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VCU Research Festival: From Ideas to Impact

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VCU RESEARCH FESTIVAL: FROM IDEAS TO IMPACT

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Project Sponsor: John Ryan, Associate Vice President, Division of Research and Development, Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation

PROJECT ABSTRACT

Since its beginning, VCU has been inextricably intertwined with the Richmond community - physically, socially, and economically. That dynamic interdependence, if leveraged correctly, can help us achieve the vision of Quest 2028. VCU's website notes, "...our past has made us who we are..." And that past has not always helped maintain our critical relationship with the surrounding community. It is telling that this year's VCU Common Book is *Organ Thieves* — a book about VCU's own Henrietta Lacks story. Research at VCU led to Virginia's first organ transplants, but there are different stories we can tell about VCU's historic roads to success. And the stories our community has heard have not always built bridges. We want to change that. We also want to open VCU's doors to the surrounding community. Many academic institutions are seen as "ivory towers," but that is not the mission of VCU.

We want to pull back the curtain on the impactful, innovative research happening here so that the community better understands what we're working on. Where and how can we engage the Richmond community with VCU's research and earn their trust? Richmonders love festivals. They are a part of our shared culture — a place where we can celebrate differences, learn from each other, and enjoy being good neighbors. We propose a VCU Research festival to rebuild the critical relationship between VCU and the community. The VCU Research Festival will build goodwill with the community surrounding VCU by showcasing the impactful and innovative research happening at VCU and the VCU Health System (referred to collectively as "OneVCU"). We envision a one-day event where diverse VCU faculty and student researchers from across disciplines will showcase their work in a single space, emphasizing interactive/hands-on displays that engage attendees. Our goal is for the event to feel like a festival, including art performances, TED Talk-style presentations, food trucks, etc. The event will be open to the public, helping VCU share its mission with the community, demonstrate its commitment to benefiting humanity at large, and lay the additional groundwork for community-engaged research. Key external stakeholders, including elected officials, donors, and business leaders, would be invited to attend, improving VCU's local reputation and national prominence. Planning of the event will require the collaborative work of several units at VCU, including the Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation (OVPRI), University Relations, the Provost's office, and the Office of Institutional Equity, Effectiveness, and Success.

QUEST 2028

Successful research at VCU depends on symmetrical relationships with the surrounding community. Yet, our historical research practices have not always been just. VCU owns this. It is

no accident that our faculty chose *The Organ Thieves* as the 2022-2023 VCU Common Book. We acknowledge an air of distrust in the community that impedes our ability for positive impact through diversity in research participation, financial support, and the joy derived from being good neighbors.

We embrace VCU's Quest 2028 theme of Diversity Driving Excellence (Theme 1), and acknowledge that we must work to earn public trust. This is important because the disciplinary diversity of our cutting edge research is directly impactful and relevant for the broader Richmond community. Our VCU Research Festival will "actively seek community partnerships and opportunities to elevate awareness and collaborative action between VCU and communities" (as outlined by Goal 1.4). By bringing the community into VCU, we move in a direction to address and restore historically fractured relations while increasing public understanding and support for our research.

The VCU Research festival will showcase our research and build on its future capacity and potential. Toward the Quest 2028 theme of Research and Innovation (Theme 3), the festival will facilitate interaction and dialogue between researchers and the community. This will propel us to our goal of a collaborative research culture (as outlined in Goal 3.2) by "advanc[ing] community engagement as a standard for knowledge co-creation and public impact."

PROJECT GOALS

The primary goal of this project is to build goodwill and improve relations with the communities surrounding VCU by showcasing the impactful and innovative research happening at OneVCU.

