



# VCU COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

## FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

*This guide is created to help researchers develop effective grant applications. It highlights specific resources and facilities that VCU offers to support projects focusing on community engagement. By using this guide, researchers will be able to clearly identify and describe the resources they have access to, which can improve the competitiveness of their proposals. Please note, that this document features a carefully chosen selection of resources and does not represent all the resources available to VCU researchers.*

### **Division of Community Engagement**

The Division of Community Engagement, in the office of the provost, serves as a cornerstone for fostering and supporting meaningful interactions between the university and the wider community. This division is dedicated to bridging the gap between academic pursuits and community needs, ensuring that the university's resources and expertise contribute positively to societal challenges. Through a variety of programs and partnerships, the division actively partners with faculty and the community to enhance social, economic, and health outcomes in the communities it serves, reflecting VCU's commitment to public service and civic responsibility. By encouraging collaboration across disciplines and with diverse community groups, the division plays a pivotal role in promoting a culture of engagement where knowledge and action converge for the greater good.

### **Community Engagement at VCU: A Commitment to Address Societal Challenges**

VCU has a proud history of community engagement, and the university recognizes the significance of forging strong partnerships and overcoming societal inequalities. Despite the obstacles faced in higher education and changing community needs, VCU remains dedicated to making a positive impact. As a broad-access, Carnegie 1, Innovation and Economic Prosperity (IEP) designated public research university, VCU

acknowledges its crucial role in shaping the future and bridging the gap between knowledge and action by being a catalyst for significant change. As one of the first universities in the country to attain the Carnegie Engaged Classification, VCU leads the way in this field. This commitment and leadership are emphasized by the inclusion of community engagement as a separate theme in the Quest 2028 strategic plan, underlining its importance and demonstrating VCU's commitment to addressing societal challenges through community engagement.

Community engagement (CE) is at the heart of VCU's overall mission and vision as a leading 21st-century university. The integration of CE into education, scholarship, research, and clinical practice offers an opportunity to demonstrate the university's commitment to fulfilling its public purpose and addressing social, economic, and health inequities. By embracing CE as a core part of its identity, VCU demonstrates its commitment to its public purpose and to being a catalyst for transformative change. Ultimately, by working reciprocally with the community, VCU tackles regional issues and provides a blueprint for resolving significant global problems, creating a remarkable contribution to the 21st century.

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## **PLACE-BASED ASSETS**

VCU takes pride in having two distinct place-based centers that provide a wide range of services, programs, activities, and other resources to faculty, students, partners, and community residents. These place-based centers are The VCU Health Hub at 25th and The Mary and Frances Youth Center.

### **VCU Health Hub at 25th**

The VCU Health Hub opened in May 2019 in the heart of Richmond's East End. It operates in a facility that provides 5,600 sq ft of multi-use learning and engagement spaces including consultation rooms, open-concept workspaces, and large group education multipurpose areas. The Health Hub supports a community engagement approach that emphasizes collaborative partnerships to enhance community impact, student experiential learning, and research engagement to improve the community's health outcomes.

The **VCU Health Hub at 25th** is a community place-based initiative operating under the Division of Community Engagement and with support from the VCU Health System,

illustrating the One VCU commitment. It serves as a catalyst to the community and collaborates in partnership with a diverse portfolio of partners, organizations, and individuals including faculty, staff, and students to improve social determinants affecting health outcomes by supporting the following services, programs, and activities:

- **Enrollment, navigation, and coordination in health care and social service benefits**
- **Legal, housing, food, and transportation assistance**
- **Health promotion, disease prevention, self-care, and wellness programs**
- **Community health events and activities**
- **Neighborhood outreach, engagement, and partnerships**

The neighborhood outreach and advocacy efforts are supported by a Community Advisory Council and Health Hub Ambassadors, which consist of local residents who volunteer to serve in these roles and are committed to seeing the East End become a thriving, more livable community. The Health Hub Community Advisory Council provides strategic input into the overall operations, administration, and delivery of services. The Health Hub Ambassadors serve as key facilitators of community engagement, outreach, and advocacy for the Health Hub.

Additionally, the Health Hub's efforts are guided and informed by ongoing research, evaluation, and data collection efforts.

### **Mary and Frances Youth Center**

The **Mary and Frances Youth Center** stands out as a unique, place-based resource that distinguishes VCU from other institutions. The Mary and Frances Youth Center (MFYC) opened in 2007 and consists of two private tennis courts and three classrooms designed for youth programming and youth-centered training. The MFYC serves as a shining example of VCU's innovative approach to youth development and its commitment to community engagement. As a regional leader in university-community collaboration, the MFYC seeks to empower youth to broaden their expectations in life, inspire youth to identify and engage their talents and support youth in strengthening their life skills.

