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VCU Day of Service Toolkit (VCU-DST)

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TEAM MEMBERS

Team Rams Unite Now! (Team RUN)			
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Project Sponsor			
Name	Position Title	Department	School/College
Joyce Lloyd	Professor and Associate Dean of the Graduate School	Human and Molecular Genetics	School of Medicine

PROJECT ABSTRACT

This team designed and developed a digital Day of Service Toolkit (VCU-DST) to help facilitate the planning and execution of community service projects by VCU students, faculty and staff. The VCU-DST includes guidance and relevant procedures for all the aspects of planning needed to execute both large-scale and small-scale projects, including resources for strategic partnerships, financial planning and event logistics and evaluation. The VCU-DST is designed to be utilized for day-of-service projects planned and initiated by VCU students, student leaders, and organizations at all levels (undergraduate, graduate, and professional). The VCU-DST is designed to be flexible and adaptable, assisting in the planning of events of all types and sizes for execution at future dates as the students and their leaders see fit. At the completion of this project, the digital VCU-DST will be delivered to our sponsor, Joyce Lloyd, the faculty advisor for the Graduate Student Government Association. It will also be made available to student leadership and service organizations to assist them in planning their community service projects.

QUEST 2028

Development and delivery of the VCU-DST to student leadership, service organizations, and their faculty advisors helps achieve the Quest 2028 Strategic Plan in several ways:

Vision. The Vision of Quest 2028 calls on *"…Virginia Commonwealth University [to] be distinguished by its commitments to…beneficial community impact."*

> The VCU-DST is a resource for students that will add efficiency to the planning and execution of Service Projects in the Richmond Community. This will allow students to invest more of their time and energy into having an impact on the community.

Values: One of the eight Values laid out in the Quest 2028 Strategic Plans is *"Service: Engage in the application of learning and discovery to improve the human condition and support the public good at home and abroad."*

> The VCU-DST is a resource that will help facilitate the planning and execution of day-of-service projects by VCU students, faculty and staff, thereby showing our commitment to this Value through actions in the community.

Strategic Theme #2 - Student Success. Goal #2 under Student Success calls on us to *"Enhance the university culture of care … that supports … [a] sense of belonging."*

> The VCU-DST will help VCU students and student organizations more easily execute day-of-service and enjoy the culture of care that experience provides.

Strategic Theme #4 - Thriving Communities. Goal #4 under Thriving Communities calls on us to *"Actively seek community partnerships and opportunities to elevate awareness and collaborative action between VCU and communities."*

> The VCU-DST is a direct resource that enables action on the part of VCU students and student organizations, sharing knowledge and procedures to seek out and forge partnerships and opportunities in the community.

PROJECT GOALS

1. Facilitate the opportunities for VCU students, staff, and faculty to lead and participate in community service projects to benefit and strengthen ties to the local Richmond community.
2. Provide a resource to student leaders and event organizers that provides guidance and pre-built processes to follow in planning and executing day-of-service projects.
3. Create a sense of VCU spirit, social connections, and a sense of community and belonging among the VCU students, staff, faculty, and members of the Richmond community

PROJECT STRATEGIES

The project is grounded in the understanding that 1) day-of-service projects are valuable to students and the community, 2) large-scale service projects are time-consuming to plan, and 3) day-of-service can be simplified by providing procedural guidelines and resources. While the details regarding specific events will vary, the digital VCU-DST will help assist students, student organizations, staff, and faculty in managing the procedural aspects of planning and executing day-of-service projects.