The VCU Research Festival will also contribute to institutional strategic goals, including:

- Improving reputation and awareness of targeted research discoveries in our community
- Increasing recognition of VCU's research goals and impacts by business and industry leaders, potential innovation partners, policymakers, donors, and the media
- Exposing local high school students to VCU research, thus contributing to student pipeline development
- Underscoring VCU's commitment to community-engaged research
- Stimulating new multidisciplinary partnerships through networking of researchers across the university

PROJECT STRATEGIES

We took inspiration from design thinking methodology, a solution-based and user-oriented approach to solving problems, as we developed our project strategies. For this project, it was vital to understand the needs of the community and ignore assumptions as to what are the best areas to showcase. We relied heavily on stakeholder interviews by holding more than 25 conversations with individuals inside and outside of VCU. Stakeholders included:

- Office of the Virginia Secretary of Education
- VCU Division of Administration
- VCU Division of Strategic Enrollment Management and Student Success
- VCU Graduate School
- VCU L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs
- VCU Office of Institutional Equity, Effectiveness and Success (IES)
 - Health Hub at 25th Street
 - Collective Urban and Regional Impact
- VCU Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation (OVPRI)
- VCU Research Development Advisory Council (ReDAC)
- VCU School of Medicine
- VCU University Relations

General takeaways from these conversations were:

- Enthusiasm for the concept of a research festival
- Acknowledgment that the relationship between OneVCU and the community is asymmetrical
- Need for more dialogue between OneVCU and the community and generative space for feedback from the community
- Need to incentivize research exhibitors to participate
- Importance of preparing exhibitors to communicate effectively with a non-scientific audience

Weekly team meetings were used to define the problem and develop a potential solution. We leveraged the help of a Project Manager to guide us on the fundamental requirements for putting together a large-scale event. We presented our idea to the ReDAC Committee to gain more ideas and ensure we have identified most assumptions based on the knowledge of the diverse committee. To help others conceptualize the festival, we worked with a VCU Arts student to design a picture to serve as a prototype and vision for the event. Finally, we developed an action plan for implementing the VCU research festival (discussed below).

ACTION STEPS

Formation of the Internal Planning Committee

- Charged and led by the OVPRI
- Responsible for establishing a Community Advisory Committee
- Responsible for event planning and execution, including venue selection, annual theme, marketing, public safety plan, and all later mentioned action steps.
- Recommended planning committee members include:
 - ONECrayola64 team members
 - John Ryan, Project Sponsor and Associate VP for Research Development (OVPRI)
 - Lydia Klinger, team collaborator and Project Manager (OVPRI)
 - Development staff (Department of Development and Alumni Relations)
 - Director of the Translational Research Fellows Program (L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs)
 - Executive Director of Collective Urban and Regional Impact (IES)
 - Marketing/Communications staff (University Relations)
 - Office of Special Events and Programs (University Relations)
 - Senior Manager of Civic Innovation and Partnerships Community advisory board liaison (Government Relations/IES)
 - VCU Division of Administration

Establish a Community Advisory Committee to ensure the exhibitions and ambiance reflect the interests of the primary target audience, our larger community.

- The committee should be representative of the primary target audience of the Research Festival. VCU resources to assist in the recruitment of community advisory committee members include:
 - Chief engagement officers for local schools
 - VCU Division of Administration
 - VCU Facts & Faith Fridays Leadership (Massey Cancer Center)
 - VCU Health Office of Health Impact
 - VCU Office of Community Engagement (IES)
 - VCU Office of Government Relations (Office of the President)
 - VCU School of Education

Develop a recruitment plan to target researchers/exhibitors that highlight the diverse research activities at VCU

- Consider whether to use an open application vs targeted invitations and active recruitment
- Utilize a research award database to identify thematically relevant projects
- Create a recruitment proposal form that articulates the value-proposition for researchers/exhibitors, this might include:
 - Interdisciplinary networking
 - Curriculum Vitae
 - Academic promotion
 - Communication skill development
 - Highlighting successes of one's department
- Compliance with federal grant requirements on community engagement
- Preparation of researchers/exhibitors to ensure an engaging and informative event for the community
 - Training on communicating effectively with the public
 - Considering providing a micro-credential to those who complete training
 - Offer guidance on developing strong, hands-on demonstration/exhibition of research