## **(Select) Mary and Frances Youth Center Programs and Initiatives:**

- **Tennis, Pickleball, and Rise Up-** These three sports-based programs provide youth with sports-based instruction that includes fostering life skills development, promoting academic achievement, and career exploration.
- **Summer Camps-** the MFYC summer camp series allows youth from around the metropolitan Richmond area to participate in tennis-specific instruction. New to the MFYC camp series in 2024 will be a multiple-sport offering and a week-long STEM and sports camp.
- **Richmond Youth Development Network (RichmondYDN)** is a professional development community for youth-serving organizations. The RichmondYDN serves as the region's hub for youth development professionals' training, sharing of resources, and community conversations. The RichmondYDN seeks to promote high-quality youth programs by ensuring that youth program professionals receive appropriate and culturally responsible professional development training.
- **Richmond YPQI (Youth Program Quality Intervention)-** The MFYC manages the implementation of the YPQI, a nationally recognized quality improvement process for out-of-school-time service providers across the region. The YPQI approach extends beyond one-time professional development training, evolving into a supportive system for ongoing improvement located at each youth program site. This process comprises three key stages: initial external and internal assessments, goal-setting within an improvement plan with clear steps and success benchmarks, and one-on-one coaching and training during the improvement phase. Programs typically engage with YPQI over multiple years, ensuring sustained enhancement and development.
- **Family Programs-** The MFYC is committed to fostering positive relationships with the families of the youth and youth-serving organizations in the region. Family events such as pickleball instruction, tennis instruction, and family tournaments connect with the overall division's mission focused on developing partnerships, creating alignment with the needs of the community, and ensuring a positive impact.
- **Faculty Research and Collaboration-** As a youth-serving facility on VCU's Monroe Park Campus, the MFYC is well positioned to collaborate with VCU faculty who focus their research and teaching on positive youth development. The MFYC and the RichmondYDN have a long-standing history of establishing positive relationships with youth-serving organizations. One of VCU's Quest 2028 goals is to build a collaborative

research culture. As the MFYC continues to expand its community outreach and partner with other schools and units across the VCU campus to grow our research efforts, we are building a model that demonstrates our dedication to prioritizing the needs of the community.

- **Transformational Learning Opportunities for Students-** The MFYC is committed to enhancing opportunities for VCU student engagement through internships, service-learning experiences, and volunteer opportunities for both individual students and student organizations.

*VCU has received national acclaim for its commitment to Community Engagement*

### **Carnegie Community Engaged Classification**

The Carnegie Community-Engaged Classification is a prestigious national elective classification bestowed upon institutions that exhibit exceptional dedication and strategic investment in community engagement. This recognition acknowledges institutions that have effectively demonstrated how their community engagement initiatives enrich scholarship, research, creative endeavors, curricula, teaching methodologies, and learning outcomes. Moreover, these efforts contribute to the cultivation of an educated and socially conscious citizenry, while also addressing pressing social challenges.

Participating in the application process aids institutions in comprehensively assessing and quantifying the integration of community engagement within the university's framework. It serves as a means to acknowledge and amplify an institution's steadfast dedication to community engagement and its resultant impact. Attainment of the classification places VCU among a select group of institutions that have attained this distinction, thereby elevating the contributions of our community-engaged scholars, enhancing the exceptional educational experiences afforded to our students, and reaffirming our unwavering commitment to serving our community.

In fact, VCU was in the first cohort of institutions to receive this classification in 2005, was reclassified in 2015, and will be submitting an application for its third reclassification in 2025. The self-study process required for reclassification is one of the strategies VCU uses to advance a unified agenda and a set of principles, practices, and policies shared across the institution that reflects our motto "Community engagement in all things," an essential process to advance the alignment of our principles and

commitments across all areas of community engagement - teaching, learning, scholarship, and service.

The self-study looks at the following core areas of inquiry, which provide the foundation for why we do community engagement:

- How we define, measure, and deliver quality community-engaged partnerships;
- Anchor strategies, which look at how the university uses core functions to promote community advantage (e.g., procurement, staffing, workforce development);
- Student engagement, outcomes, and impacts on both the students and the community;
- University-wide policies and practices that advance community-engaged work and support faculty, staff, and students;
- Outcomes and impacts for faculty, staff, the community, and the campus.

This process relies on gathering a large amount of data, which can also be used to support research, teaching and learning, and proposal and project development.

The work for reclassification will be done under the auspices of the Council for Community Engagement, ensuring that what we learn is dispersed throughout the university and serves as a core tool for continuous improvement and expansion of our community engagement commitment.

### **The Innovation and Economic Prosperity Designation (IEP)**

In 2022, VCU attained the Innovation and Economic Prosperity (IEP) designation from the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU). The designation recognizes that VCU has a sustainable, strategic, and institution-wide commitment to creating economic and community engagement and to creating equitable economic opportunities for our neighborhoods and our region. Similar to the Carnegie Engaged Classification, the IEP is data-rich and requires VCU to collaboratively and rigorously assess our economic and community engagement processes and impacts with university and community partners. It is one of the strategies by which we identify and recognize the community-engaged scholarship, discovery, and pedagogy occurring at VCU through the eyes of both internal and external stakeholders. The results identified

our strengths in community engagement, including health equity innovation, cluster and entrepreneurship development, and place-making, and our growth areas - more equitable economic development, improved community engagement process, and stronger communications, especially around vision and priorities. Our recalibrated strategic plan, Quest 2028, builds on these strengths and looks to improve our growth areas. The data and the designation can support faculty and staff in research, proposal writing, and making connections with others across campus.

