

**Division of Community Engagement**  
Office of the Provost

**REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL**  
**THRIVING**  
**COMMUNITIES**  
**RESEARCH**  
**PILOT GRANT**  
**PROGRAM**

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

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

**\*Updated 3/3/25**



# ■ Introduction and Purpose



## Background

Virginia Commonwealth University is deeply committed to advancing its Quest 2028 strategic plan, particularly the Thriving Communities theme which focuses on fostering collaborative partnerships to drive authentic gains in health, education, and economic prosperity. These goals are essential to VCU's mission as a community-engaged university, where collaboration with diverse stakeholders drives innovative solutions to complex challenges.

The Division of Community Engagement (DCE) plays a pivotal role in supporting these efforts by fostering connections between faculty, students, and community partners.

Community-engaged research is a vital approach for achieving these objectives, emphasizing authentic, reciprocal relationships and a commitment to co-creating knowledge and solutions with community members. This funding program recognizes that impactful research often starts with exploratory, innovative, and preliminary work that builds a foundation for long-term impact. By providing pilot funding, VCU aims to empower faculty to explore new methodologies, test novel ideas, and collaborate meaningfully with communities to address pressing needs.



# ■ Problem Statement

Community engagement is central to VCU's mission. Integrating community engagement into all aspects of our work—student learning, scholarship, outreach, engagement and research—is a top priority. As a Carnegie-classified R1 research university with a community-engaged distinction, VCU is committed to supporting faculty in conducting collaborative research with community partners.



VCU's definition of community-engaged research highlights collaboration with communities, emphasizes research that includes data dissemination centered on community priorities, and addresses community needs. Faculty at VCU excel across diverse research disciplines and can further enrich their work by integrating collaborative approaches with the right resources and support.

Addressing societal challenges, particularly those tied to gaps in services based on social, economic, geographic or other factors, 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 research mission.

## ■ Program Goals

01

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

02

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

03

Encouraging partnerships with **VCU's priority 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

Empowering researchers to expand their methodologies and impact, regardless of their discipline, including creative arts, basic scientists, etc. or faculty who have not previously conducted community-engaged research.

06

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

# ■ Call for Proposals

The Division of Community Engagement invites proposals for the Thriving Communities Research Pilot Grant Program. This program provides \$25,000 in funding for pilot research projects that address community-identified needs and foster collaboration between VCU faculty and community partners.

## Proposals should:

- Demonstrate a clear alignment with [Quest 2028's](#) Thriving Communities theme and VCU's [priority partner community](#) goals.
- Outline an innovative research project that incorporates community engagement at every stage.
- 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.

This program seeks to support faculty in stepping beyond traditional research paradigms, embracing the principles of community engagement, and creating transformative partnerships that address critical community needs. Proposals from [all disciplines](#) are encouraged, with the aim of supporting faculty in building a foundation for impactful and sustainable research that makes a real difference in the communities we serve.

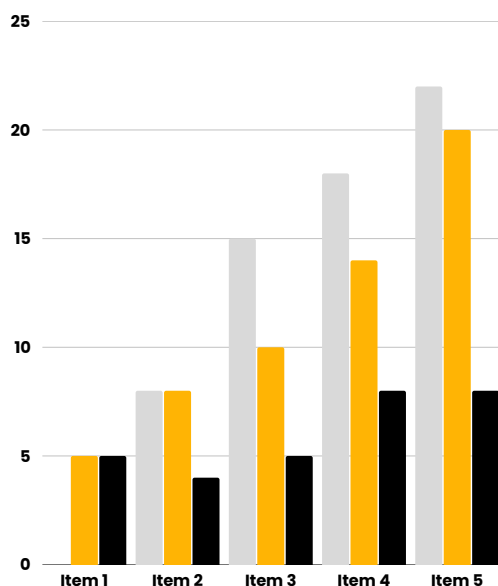


## ■ Funding Details

Four grants of \$25,000 each will be awarded. Projects should be completed within 12 months of the award date.

## ■ Eligibility

Applicants must be full-time VCU faculty members. Projects must involve a community partner and address a need within one of VCU's **priority partner communities** or provide a strong rationale for partnerships outside these areas.



## ■ Expectations After the Grant Award

Grantees will participate in a six-month progress meeting with both the faculty lead and the community partner to discuss project progress, successes, and any challenges encountered.

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

Faculty are expected to use VCU's partnership database, Collaboratory, to document their community partnerships and project details. More details to follow.

Grant recipients are encouraged to share their work through academic and community channels to further enhance impact.

# ■ Informational Meetings and Technical Support

To assist applicants, two informational meetings will be held to provide an overview of the RFP, expectations, and application process.

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

## ■ Informational Sessions

(<https://forms.gle/ewL6V3wTsiqcBsNV8>)

- December 18, 2024 at 4 PM
- January 16, 2025 at 2 PM
- February 19, 2025 at 12 PM

[Register Here](#)

# ■ Application Requirements

## **Submission Guidelines:**

- Title of Proposal
- 150 word Abstract, 11 pt arial font
- Research Proposal (6 pages)
  - Background and Research Plan (3 pages)
  - Community Partnership Plan (1 page)
  - Evaluation, timeline and metrics (1 page)
  - Sustainability and Long-term Plan (½ page)
  - References (additional pages)
- Supplemental Materials
  - Human Subjects Research (if applicable) (½ page)
  - Budget and Justification (additional one page)
  - Letters of Support

## **1 Background and Research Plan (3 pages)**

- 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.
- Describe how the project meets the definition of community-engaged research.

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## **2 Community Partnership Plan (1 page)**

- 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.
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### **3 Evaluation, Timeline and Metrics (1 1/2 page)**

- Metrics for assessing the success and impact of the project.
  - Methods for capturing both qualitative and quantitative outcomes.
  - A clear timeline for project activities, including milestones for community engagement, research, evaluation, and dissemination.
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### **4 Sustainability and Long-term Plan (1/2 page)**

Applicants must clearly outline how their research partnerships are addressing sustainability and long-term impact:

- Explain their 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.

While sustainability is a challenging aspect of community-engaged research, applicants should provide specific details on how they are considering and addressing these issues in their proposal.

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

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

## 6 Budget and Justification

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

- Letter from the department chair supporting the project.
  - 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 proposal 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.

## ■ Submission Instructions



Proposals must be submitted as a single PDF document to [dcegrantsinfo@vcu.edu](mailto:dcegrantsinfo@vcu.edu) by March 14th.

Formatting guidelines include 11-point font, 1-inch margins, and single spacing.

## ■ Grant Program Timeline

Proposal Submission Deadline:  
**March 14th**

Award Notification:  
**May 14th**

For questions about the RFP or application process, please contact Lorielle Bouldin at [BouldinLN@vcu.edu](mailto:BouldinLN@vcu.edu) or [DCEGrantsInfo@vcu.edu](mailto:DCEGrantsInfo@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**  
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