



**VCU**

Office of the Provost

**2026**

# Academic- Community Partnerships Planning Grants

Request for Proposals

**Division of Community Engagement**

Office of the Provost

[community.vcu.edu](http://community.vcu.edu)

[engage@vcu.edu](mailto:engage@vcu.edu)



# Full Proposal Submission Guidance

The Division of Community Engagement invites proposals from VCU faculty for academic-community planning grants that advance community-engaged research. This opportunity supports the development of research partnerships with community partners that generate meaningful scholarly outputs and create lasting benefits for both faculty and community partners. The goal is to foster collaborations that address societal challenges and community-identified needs, laying the groundwork for future grant funding, research projects, and programmatic initiatives. These planning grants are intended to strengthen the foundation for high-quality community-engaged scholarship that is responsive, impactful, and sustainable.

# Purpose

This grant represents an excellent opportunity to advance faculty scholarship while supporting the development of strong, authentic community partnerships. At a time when research excellence and impact are central institutional priorities, this funding provides a unique avenue for faculty to strengthen their scholarly work through collaboration, co-learning, and mutual benefit.

Developing meaningful partnerships requires time, trust, and intentional planning—elements that are often unfunded but essential to community-engaged research. The Academic Community Planning Grant directly addresses this need by providing faculty with resources to build and sustain equitable partnerships that can serve as the foundation for future research and programmatic initiatives.

By investing in these early stages, the grant helps faculty and community partners co-develop shared goals and approaches that lead to high-quality scholarship and measurable community impact, advancing both academic excellence and community well-being.

Increasingly, funders across agencies and foundations emphasize the importance of robust, authentic academic–community partnerships grounded in trust, shared decision-making, and mutual benefit. This planning grant responds to that need by supporting the foundational work required to co-develop projects that are both scientifically sound and community-informed.

Now in its second cycle, this grant has already supported successful collaborations that have produced strong scholarly outputs, new partnerships, and the strengthening of existing relationships. These partnerships have advanced both faculty scholarship and community priorities, exemplifying the mutual benefit and shared learning at the heart of community-engaged research.

In this Request for Proposals, we seek to fund projects that align with the core values of building authentic partnerships  
<https://ccphealth.org/partnering/principles-of-partnering/>.

We are seeking proposals that advance the goals of VCU's Quest 2028 by addressing the Thriving Communities theme and focusing on societal challenges and community-identified needs. Projects should demonstrate a commitment to building long-term, collaborative partnerships that foster shared learning and mutual benefit.

Proposals are expected to take a transdisciplinary approach, bringing together diverse perspectives and expertise to co-create solutions that strengthen and sustain communities.

This funding opportunity reflects the university's dedication to research and scholarship that generate real-world impact through authentic engagement with communities. It supports efforts that not only respond to pressing societal issues but also elevate the voices, priorities, and strengths of community partners.

More information about the goals of Quest 2028 can be found at  
<https://quest.vcu.edu/university-goals/>.

We look forward to receiving proposals from faculty across diverse disciplines, including those who may not have previously engaged in community outreach and engagement efforts. Applications from both established and emerging community-engaged faculty are equally encouraged.







## The Academic-Community Partnership Planning Grant is designed to:

- Support the development of authentic, mutually beneficial partnerships between faculty and community partners that foster collaboration, shared learning, and trust.
- Provide faculty with the opportunity to cultivate relationships that serve as a foundation for meaningful community-engaged scholarship and future research initiatives.
- Facilitate joint identification of priorities and research questions that address community-identified needs and broader societal challenges.
- Advance the scholarship and science of community engagement in alignment with VCU's Quest 2028 goals, particularly the Thriving Communities theme, by strengthening coordinated, place-based efforts that generate both scholarly outcomes and lasting community impact.

## ***CULTIVATING ACADEMIC- COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS***

VCU defines partnerships as “a sustained collaboration between institutions of higher education and communities for the mutually beneficial exchange, exploration, and application of knowledge, information, and resources.” This planning grant allows for dedicated time to developing a strong and trusting partnership with the community partner. The nature of this partnership will vary depending on the unique dynamics of each collaboration, but it should be rooted in core partnership principles such as respect, co-learning, mutual benefit, and shared goals.

## AWARDS

The DCE will provide 10 one-year seed grants of up to \$10,000 to support academic-community partnerships.

Each proposal must have a designated community partner as a co-partner on the grant.

**Applications are due March 27, 2026, at 5:00 pm.**

## ELIGIBILITY



- 01.** Open to all VCU Full-time faculty with community co-partner



- 02.** Must participate in a mid-year grantee meeting with the community partner



- 03.** Must enter grant activities into Collaboratory, VCU's Database for community-engaged activities and Partnerships

## Information Session

Three virtual informational sessions will be offered to provide guidance and answer any questions applicants may have specific to the RFP, community engagement or community-engaged research.