- **The Innovation and Economic Prosperity Talent Award:** As an IEP-designated university for an APLU award, VCU can apply for an award in one of three areas - innovation, talent, or place - considered by APLU to be essential areas for advancing economic and community engagement impacts. In 2023, VCU applied for and received the Talent Award, which recognizes excellence in education and the workforce for our students and the community. The award showcases nationally the work of our community engaged in research, teaching, and scholarship in a thematic area.
- **Regional Partnerships:** Working with VCU's School of Education, Virginia State University, Norfolk State University, Longwood University, and Activation Capital, VCU's Division of Community Engagement won an NSF grant to hold three workshops across the region to support efforts to build a collaborative regional research infrastructure among higher education institutions and community partners in the Central Virginia region. While the project emphasizes supporting emerging and minority-serving institutions, the benefits to VCU faculty are equally strong, providing a region-wide pool of collaborators, students, and thought partners for research development. Each workshop focuses on a specific topic - Corporate and Community Partners for Translational Research, Technology Transfer and Intellectual Property, and Human Capital with a focus on Student Research Leadership. Our goal with these workshops is to generate a set of action steps we can take to move this concept forward.

By working collaboratively regionally, we can strengthen our research infrastructure to better support more faculty research to reach a wider range of regional stakeholders and create new opportunities. Those opportunities include but are not limited to, exploring how translational research and technology transfer can serve non-profits as well as private businesses, how humanities and social sciences research can better connect to community needs, and how we can nurture more diverse student research leadership.

- **Community Partnership Support:** The Division of Community Engagement (DCE) offers faculty infrastructure support to aid in the development, connection, and capacity building of partnerships. At VCU, the Senior Manager for Civic Connections and Partnerships serves as the primary contact, facilitating connections between faculty and research community partners. This division plays a crucial role in furnishing a diverse range of support services to faculty, researchers, and students, with the goal of establishing an infrastructure that meets faculty needs, particularly in partnership cultivation and nurturing. We take pride in laying the necessary groundwork, streamlining the process for researchers to effectively engage with community partners.

Our commitment extends to expanding VCU's outreach and engagement with various communities and nonprofit partners across the greater Richmond region and the Commonwealth. Our focus lies in fostering connections, driving institutional enhancement, and mitigating disparities in education, health, and economic well-being. We offer guidance in crafting community relationship-building strategies that bolster VCU's presence and capacity to serve diverse communities. Moreover, we prioritize building strong, trusting relationships with community leaders, associations, and city officials at all levels. This entails providing access to pertinent community, city, and nonprofit contacts to facilitate research and practice opportunities.

Active engagement with community members and partners ensures open lines of communication and collaboration. Additionally, we provide support to university stakeholders for community engagement initiatives and special projects. Our consultation services encompass strengthening partnerships related to student engagement, community service project development, and student-engaged learning within our partnering and adjacent communities.

At VCU, our dedication lies in fostering connections and creating lasting impacts through our comprehensive support services. As connectors, the division staff endeavors to cultivate relationships with community partners, nonprofit organizations, and regional leaders to identify opportunities for students, faculty, and staff, community-engaged research, and partnership development. Emphasizing bi-directional communication, our office offers consultation, connection facilitation, and networking assistance among our extensive partners, fostering opportunities for partnership expansion and collective impact.



## Community Engagement Council

The Council for Community Engagement at VCU has been established as a pivotal resource for faculty, bringing together representatives from all academic and major support units. This council provides a robust infrastructure, promoting and strengthening the university's commitment to community engagement. Its formation reflects an understanding of the importance of collaborative approaches in addressing social and health inequities alongside communities.

In its operational strategy, the Council focuses on aligning community engagement efforts with the university's strategic goals and civic responsibilities. Serving as an accountability group, the Council maintains a close alignment with VCU's stated goals and best practices in community engagement. This approach subtly underscores the importance of embedding community engagement deeply within the university's operations, thereby enhancing the effectiveness and relevance of the faculty's efforts in community initiatives.

**Community Ambassadors** As part of the community-engaged infrastructure, we identify community members to serve as ambassadors in what will be known as the VCU Ambassador Program (or VCU Community Connectors). While some of these members may participate on the advisory board, this group essentially serves on an ad hoc basis.

Often, universities lack the infrastructure that allows for direct contact with residents who can be informed about VCU activities and share that information through their social networks. These community members are not expected to be as highly involved as those on the advisory board, but they are still informed and are residents who are supportive of VCU, willing to "spread the word" and serve as direct links with community members.

The goal is to build a robust engagement infrastructure to ensure that VCU makes every effort to reach far and wide into the communities we serve. By having a team of ambassadors or community connectors, the university can improve its ability to communicate with the community, share information, and create trust in the community. The goal is to build a robust engagement infrastructure to ensure that VCU makes every effort to reach far and wide into the communities it serves.

## Transportation Services

DCE has two (2) passenger vans and one (1) SUV to support the mission of Community Engagement at VCU. We have pathways to make these resources available for VCU Faculty, Staff, Students, and community partners.

