



Director's Report – Don Ryan Center for Innovation (DRCI)

February 2026

Overview:

February was a high-visibility and forward-moving month for DRCI. While the planned ribbon cutting for The COVE was postponed due to inclement weather, momentum continued across programming, partnerships, and strategic initiatives. Highlights included participation and sponsorship of BCEDC's Converge Conference, multiple diligence meetings with prospective entrepreneurs, progress on grant strategy, and the soft launch of the new DRCI website. The team remained focused on preparing for a strong 2026 through program enhancements, technology upgrades, and business development initiatives and the opening of The COVE.

Entrepreneur Program Update

- Diligence meetings with:
 - Sarah Wright – Flex & Fit Body Training
 - Effervescent Yoga (restart discussion)
 - Rosano
 - Dr. Weniger
 - Sol Balance
- Conducted several 1:1 introductory and diligence calls with prospective entrepreneurs
- Guided and prepared a local entrepreneur for a meeting with DoorDash, including executive-level pitch preparation
- Continued LivePlan implementation for early-stage startups

STARTUP Companies

Our STARTUP pipeline continues to grow, with new diligence meetings and program milestones achieved.

- **OPFOB**
- **Part of the Family**
- **AMA Private Dining**
- **Bright Beginnings Academy**
- **Diversity Nursing (Hardeeville)**
- **Amia Marcell**
- **Belleau Woods Tavern (HEROES)**

- **Buysight.ai**
- ***New – 221B Studios**
- ***New – Rosano**

GROWTH Companies:

Supporting established businesses in their expansion efforts remains a priority for DRCI.

- **Bluffton Electric**
- **Delta Roofing**

THRIVE Companies

Ongoing long-term work with established Growth companies

- **Universal Bookkeeper**
- **HardeeGreens (Hardeeville)**

Mentor Program

- Continued mentor alignment and engagement conversations
- Matched mentors with new STARTUP participants
- Ongoing refinement of program expectations and structure

Operations, Economic Development, Events and Meetings:

- Attended, presented, and sponsored BCEDC's Converge Conference
- Sent COVE 2nd floor leases for signature
- Met with Jeremy to discuss upcoming grant opportunities
- Ongoing coordination with IT on technology infrastructure at The COVE
- Taught three entrepreneurship classes at Hilton Head Christian Academy on developing pitch presentations
- Conducted Marketing Plan 2026 strategy meeting
- Hosted SC Works Workforce Initiative event at The HUB
- Completed new DRCI website soft launch
- AI strategy meeting with TCL

- Continued LivePlan integration for early-stage clients
- Continued refinement of digital systems to support scaling programs
- Professional Development & Leadership - Kristin attended leadership training
- Paul attended SCEDA Institute

Partnerships

Key Collaborations:

- **Hardeeville:** Quarterly meeting and 2026 Strategic Planning
- **Beaufort County Economic Development Corporation:** Ongoing collaboration on multiple impactful projects including collaboration. Attended board meeting. Attended, presented and sponsored Converge Conference
- **Greater Bluffton Chamber:** Participated in numerous ribbon cuttings, showcasing the growth and expansion of local businesses and attended. Working on 2026 lunch and learn schedule for the GBCC
- **Hilton Head – Bluffton Chamber:** Collaborating with HHI Bluffton Chamber for JobsNow 2026 Job Fair scheduled for March
- **Hispanic Business Association of the Lowcountry:** Ongoing membership, Paul Arvantides is a member of the HBA Lowcountry Partnerships Committee
- **Beaufort County Airport Board:** David Nelems is a member of this Board
- **Furman University:** Ongoing collaboration through Strategic AI Program; exploring expanded offerings