



**VCU**

Office of the Provost

**Division of Community Engagement**

**REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS  
2026 THRIVING  
COMMUNITIES  
RESEARCH  
PILOT GRANT  
PROGRAM**

✉ [dcegrantsinfo@vcu.edu](mailto:dcegrantsinfo@vcu.edu)

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



# Background



VCU is deeply committed to advancing its Quest 2028 strategic plan, particularly the Thriving Communities theme, which focuses on addressing societal challenges, improving community health, and fostering strong mutually beneficial partnerships.

Community engagement is central to VCU's mission. Integrating community engagement into all aspects of our work—transformative student learning, scholarship, and research—is a top priority.

As a Carnegie-classified R1 institution with a community-engaged distinction, VCU is committed to supporting full-time faculty and staff in conducting collaborative research and building transformative student research experiences with community partners. VCU's definition of community-engaged research highlights collaboration with communities, emphasizes research that is centered on community priorities, and addresses community needs. Addressing societal challenges requires innovative research methodologies that connect academic work to real-world community impact. However, launching new approaches often requires funding for exploratory or pilot projects, especially for faculty new to community-engaged research or seeking to expand their current methods. Without this crucial support, opportunities for innovation and meaningful community collaboration may be missed, limiting the broader impact of VCU's academic mission.

# Program Goals

The Thriving Communities Research Pilot Grant Program is designed to address these challenges and opportunities by:

**01**

Providing faculty with pilot funding to explore innovative, multidisciplinary, and community-engaged approaches to their research.

**02**

Supporting faculty who wish to incorporate community-engaged methods, especially if they are new to this approach.

**03**

Encouraging partnerships with partner communities or other community organizations to address critical, community-identified needs.

**04**

Creating opportunities for faculty to build preliminary data and evidence that can serve as a foundation for larger, externally funded projects.

**05**

Advancing VCU's commitment to Thriving Communities as outlined in Quest 2028.

# Call for Proposals

The Division of Community Engagement invites proposals for the Thriving Communities Research Pilot Grant Program.

## Proposals should:

- Demonstrate a clear alignment with **Quest 2028's** Thriving Communities theme and VCU's partner community goals.
- Outline an innovative, exploratory research approach that incorporates community engagement at every stage, and where relevant, identify opportunities to include students in the research or partnership experience.
- Provide a plan for ensuring long-term sustainability, including strategies for leveraging pilot work to secure future funding, building community capacity, and addressing what happens after the research concludes.
- Include a clear evaluation plan to assess impact and shared outcomes for both academic and community stakeholders.

Proposals from all disciplines are encouraged, with the aim of supporting faculty in building a foundation for sustainable research that makes a real difference in the communities we serve.



## Funding Details

This program provides \$25,000 in funding for pilot projects that address community-identified needs and foster collaboration between VCU faculty and community partners. Projects should be completed within 12 months of the award date.

# Eligibility

Applicants must be full-time VCU faculty members or full-time research staff. Projects must involve a community partner.



# Expectations After the Grant Award

Grantees will participate in a progress meeting at the 6-month mark to discuss project progress, successes, and any challenges encountered.

A final report will be required, summarizing the project's successes, outcomes, and next steps.

Prior to the final report due, faculty are expected to use VCU's partnership database, **Collaboratory**, to enter their community partnerships and project details.



# Application Requirements

Proposals should not exceed four pages (excluding appendices such as the budget, letters of support) and must include the following sections:

**A Abstract (150 words on a separate page)**

**B Names, titles, and departments of the research team and community partner information (on a separate page)**

**C Research Strategy**

## **1 Background and Research Plan**

- Background and significance of the community issue being addressed.
- Specific aims and objectives of the pilot project.
- Description of the research methods and activities, ensuring community engagement at every stage of the process.

## **2 Community Partnership Plan**

- Clear articulation of the community partner's role in the design, planning, and implementation phases.
- Detailed description of how the community partner will be involved at every stage of the research process.
- Strategies for ensuring collaboration and shared decision-making.
- Description of how research findings will be disseminated both academically and within the community.

### **3 Sustainability and Long-term Strategy**

- Explain approach to leveraging project outcomes for future funding.
- Describe efforts to build community capacity and address community concerns about what happens after the research concludes.
- Highlight plans for partnering with local organizations to sustain efforts.
- Include how VCU students will be engaged in ways that contribute to the project's long-term impact.

### **4 Evaluation**

- Metrics for assessing the project's success and impact, and student learning when students are involved.
- Methods for capturing both qualitative and quantitative outcomes.

### **5 Timeline**

- A clear timeline for project activities, including milestones for community engagement activities, data collection, evaluation, and dissemination.

### **5 Human Subjects Research (if applicable)**

- Plans for securing human subjects approval and ensuring compliance with all ethical requirements.

## **C Budget & Letters of Support (separate pages)**

### **1 Budget & Justification**

- Detailed breakdown of how funds will be used, with an emphasis on equitable distribution of resources to benefit both the academic and community partners.
- [Click to Download Budget Template](#)

## 2 Letters of Support

- Letter from the department chair
- Letter from the community partner outlining their role in the design and planning process, their commitment to ongoing engagement throughout the project, and how they have been involved in the project design

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## Review Criteria

### Proposals will be evaluated based on the following:

- Alignment with the goals of Quest 2028 and the Thriving Communities theme.
- Strength of the community partnership, with a focus on partner involvement at all stages of the research process.
- Clarity and feasibility of the project design, evaluation plan, and timeline.
- Demonstrates a clear understanding of sustainability in community-engaged research, with evidence of planning for lasting community benefits, future funding potential, and long-term impact incorporated into the project design.
- Impact on addressing the identified community need, including plans for academic and community dissemination of findings.

