

## VCU BREAKTHROUGHS FUND Request for Applications

With the launch of the [One VCU Research Strategic Priorities Plan](#) (research strategic plan) in July 2021, Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) entered a new research paradigm, driven by our culture of collaboration designed to facilitate discovery, scholarship and creative practice. Further catalyzing the commitment of VCU, with the approval of the VCU Board of Visitors, President Michael Rao, Ph.D., has authorized the Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation (OVPRI) to invest in our second year of the six-year research strategic plan

The research strategic plan aligns the strengths of VCU’s faculty, staff, students, and our greater community into four research themes designed to further our goal to improve the human condition including recognition that diversity, equity, inclusion, and sustainability are imperative to success:

1. **Enriching the human experience:** apply creative expression, critical analysis and advancements in knowledge and technology to enhance individual quality of life and social infrastructure.
2. **Establishing a just and equitable society:** commit to identifying injustices and finding solutions to the most difficult social problems to build a better world, recognizing that change begins with us.
3. **Optimizing health:** use trans-, multi-, and interdisciplinary approaches at scales from molecules to populations in search of new ways to preserve and restore human health.
4. **Supporting sustainable energy and environments:** create evidence-based solutions that contribute to a better future in a rapidly changing natural world.

The research strategic plan’s overall return-on-investment indicators include, but are not necessarily limited to, faculty, staff, trainee, and student contributions in accordance with some or all of the following priorities:

1. Expands external funding awards and research expenditures, developing VCU’s national program rankings, including increased externally sponsored awards, growth of federally supported research activities, increased research expenditures, and full indirect cost recovery on external funding awards as applicable.
2. Expands the rate of growth of diverse, multidisciplinary research teams in all disciplines, including STEM, humanities, social sciences, and the arts (sponsored funding, impact, etc.).
3. Expands the number of underrepresented minority faculty as part of team leadership on extramural grants submitted and awarded.
4. Increases the engagement of students and trainees in research and scholarship.
5. Expands the rate of growth and impact of VCU community-engaged research activities and measurements of public/societal impact that contributes to diverse and inclusive communities.
6. High impact publications in quality peer-reviewed journals, monographs, editions or edited collections.
7. Advances community access to innovation through increases in patents, licensing, public-private partnerships, and start-ups, leading/translated into community practice.

### VCU Breakthroughs Fund At-A-Glance (see full details below)

<b>RFA Release</b>	Oct. 14, 2022
<b>Full Proposal Deadline</b>	Feb. 17, 2023
<b>Award Start Date</b>	June 2023 (use June 30, 2023 as project start date)
<b>Total Funds Available</b>	\$2.5M
<b>Award Ceiling</b>	Up to \$200,000

<b>Unit level cost share</b>	None
<b>Fund Release</b>	Initial: 50%; Remaining 50%: following successful 6-month progress report
<b>Project Period</b>	18-24 months
<b>Anticipated # of Awards</b>	Up to 12 anticipated
<b>Program Category</b>	Large scale program funding
<b>Eligibility</b>	<p>Transdisciplinary research required.</p> <p>Multi-PI required. PIs must be from at least two different schools/colleges.</p> <p>PIs may be any <u>full-time, primary appointment</u> VCU faculty, research faculty or clinician researcher regardless of rank or tenure status. Clinician researchers must have a university faculty appointment to serve as a PI. Staff without affiliate college/school faculty appointments are not eligible to be a PI.</p> <p>Inclusive research teams encompassing meaningful participation of all members, are strongly encouraged, including URM and/or minoritized faculty, early-stage investigators, trainees, and students.</p> <p>Alignment with a research strategic plan initiative, including specific goal(s) and objective(s) identified in the <a href="#">One VCU Research Strategic Priorities Plan</a>.</p>

**Purpose:** VCU Breakthroughs Fund (Breakthroughs) supports transdisciplinary teams to design unique, creative, and innovative large-scale approaches to confront humanity’s grand challenges as identified in the One VCU Strategic Research Priorities Plan. Successful projects are designed to reach very specific outcomes or establish the capability to compete for external funding upon award completion.

**Eligibility:** Transdisciplinary research, including multiple principal investigators (PIs), is required. This is defined as research that combines two or more areas of study into a seamless project. PIs must be from at least two different VCU schools or colleges. Principal investigators may be any full-time VCU faculty, research faculty or clinician researcher regardless of rank or tenure status, whose appointments are approved by the dean of their college or school. Inclusive research teams encompassing meaningful participation of all members, are strongly encouraged, including URM and/or minoritized faculty, early-stage investigators, trainees, and students. Projects must demonstrate alignment with initiative, along with specific goal(s) and objective(s).

**Award Period:** Funding up to \$200,000 total with project periods from 18-24 months. Project start: June 30, 2023.

**Full proposal deadline:** Application packages should be submitted via RAMS-SPOT Internal Opportunities here: [Breakthroughs: OP00000504](#) no later than **5pm (EST) on February 17, 2023**. You will receive a confirmation email upon receipt. **Applications will not be accepted after the deadline for any reason.**

**Proposals not following the content and format requirements will be returned without review.**

**Format:** Applications should be single spaced, Arial, 11-point (minimum) font with half-inch margins on all sides. Required forms can be downloaded here: <https://onevcuresearch.vcu.edu/funding/> in the “Quick Links” box. **Include the following components in order as a single PDF file for upload:**

- **Project abstract or specific aims (1-page):** Include information on the external funding opportunity targeted.
- **Team Profile (3-pages):**

