accordingly.

If an individual breaks this code of conduct, they will no longer be able to serve with CEI. If an individual believes they are subjected to any of the prohibited conduct, they may report this to their supervisor who will determine the necessary corrective action per CEI's policies. If there are any questions or concerns, please reach out to the Volunteer Coordinator by emailing volunteer@cei.earth or CEI's Executive Director at info@cei.earth.

Volunteer Program Information

On-Farm Opportunities

Caring for a farm involves a lot of physical work! We are always looking for help in the following areas:

- Maintaining our food growing gardens
    - Market Garden - our primary space to demonstrate small-scale, regenerative agriculture; *may require additional training on more specialized tasks*
    - Grow-It-Eat-It Garden - a garden to demonstrate food growing in an urban, community-garden space. Includes raised beds and other growing structures; the primary space for our donation produce
    - Climate Victory Garden - shows the 10 principles of climate victory gardening in action in a space similar to a backyard plot in a suburban/urban area
    - Youth Garden/Food Forest - emphasizes gardening's role in youth education as well as perennial edibles planted in a "food forest" structure
- Tending to the ecological areas of the farm (woods, streams, meadows, etc.)
- Helping with regular property maintenance (enhancing paths, removing invasives, weeding, etc.)
- Help building structures such as outdoor education spaces, picnic tables, animal enclosures, etc.
- Sharing skills via community workshops.
- Engaging with our partner organizations in the gardens they manage: Howard County NAACP, HopeWorks, and The Third. If you are interested, please reach out to the Volunteer Coordinator and they will connect you to the organization directly.

Virtual/Online Opportunities

Strategically and mindfully managing and growing a relatively young non-profit takes a lot of work! We welcome volunteer support with "behind the scenes" tasks such as:

- administrative support
- social media engagement
- communications - newsletters, press releases, articles, etc.
- community outreach
- Project and program development
- Educational content and workshops
- fundraising
- event planning
- Board and committee participation

Registration

All new volunteers are required to register via Better Impact, CEI's volunteer management system. Included in this registration is the requirement to review and agree to CEI's waiver.

New volunteers are strongly encouraged to attend one of CEI's regular "New to CEI" tours before beginning their volunteerism. While not required, these tours are a great opportunity to learn about the various programs that make up CEI and the many opportunities for engagement. Please check the volunteer page of our website for instructions on how to sign up for these tours.

For the safety of our community, which includes minors, all volunteers will be subject to a basic background safety check. This will consist of a check of a volunteer's personal information through the State Sex Offender Registry.

Scheduling Shifts

To schedule a volunteer shift, follow these steps:

1. Log in to your MyImpact page using the username and password you entered to create your profile in Better Impact.
2. Navigate to the "Opportunities" tab, where you can view a list of open volunteer opportunities or view them on a calendar.
3. Select the shift you'd like to sign up for and click "Sign Up" on the bottom right-hand corner. *Please note that you will not be able to sign up for opportunities within 48 hours of their start time*.

4. To view your schedule made up of shifts you've signed up for, navigate to the "Schedule" tab. If you need to cancel your shift, click "Remove" under the "Actions" column in your schedule.

If you are looking to schedule a visit on behalf of a group, **please contact the Volunteer Coordinator** (volunteer@cei.earth) directly with the group size, preferred date(s) & time(s), purpose of visit, and any important group considerations (i.e. accessibility, educational focuses, etc.). The Volunteer Coordinator will then follow up with further instructions for group scheduling and registration.

Volunteer Expectations

Definition of a Volunteer

A volunteer is anyone who, without compensation or the expectation of compensation, performs a task at the direction of and on behalf of the organization. Individuals that fill this role frequently include scouts, interns, community members, families, and/or individuals from community organizations.Volunteers are one of the most important part of CEI's organization and we are deeply grateful for their helping hands and committed to making sure the volunteer experience is a win-win, with the volunteer feeling like they are learning, growing and enhancing their well-being through their time spent with CEI.

Staff Relationship to Volunteer

Volunteers and CEI staff are considered partners in implementing the mission and programs of the organization, each with complementary roles to play. During each volunteer shift, at least one CEI staff member will fill the role of volunteer supervisor. The volunteer supervisor will provide orientation, training, supervision, and feedback to volunteers as needed and/or requested. Volunteers are encouraged to express their interests and skills to their supervisor, who will work to provide matching opportunities.

Working Onsite

Arrival/Departure

The day a volunteer arrives onsite, they will be expected to check in with the volunteer supervisor at the farm stand at their scheduled time of arrival. If they arrive more than 10 minutes late without prior notice, the supervisor may be located elsewhere. Volunteers are expected to make a timely departure from the farm at the end of their scheduled shift unless otherwise arranged. This is to ensure that we have enough

capacity to accommodate the various groups and events often scheduled throughout the day.

Dress code for safety

All volunteers who are volunteering onsite are required to wear closed-toe shoes for their safety. We encourage people to wear clothing appropriate for the weather, including impermeable jackets & footwear, hats, sunglasses, and protective layers. If you are sensitive to contact with tall-plants or insects, long sleeved shirts and pants are encouraged. We also encourage volunteers to wear environmentally safe sunscreen & bug repellant, especially during the summer months, and to bring their own water bottle, which can be refilled on site.

Property Care

While onsite, volunteers are expected to practice and ethic of care for one another and our property. This means cleaning up any tools/materials used during volunteering and returning them to their designated place. Trash and other waste must be placed in the proper containers located throughout the farm. Volunteers must also ensure the wellbeing of their personal belongings, as CEI is not responsible for the loss or damage to personal belongings that may occur while on our property.

Visitors to the farm should not enter any of the “out buildings” (greenhouses, sheds, quonset huts, etc.) unless it is a part of their planned experience and has been permitted by the Volunteer Supervisor. Should a volunteer need to use the bathroom, they are available in the Community Engagement Center. Visitors should not go to the second level of the building without permission, as this is where staff offices are located.

In Case of An Emergency

If you or anyone is injured while onsite, please notify the nearest staff member and the Volunteer Coordinator immediately. A first aid kit will always be available at the farm stand to address minor injuries. In case of an emergency, please call 911. The address of the farm is 8000 Harriet Tubman Lane, Columbia, MD 21044. The address of the Green Farmacy Garden is 8210 Murphy Road, Fulton, MD 20759. Howard County General Hospital is the closest emergency medical facility.