To develop the VCU-DST and customize it for projects relevant to the VCU community, the team planned and executed four specific objectives:

1. **Conversations with VCU Administrators, Staff, and Student Leaders**. The team met and spoke with the following members of the VCU community to get feedback and direction on the scope and content of the proposed toolkit:
   - Dr. Aaron Hart, Vice President for Student Affairs
   - Nicole Patterson, 2020 Big Event SGA advisor
   - Lisa Cooper, Associate Director, Student Engagement
   - Carole Dowell, Director, University Student Commons and Activities
   - Sincere Slade-Reading, President of Undergraduate Student Government

- Tony Trimpe, Assistant Director for Leadership Engagement, Virginia Tech
- Verenda K. Cobbs, Senior Manager for Civic Innovation & Partnerships
- Monee S. Mosley, ARM, Senior Risk Associate, Insurance and Risk Management
- Adriene DeLoach, Executive Director, Division for Student Engagement and Impact Director, VCU Diversity P.A.T.H.S
- The team also spoke with Reuban Rodriquez, previous Associate Vice President and Dean of Students, prior to his departure from that role.

2. **Research on "The Big Event" National Service Project Initiative and Conversations with Leaders of the Big Event at Virginia Tech**. The team was aware of, and some had participated in "The Big Event" and similar day-of-service projects at other institutions, including Virginia Tech. The team researched this national initiative, including implementation at other institutions and their practices and procedures. In the course of this work, the team spoke with Tony Trimpe, Assistant Director for Leadership Engagement from Virginia Tech, and gathered additional information about student engagement for their Big Event and a semi-annual conference for schools with similar events.

3. **Survey of Students on Attitudes and Preferences for Service Projects.** To help customize the Toolkit for the VCU Community, the team conducted surveys of VCU students to understand their motivations, preferences, and desired activities for community service projects. That data revealed that 36% of students were interested in service projects benefiting the Richmond community, 19% were interested in environmental service projects, 17% were interested in VCU-focused activities, and 16% in social justice-related projects. 54% of students surveyed responded that were likely or extremely likely to engage in an on-campus day of service. The highest motivating factor amongst students was giving back to the Richmond community. When analyzing the data gathered, the significant factors of engagement centered around engagement with the VCU community. Leadership opportunities were an additional motivating factor for students.

4. **Construction of the VCU-DST.** The combined efforts of Specific Aims 1 - 3 enabled the team to identify key components for the VCU-DST, including, among other things, a timeline, communications plan, institutional partners, project management tools, and an evaluation rubric. The completed VCU-DST will be delivered to the team's sponsor, Professor Joyce Lloyd, for future use by the Graduate Student Government Association and other VCU administrators for use by the undergraduate SGA and other student organizations.

ACTION STEPS
The VCU-DST offers a practical and detailed roadmap for planning and executing a day-of-service project for the VCU Community. The information in the VCU-DST includes:

- Purpose
- Roadmap
- Communication Plan
- Key Partners
- Budget & Financial Resources
- Project Management Tool
- Sample Day of Event Agenda
- Liability/Risk Management
- How to Capture Content
- Evaluation Tools

To plan and execute an event, a student leader or student organization would choose a cause or specific service activity and follow the steps in the VCU-DST in consultation with the Faculty Advisor for the organization to plan the event. The VCU-DST assumes that a leadership team will be formed for the event to allow multiple student leaders to participate and carry the workload for planning the event.

The biggest hurdle the team identified for students planning and executing these types of events is the availability of funding from the University to cover event costs. The VCU-DST offers a sample budget for

student leaders to consider and other points of guidance on the resources they will need to secure in order to execute a day-of-service event.

OUTCOMES

The primary outcome of the VCU-DST is to create a turnkey plan for a student-led, university-wide day of service.

Secondary outcomes include:

- Provide direct service to residents and non-profit organizations across Richmond
- Create positive publicity for VCU
- Generate leadership opportunities for student
- Increase student by instilling a sense of belonging and VCU pride within students

SUSTAINABILITY

VCU has the opportunity to serve as a natural hub for the community it serves. The key stakeholders include offices that will provide support for students, faculty, and staff on campus, such as the VCU Division of Student Affairs, Office of the Provost (Community Engagement and Inclusive Excellence), and Office of the President (Government Relations). Additional prospective stakeholders include undergraduate and graduate student executive board members, business leaders, community leaders, non-profit organizations, media outlets, and faith leaders.