Details	Date	Registration Links
Info Session	January 27, 2026, 12-1 PM	<a href="#">Link</a>
Panel Discussion	February 18, 2026, 12-1 PM	<a href="#">Link</a>
Info Session	March 4, 2026, 1-2 PM	<a href="#">Link</a>

## Submission Guidelines

Required Application Components:

### Project Length

The completed proposal should not exceed four pages.

### Formatting Requirements:

Please use Arial, 11-point font size, 1-inch margins, and single spacing to ensure consistency across submissions.

### Proposal Structure:

- The project title and abstract must occupy a separate page; this page will not count toward the four-page limit.
- The timeline and budget justification should be provided on separate pages.

Final proposals must be electronically submitted as a combined PDF to [dcegrantsinfo@vcu.edu](mailto:dcegrantsinfo@vcu.edu)

# Be sure to provide the following in your proposal

## **Project Title**

Provide a brief description title for the project

## **VCU Project Leader**

Include the project leader's name, contact information, and departmental or unit affiliation

## **Community Partner/Community Location**

List the partner organization, community location, and relevant contact information

## **Project Abstract (150 words)**

Provide a concise summary of your project's objectives and the expected outcomes.

## **Overview of the Partnership Description and Specific Aims**

- Clearly outline the specific aims or objectives for this planning grant.
- Describe how the partnership was initiated or how it will be established, with particular emphasis on the partner selection process.
- Highlight the mutual research interests and strengths that form the basis of this partnership.
- Include details about any prior collaborations or working relationships with the partner.

## **Alignment and Quest 2028 Thriving Communities**

Explain how the project aligns with the core principles of partnership and community engagement and how it supports Quest 2028's Thriving Communities.



## Planning and Partnership Activities

This section should describe how you and your community partner(s) will work together during the grant period to plan, develop, or strengthen your joint project. Focus on the processes, structures, and activities that will make this partnership successful.

In this section, include:

- **Collaborative Process:** Explain how you and your partner(s) will organize your work together. Describe meeting structures, planning sessions, or other mechanisms that will guide collaboration and ensure shared decision-making.
- **Planned Activities:** Outline the key planning or pilot activities you will undertake, such as developing research questions, co-designing project frameworks, identifying data sources, or testing approaches that can inform a future project or proposal.
- **Community Involvement:** Describe how community members will actively contribute to shaping the project's direction, identifying priorities, and determining methods that reflect their perspectives and needs.
- **Student Engagement (if applicable):** If students will participate, explain their role and how their involvement contributes to both learning and the project's overall goals.
- **Governance and Reciprocity:** Summarize how decisions will be made, how roles and responsibilities will be shared, and how the partnership will ensure mutual respect and accountability.

## Community Focus and Societal Impact

In your proposal, describe the community or communities with whom you will be working. Explain the context, significance, and characteristics of this community and how your project will engage them as partners. Clearly outline how your proposed work addresses both a societal challenge and a community-identified need. Discuss how the collaboration will contribute to mutual benefit, long-term partnership development, and the advancement of community-engaged research and scholarship.

### **Scholarly and Community Impact**

In your proposal, describe how the partnership and proposed activities will contribute to both scholarly advancement and community benefit. Discuss how this collaboration can serve as a foundation for future grant opportunities, research projects, or program development with the community. Explain the potential for the partnership to deepen VCU's engagement with the community over time, expand collaborative networks, and generate outputs that strengthen both faculty scholarship and community outcomes. Include any plans for assessing the lasting influence of this partnership on future research or programming efforts.

### **Dissemination and Project Outputs**

In your proposal, describe the intended outputs of your project for both academic and community audiences. Explain how you plan to share findings, outcomes, or data with the community in ways that are accessible, relevant, and meaningful to those involved. Outline your plans for scholarly dissemination, including publications, presentations, or other products that contribute to community-engaged scholarship. Be sure to address how you will ensure that results are communicated in ways that support continued collaboration, inform future projects or grant opportunities, and demonstrate mutual benefit for both faculty and community partners.

### **Budget and Budget Justification**

Provide a detailed budget that outlines how the requested funds will be used to support the planning and partnership activities described in your proposal. The budget should reflect the collaborative nature of the project and demonstrate how resources will benefit both faculty and community partners.

Include a budget justification that clearly explains how each expense supports the goals of the project and contributes to the development of the academic–community partnership.

## Timeline

Provide a project timeline that outlines key milestones, major activities, and anticipated completion dates.

## Letters of Support

- **Community Partner Letter:** A letter from the community partner demonstrating their support for the collaboration and confirming their understanding of the project's purpose, design, and anticipated outcomes.
- **Department Chair Letter:** A letter of support from the department chair endorsing the project.

# Review Process and Criteria

## Initial Screening

Proposals will first undergo an initial screening by the Division of Community Engagement staff to ensure they meet all eligibility criteria and comply with all RFP guidelines. This includes verifying completeness of the application, adherence to word and page limits, and inclusion of all required documents.