Planning and implementation of non-research and entertainment event components

- Components can include:
 - Performances
 - Food trucks
 - Live music
 - Decorations
 - Local artisans
 - Promotional items ("swag")
- Stakeholders to engage should include University Relations (marketing), VCU Arts and Music, VCU student groups

Develop metrics to "test" whether the festival met its goals and determine how it can be improved for future years (as outlined in the "Outcomes" section)

OUTCOMES

We propose evaluating both the process ("festival *outputs*") and the impact ("festival *outcomes*"). Output metrics will help us understand if our intended process matches what actually happens at the festival. Outcomes, on the other hand, speak more directly to whether the event meets its intended goals.

Measurable **outputs** for this project will include:

- Number of festival attendees
- Characteristics of participants [age, race/ethnicity, Richmond city resident, affiliated with VCU, high school student/other prospective VCU student, external stakeholders (e.g., politicians and local industry/business leaders)]
- The number of researcher exhibits planned versus delivered
- The number of wrap-around events (e.g., food trucks) versus delivered

Immediate outcomes may be assessed by exit surveys (written and/or electronic with QR code provided as attendees leave the festival) and through brief interviews conducted with attendees during the festival. Conducted by student reporters from the VCU Robertson School serving as roving reporters, the two-minute surveys would provide vital feedback on the user experience and serve as future marketing assets. Outcomes to be assessed might include attendee beliefs surrounding public trust as well as the quality and perceived relevance of the VCU Research

enterprise; particular areas of research interest; and what they would like to experience in future festivals.

Future outcomes of this project could include:

- Improved relations between OneVCU and the surrounding community members, neighborhoods, businesses, policymakers, and potential innovation partners
- Increased awareness of showcased research discoveries (with an emphasis on tangible human impact/grand societal challenges)
- A pipeline for diverse prospective students in STEAM learning paths
- Greater and diverse participation in clinical trials and community-based research
- New interdisciplinary partnerships through networking of researchers across the university

SUSTAINABILITY

To ensure project sustainability, the team recommends that the Vice President for Research and Innovation, or their designee, maintains ownership of the annual event. The Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation (OVPRI) has indicated that this type of community engagement is a high priority and a willingness to commit financial resources toward the festival. OVPRI should collaborate closely with the OneVCU stakeholder units recommended for service on the planning committee (as outlined in “Action Steps”).

The team recommends the establishment of metrics of success, described above in the “Outcomes” section, at the outset of the planning process. Finally, an annual evaluation should be provided at the project’s conclusion to the President’s Cabinet, the Research Development Advisory Committee, and other stakeholders to improve the visibility of the festival, increase buy-in from senior leaders, and ensure its continuation.

FINANCING AND RESOURCES

The financial and budgetary components of the event will be impacted by the selection of a venue. The largest expense will be the venue rental along with facility setups such as staging, AV rental, and entertainment costs. The actual display and presentation costs are not estimated in this proposal and are expected to be covered by the departments presenting the research projects.

The following cost components will make up the budget. Some will be fixed and others will be variable depending on the number of attendees, exhibitors, and scope of food and entertainment options. The estimate below assumes an attendance of 500 people for an event staged at the Main Street Station in downtown Richmond.

VCU RESEARCH FESTIVAL**INVITE & ATTENDANCE SUMMARY**

Maximum Number of Attendees 500

EXPENSES Estimate (Main Street Station)**VENUE & CATERING (includes taxes and gratuities)**

Venue rental	\$14,800.00
Staging	\$2,045.00
Chairs (\$2/ea)	\$210.00
Tables/Cloth (\$85/ea)	\$1,275.00
Décor/florals	\$500.00
Food and beverage	\$1,500.00

A/V

External AV: A/V, tech, rentals	\$5,000.00
Photography	\$1,000.00
Videography	\$1,000.00