FINANCING AND RESOURCES:

The resources necessary to implement community service projects with the VCU-DST will depend upon the scale and scope of the project. We anticipate the following needs with total estimated expenses of $35,500 in year 1:

- Personnel: much of this project will be led and staffed by student volunteers, but we anticipate the additional need for a paid part-time staff project coordinator and the support of undergraduate and graduate student assistants ~$5,000
- Supplies/Miscellaneous: signage and printing, tent/table rentals, tools and equipment for service projects, participation gifts, swag, snacks, and water. ~$23,000
- Vendors: food truck and entertainment ~$2,500
- VCU Services: VCU Police (Traffic control, security), transportation (buses), Rodney the RAM, The Peppas ~$5,000

As the project grows, there will be incremental cost increases that may be offset by additional sponsorship support. We project estimated costs to be $37,275 in year 2 and $39,178.25 in year 3.

A detailed budget for years 1-3 has been provided in the VCU-DST.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Identify an office that will serve as sponsor for this project and add a partial FTE staff line to provide sustaining support and continuity for the project as student leadership changes from year to year
- Send a staff member and student leader to the One Big Thanks conference to learn more about planning and executing large-scale community service projects
- Identify community sponsors to help offset day of event costs
- Schedule individual meetings with all stakeholders to achieve project goals
- Provide clear expectations and guidance

Advance planning is ideal. Barriers to the project's success may include time, project evaluation, budget, project management, communication, planning, hitting critical milestones and deadlines, and competing team priorities.

FINAL PITCH

The VCU-DST will give VCU students a roadmap to implementing a university-wide day of service. There are multiple benefits of a day of service, several of which align with Quest 2028 goals.

It will provide an opportunity for students, faculty, and staff to provide direct service to the Richmond community. In addition to making a positive impact in the lives of community members, a service-oriented event on this scale will garner positive media coverage furthering VCU's reputation as a good citizen of the City of Richmond.

The VCU-DST and its implementation will also have direct benefits to VCU students. The day of service is designed to be implemented as a student-led event. This will provide students with leadership opportunities that can be leveraged during job searches. Participating in the event will also give students the opportunity to connect with classmates beyond their degree programs and foster a sense of belonging within the VCU community. This sense of belonging leads to higher student satisfaction and retention rates.

TEAM PROCESS OBSERVATIONS

The team had a great learning experience and completed the project drawing from the skills and strengths of each member.

While there were initial teamwork challenges to overcome related to finalizing project ideas, we were able to build team collaboration and leverage the skills of each team member to identify a project that achieved our common goal.

We gained experience in project team structure and learned that it can be difficult to coordinate a set time for team meetings each week. This was especially important during our corrective actions stage of the project and developing the toolkit and design of our project.

We had to optimize our team's ability to work across campus to collaborate with the administration. Due to leadership changes on campus, this presented challenges when identifying a team sponsor. We also learned the importance of allowing the students to design and lead the project they wanted rather than providing them with a template to execute one we might imagine.

During data collection and interacting with students and community partners, the team learned that graduate and undergraduate students on the Monroe campus and medical campus were both interested in participating in a day of service opportunity.

We also learned there is currently a lot of involvement in the service and giving back space both at VCU and at colleges and universities nationwide. The "One Big Thanks" conference is a resource available for anyone who wants to learn more pertaining to hosting a "Big Event" on campus. From the One Big Thanks Conference registration site: https://engage.vt.edu/programs/bigevent/obt_conference.html
"The conference serves as an opportunity to promote the values of service and unity and to encourage other universities to establish The Big Event on their own campuses. The name of the conference is derived from The Big Event's motto: "One Big Day, One Big Thanks!". Today, over 130 universities have The Big Event — a way to say, thank you to the local community that supports their university."