## Informational Meeting

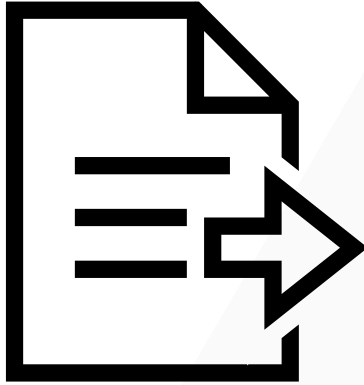
To assist applicants, an informational meeting will be held to provide an overview of the RFP, expectations, and application process on

**April 21, 2026, from 12:00 PM - 1:00 PM**

Additionally, applicants will have access to technical assistance for proposal development, including assistance with designing community-engaged components as requested.

[\*\*Register Here\*\*](#)

# Submission Instructions



Proposals must be submitted as a single PDF document to [dcegrantsinfo@vcu.edu](mailto:dcegrantsinfo@vcu.edu) by May 15, 2026, by 6 PM.

Formatting guidelines include 12-point font, 1-inch margins, and single spacing.

## ■ Grant Program Timeline

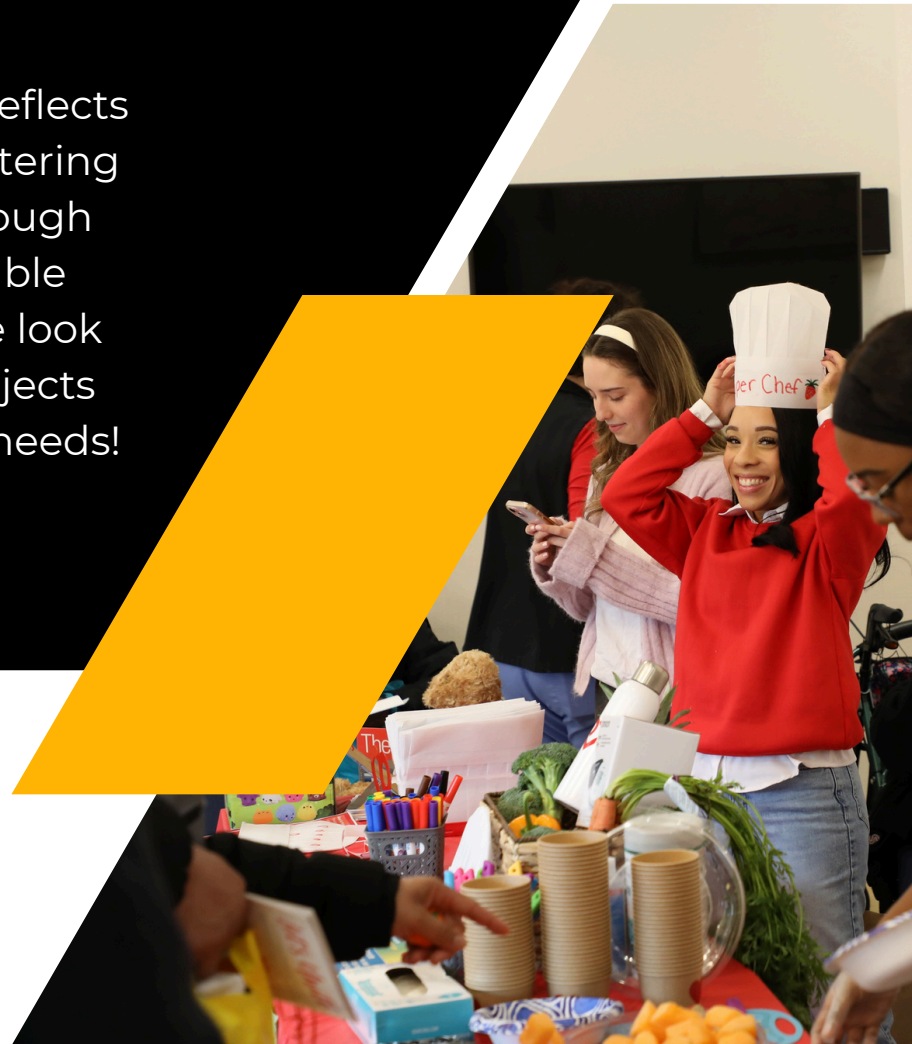
Proposal Submission Deadline:  
**May 15, 2026 by 6 PM**

Award Notification:  
**June 19, 2026**

For questions about the RFP or application process, please contact Challen Wellington, [wellingtonc@vcu.edu](mailto:wellingtonc@vcu.edu), or Mitsuko Cedras, [cedrasmd@vcu.edu](mailto:cedrasmd@vcu.edu).

# Thank You!

This pilot grant program reflects VCU's commitment to fostering thriving communities through collaborative and sustainable research partnerships. We look forward to supporting projects that address community needs!



**Contact Us**  
[DCEGrantsInfo@vcu.edu](mailto:DCEGrantsInfo@vcu.edu)

**Visit Our Website**  
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