1. Full team roster including name, affiliations (college/school/center/institute), and department, organized by discipline.
  2. Discuss the diversity (specifically URM and/or minoritized faculty, early-stage investigators) of the proposed team, including how team composition and members specifically contribute to the design of project strategies, operations, evaluation, and dissemination (inclusive of PIs, Co-PIs, Co-Is, collaborators, postdoctoral fellows, and graduate/undergraduate students as applicable).
  3. Detailed description of the team's prior collaboration history (e.g., as evidenced by co-authored papers and/or jointly held grants).
  4. Multi-PI management plan.
- **Project plan (6-pages total):**
    1. Identify the corresponding strategic research plan initiative(s) and the specific goal(s) and objective(s).
    2. Background and significance of central research theme.
    3. Description of preliminary data/findings/results as appropriate.
    4. Research questions/methodology for proposed work as appropriate.
    5. Specific list and description of measurable outcomes/outputs that can be leveraged into external support including detailed evaluation plan.
    6. Sustainability plan: Description of how project outcomes/outputs will advance the team's scholarly trajectory/line of inquiry, including specific information on applications for external funding, community impact, intellectual property, and/or other outcomes. This section is a leading criterion for award selection and should be sufficiently detailed to show a tangible return on investment within one year of project end date.
  - **References cited (if applicable – no limit):** Use the citation format appropriate for your field.
  - **Timeline (1-page):** Outline planning activity milestones and timeframes for accomplishment(s) anticipated during the project period (18-24 months) culminating in submission of the external proposal. Anticipated start: June 30, 2023.
  - **Facilities and resources (no limit).**
  - **Biographical Sketches:** NIH and NSF bio sketches accepted. If you do not have a current bio sketch, use this [bio sketch form](#).
  - **Budget and budget justification:** Use the [budget and justification form](#) to list and justify all requested costs associated directly related to planning activities only. Momentum funding cannot supplant existing support for a proposed project. Facilities and administrative (F&A or indirect) costs are not allowed.

**Note: Budgets will require approval from the chairs and deans (or their designees) in RAMS-SPOT before submission. Please allow adequate time for approval routing.**

Eligible costs:

1. Salary support, **including fringe benefits**, for PI(s) and co-investigator(s) **collectively** cannot exceed 20% of total project costs (i.e., if the total project budget is \$200,000, the PI/co-I salaries and fringe cannot exceed \$40,000 total).
2. Salary support, including fringe benefits, for research staff.
3. Research supplies.
4. Undergraduate, graduate student and postdoctoral stipends if relevant to the project with a detailed justification.
5. Essential travel related to the project.
6. Other expenses (i.e., laboratory and shared core facilities/resource fees).
7. Consultant costs.
8. Equipment/technology critical to the project. (Requests over \$5,000 must include a detailed justification.)
9. Participant fees.

**Ineligible costs:**

1. Salary support for administrative personnel or 12-month UAP/executive personnel.
2. Office equipment and supplies (including faculty computers/laptops/tablets, unless strictly related to project).
3. Travel not strictly related to the project.
4. Tuition other than graduate student tuition.
5. Professional organization dues or membership fees.
6. Sub-awards to institutions or salary support for individuals external to VCU.
7. Pre-award costs.

- **Current and Pending Support (no page limit):** Use this form to itemize all current and pending support associated with the proposed project.

**Proposal review:** The submission, review, and funding process are coordinated by the Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation. **Review Process:** Applications will be reviewed and scored by a faculty panel including members from across the University. Reviews and scores will then be submitted to the SRPP Advisory Council. Recommendations from the Council will be forwarded to the VPRI for final approval. Written reviews and scores will be sent to those applicants not awarded. Review criteria include:

1. Merit: 1) scholarly merit and impact, and 2) feasibility (budget and timeline).
2. Broader impacts: 1) translational potential, and 2) potential for high return on investment.
3. Relation to Strategic Research Priorities Plan: specific potential for a project to further the goals and objectives identified.
4. Team: 1) PI(s) preparedness, 2) transdisciplinary qualities, 3) diversity (meaningful participation of trainees, students, URM and/or minoritized faculty and early-stage investigators as well as cross-campus collaboration).

**Award and Reporting Requirements:** The award period is 18-24 months beginning June 30, 2023 (dependent on conclusion of review process). Fifty percent of award funding will be released at the start of the project period with the remaining 50% contingent submission of a six-month report documenting meaningful progress toward fulfillment of the project aims/goals. Progress should include evidence that the applicants have met with a relevant program officer/director from the planned funding agency if such a meeting is allowed by the agency. The Vice President for Research and Innovation (VPRI) and members of the Advisory Council will review progress in comparison to budget utilization and project milestones based on the initial project proposal. The remaining 50% of funds will only be released following approval from the VPRI. A final project report including an accounting of all funds expended, a summary of work completed, and progress on sustainability plans will be required 30 days after the initial project end date.

**Questions:** Please direct all questions to [ovprifunds@vcu.edu](mailto:ovprifunds@vcu.edu).

**Additional requirements:**

1. Projects must have documented compliance approvals (e.g., IRB, IACUC), as applicable and appropriate, secured before work may begin.
2. The principal investigator(s) will be required to participate in an annual survey of results and outcomes (e.g., external grants submissions and awards, publications, creative work, intellectual property, etc.) associated with their fund-sponsored research. Participation will begin one year after the project end date and continue annually for a total of three years.
3. All publications, presentations, etc., resulting from the project must acknowledge financial support from the VCU Breakthroughs Fund.
4. Projects are expected to be completed within the specific budget period. No-cost extensions will be granted only in highly exceptional circumstances. PIs will be expected to fully justify any extension requests in writing. Extensions are at the sole discretion of the VPRI.