SUPPORT STAFF

Housekeeping/Support Staff	\$1,500.00
Musician(s), performer(s)	\$1,100.00
Speaker(s)	\$0.00
Other	

\$29,930.00**MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS**

Graphic design work	\$500.00
Print invitations	\$500.00
Onsite signage	\$1,700.00
Marketing	\$7,500.00

\$10,200.00**OTHER**

Awards/Accreditation	\$500.00
Guest: Parking & Transportation	\$500.00
Security: VCU Police	\$626.40

\$1,626.40**TOTAL EXPENSES****\$41,756.40****REVENUE****Estimate****SPONSORSHIPS**

Sponsor 1 VP of Research	\$25,000.00
Sponsor 2	\$5,000.00

TOTAL REVENUES**\$30,000.00****NET COST****-\$11,756.40****NET COST / ATTENDEE****(23.51)**

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our vision for the VCU Research Festival is an annual event that takes place in the community. In its first year, we envision a one-day festival with approximately 500 attendees. In the budget section, we provide pricing estimates based on one venue option (Main Street Station). Other venue ideas include Belle Isle, Brown's Island, the 17th Street Marketplace, a museum, or the Richmond Convention Center. The Planning Committee should make the final venue selection. It will be important to choose a location that is accessible to community members. ONECrayola64 strongly recommends that the festival not be held on either of VCU's campuses.

- Use of a planning committee with two co-leaders: one focused on project management/implementation and one focused on the big picture goals of the event
- Integrating the voice of the community/event audience as it is critical to the success of the Research Festival
- Active participation from researchers as this can effectively communicate to the public OneVCU mission and commitment to the community.
 - Thus, we recommend exhibitions/displays are hands-on, interactive, and make the research "real" for participants.
- Address potential challenges that may serve as an implementation barrier, such as:
 - Buy-in from faculty and VCU stakeholders
 - Effective marketing to the community/audience
 - Project's dependence on several stakeholders and units within OneVCU, which may mean a complex planning process

FINAL PITCH

The best relationships are built through community engagements, partnerships, and mentorships. Our goal is to improve OneVCU's relationship with its surrounding communities by improving our reputation and increasing awareness of the positive impacts of research in our community.

The VCU Research Festival will build goodwill with the community by showcasing the impactful and innovative research happening at OneVCU. Our vision of a one-day event, at which diverse VCU faculty and student researchers from across all disciplines will showcase their work in a single space with an emphasis on interactive and hands-on displays that will engage attendees and ignite a passion for learning and community involvement. This event will feel like a festival, celebrating with arts performances, TED-Talk style presentations, etc. The sky's the limit as to what we can create and accomplish with this festival. We will continue to share VCU's mission with the community, demonstrating its commitment to the advancement of humanity.



ONECRAYOLA64 TEAM MEMBERS

- 👤 **Samsam Ali** - Senior Accountant, Cost Analysis, University Controller's Office
- 👤 **Marlo Brown** - Systems Engineer, Performance Improvement, VCU Health
- 👤 **Elizabeth Fredericksen-Trent** - Division Administrator/Operations Manager, Center for Human Simulation & Patient Safety, School of Medicine
- 👤 **Catherine Ham** - Assistant Professor of Neurology, Director, VCU Headache Center, School of Medicine
- 👤 **Carly Katz** - Senior Director of Federal Relations, Government Relations, Office of the President
- 👤 **Tiffany Murray-Robertson** - Associate Director of Communications and External Relations, L. Douglas Wilder School and Government and Public Affairs
- 👤 **John Quillin** - Associate Professor, Pediatrics, School of Medicine

👤 **Project Sponsor: John Ryan** - Associate Vice President, Division of Research and Development, Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation



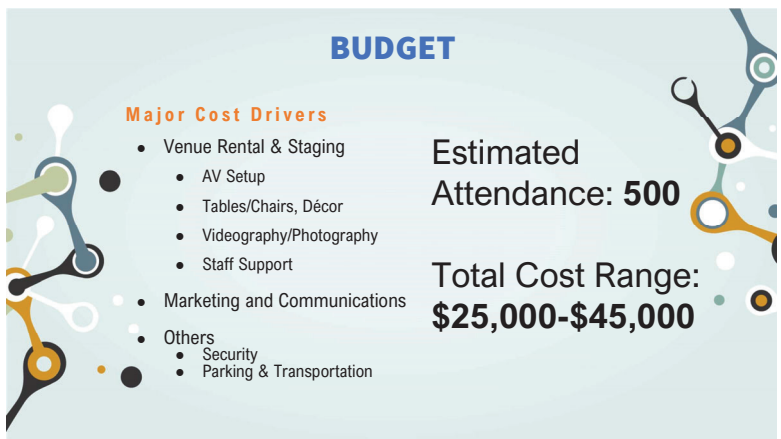
We were the 1st

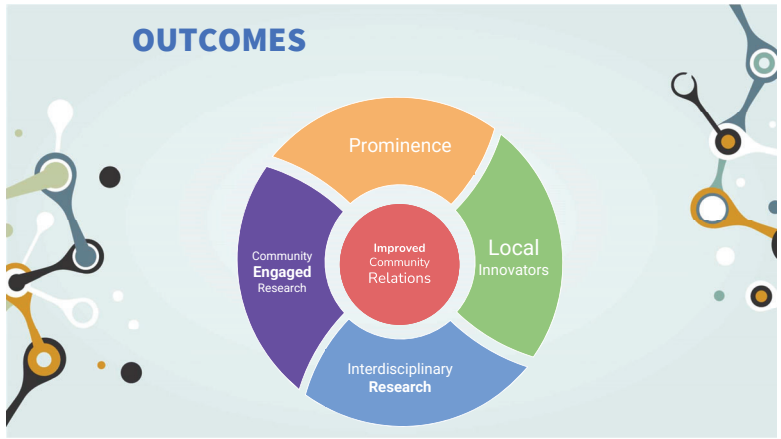
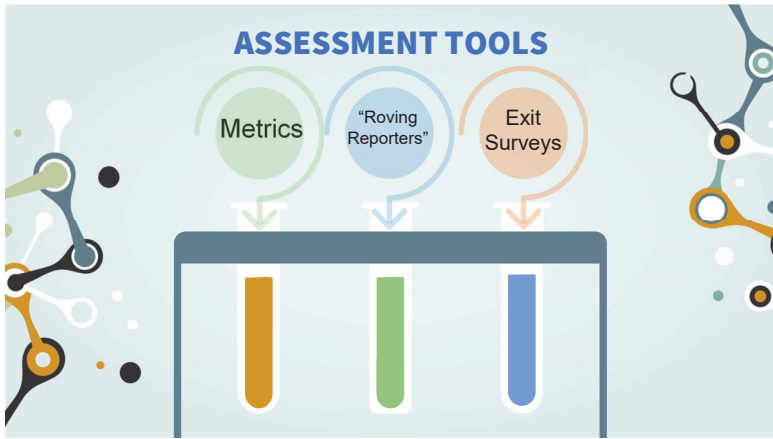
- The first school of social work in the South**
- First organ transplants in Virginia**



VCU RESEARCH FESTIVAL

- Bring VCU to the community to show how we turn ideas into impact
- Festival atmosphere to bring down the walls of the "ivory tower"
- **NOT** a poster session!





JOIN US!

IF YOU CAN THINK IT....

IF YOU CAN WISH IT....

IF YOU CAN DREAM IT....

YOU CAN DO IT!

ONECrayola64

Team Process Observations

WHAT WENT WELL

- Well-balanced team with many strengths
- Positive and empathetic culture
- Appreciative leadership approach
- Clear expectations
- Strong communication

CHALLENGES

- Ideation and brainstorming sometimes slowed progress → Sought outside advice to overcome
- Individual visions for the event and its execution → Developed shared expectations and vision through communication exercise



THANK YOU

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