## Evaluation by Review Panel

Proposals that meet the eligibility requirements will be evaluated by a review panel composed of subject matter experts, community engagement professionals, and community stakeholders. The panel will assess each submission using predefined criteria aligned with the goals of the grant.

## Final Decision and Feedback

Final funding decisions will be made based on the review panel's recommendations.

# Criteria for Evaluation

## **1. Alignment**

Assessment of how well the proposal aligns with:

- Collaborative partnership development
- Quest 2028 Thriving Communities goals
- The potential for the partnership development process to enhance coordinated community engagement efforts at VCU

## **2. Strength of Partnership and Partnership Activities**

Evaluation of the depth and quality of the academic–community partnership, the intentional design of partnership activities, and the extent to which mutual benefits and shared goals are demonstrated.

## **3. Planning and Feasibility**

Review of the proposal's evidence of joint planning with the community partner and the likelihood that the project will support future collaborative programs and/or research.

## **4. Community Partner Support**

Special consideration will be given to the community partner's letter of support or video/audio message, with emphasis on the authenticity of the collaboration and the partner's enthusiasm for the project.

## **5. Department Chair Support**

Assessment of the letter of support from the department chair endorsing the project.

## **6. Interviews or Presentations (if required)**

Applicants may be invited to participate in interviews or deliver presentations to provide additional insight and address questions from the review panel.

# Timeline

DATE	ACTIVITY
December 15, 2025	RFP Announced
January 29, 2026	Informational Session (Zoom)
February 18, 2026	Grant Panel Discussion (Zoom)
March 4, 2026	Informational Session (Zoom)
March 27, 2026	Proposals Due
May 14, 2026	Awardees Announced
Dec 4, 2026	Six-month joint partner meeting
End of July 2027	Final Written Report and Data Dissemination

## Resources

- **What is Community Engaged Research?**
- **Collaborative Partnerships**
- **Community Engaged Research Approaches and Design**
- **Dissemination and Translation of Findings**
- **Community Engagement - CARNEGIE CLASSIFICATION OF INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION**
- **Principles of Partnering | Community-Campus CCPH Board of Directors. Position Statement on Authentic Partnerships. Community-Campus Partnerships for Health, 2013.**

## **Additional Information**

### **Types of Planning & Partnership Activities**

Please note that the suitability of these planning activities may vary depending on your research, the community, partnership dynamics, and other contextual factors. In community engagement, there is no one-size-fits-all approach. The choice of planning activities should be tailored to the specific needs and circumstances of your project, emphasizing the importance of a flexible and adaptable approach to community-engaged research. Below is a list of potential activities which may not be relevant to your partnership. Identify activities relevant to your partnership and areas of focus.

- **Identifying Community Challenges:** Collaboratively engage with the community to identify significant issues, obstacles, and priorities that will serve as the foundation for the project. Ensure that this process is data-driven and involves informal stakeholder meetings, community discussions, and active involvement within the community, all while closely working alongside community leaders. This collaborative effort should be focused on understanding and addressing community-engaged research.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Identify and engage relevant stakeholders within the community, such as community leaders, organizations, and residents, to establish engagement strategies and cultivate a shared understanding of the problem and its approach.
- **Protocol Development:** Depending on the stage of your partnership development, you may begin working together to draft a research protocol, discussing the research design, outcomes, and ensuring a mutual understanding of potential challenges, priorities, and timelines.
- **Partnership Agreement:** Develop a partnership agreement that outlines the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of both academic and community partners. It is essential to formalize this agreement, but preliminary discussions and building toward this formal agreement are crucial. This agreement should also address how potential challenges will be handled, the communications plan, and realistic expectations from both academic and community perspectives.



# Training and Capacity Building

Recognizing the need for training in both academic and community contexts, provide training and capacity-building opportunities for community members and academic partners to enhance their skills and knowledge relevant to the research project. This training should encompass the academic and community context, history, and specific aspects related to the research issue.

- **Community Asset Mapping:** Embrace an asset-based approach in community engagement, which involves identifying and valuing the assets within a community. Therefore, as a partnership-building activity, consider collaboratively identifying community assets, including resources, knowledge, and skills that can be leveraged for the research project.
- **Project Planning and Timeline:** Organize and implement planning sessions with community stakeholders to collaboratively develop a project plan and timeline. Identify milestones, deadlines, and deliverables for your collaborative work.
- **Data Collection Strategy:** Design a data collection strategy, including data sources, instruments, and data collection methods, with input from the community.
- **Communication Plan:** Develop a communication plan outlining how the partnership will disseminate project updates, findings, and engage with the broader community.
- **Resource Mobilization:** Explore funding opportunities to support the partnership's work. Investigate local resources to sustain efforts associated with non-research-related aspects of the defined issue.





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**For Any Questions,  
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