

DIVISION OF
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



2026 VCU EXCELLENCE IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AWARDS

Celebrating Community Engaged Partnership

community.vcu.edu

 [@vcudce](https://www.instagram.com/vcudce)

AWARD CATEGORIES

Tonight, we present awards in the following categories:

EXCELLENCE IN CE RESEARCH

EXCELLENCE IN CE TEACHING

EXCELLENCE IN CE FACULTY OR STAFF

EXCELLENCE IN CE STUDENTS OR POSTDOCS

**OUTSTANDING UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY
PARTNERS**

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EXCELLENCE IN COMMUNITY ENGAGED RESEARCH

Recognizes researchers building authentic, multi-sector partnerships to address pressing 21st-century challenges

EXCELLENCE IN COMMUNITY ENGAGED RESEARCH

2026 Nominees:

Daniel Klyce

Sterling Hundley

Gigi Amateau

Jonathan Becker

Ryan Smith

Katherine Tossas

Yaoying Xu

Laura Battaglia

DR. KATHERINE Y. TOSSAS

AFFILIATIONS

Assistant Professor, Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences, VCU School of Public Health, Associate Director Global Oncology, VCU Massey Comprehensive Cancer Center

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Chickahominy Tribe (TRUTH Project), CAHN, Virginia Native Nations Against Cancer Coalition



“I am here to steward and, as needed, to translate community wisdom into biobehavioral evidence, so healing can reach where systems fail.”

EXCELLENCE IN COMMUNITY ENGAGED TEACHING

Honors individuals using evidence-based strategies to create transformative, community-based learning experiences for students

EXCELLENCE IN COMMUNITY ENGAGED TEACHING

2026 Nominees:

Dre'mon Miller

Marion C. Manski

Stephani Rizzi

Alix Bryan

Katherine Falls

Emily Smith

Lisa Cipolletti

EMILY SMITH

AFFILIATIONS

Assistant Professor, Dept. of Interior Design,
VCUarts; Co-lead, Middle of Broad (mOb) Studio

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Storefront for Community Design, Richmond City
Departments



“Emily’s framework allows students to connect deeply with the human experience, bridging the gap between their craft and their community.”

EXCELLENCE IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: FACULTY OR STAFF

Celebrates faculty or staff demonstrating purpose-driven leadership and sustained impact in research, teaching, or service

EXCELLENCE IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: FACULTY OR STAFF

2026 Nominees:

Vivian Dzokoto

Sonya Durham

Jennifer Koblinski

Nancy Valencia Rojas

Naomi Wheeler

Carmenita Higginbotham

Anita Nadal

Emily Zimmerman

DR. EMILY ZIMMERMAN

AFFILIATIONS

Professor of Epidemiology, School of Public Health; Director of Community Engaged Research, VCU Center on Society and Health; Co-leader, Community Engagement team, Wright Center for Clinical and Translational Research

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Richmond Health Equity Program Community Advisory Board, Health Hub at 25th



“Emily Zimmerman doesn’t just manage research; she fosters belonging. She ensures the expertise of our neighbors is the primary driver of inquiry.”

EXCELLENCE IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: STUDENT, TRAINEE OR POSTDOC

Acknowledges students, trainees, or fellows who mobilize resources and engage in reciprocal partnerships to enhance quality of life

EXCELLENCE IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: STUDENT, FELLOW OR POSTDOC

2026 Nominees:

Vashti Bandy

Oliver Ansari

Maddy Funk

Roqia Ali

Lily Corbin

Nina Dashti-Gibson

Naeem Ahmad

Adam Vo

James Bacon

Sherrick Hill

NINA DASHTI-GIBSON

AFFILIATIONS

MD-PhD Candidate, VCU Medical Scientist Training Program; T32 Scholar, Wright Center Translational Biomedical Sciences Training Program

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Ron Thompson (Massey Cancer Champion), Ron Thompson, Khalid Thompson, Rain Spann, Silly Genius



“The experience has allowed me to foster dialogue about the important role community members play in advancing scientific discovery.”

OUTSTANDING UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY PARTNER

Honors community partners that collaborate with VCU to
address local needs and inspire civic engagement

OUTSTANDING UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY PARTNER

2026 Nominees:

Richmond Public School

Fight Cancer Stay Positive Foundation

Carver Area Civic Improvement League

East End Library

Harm Reduction Program at the Health Brigade

RICHMOND PUBLIC SCHOOLS MULTILINGUAL STUDENT SUCCESS TEAM

Lead Collaborators: Dr. Jennifer Blackwell,
Lily Mirjahangiri, Amelia Castaneda, and
Luis Martinez

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

VCU School of Education (Three-year initiative)



“They move beyond the traditional model of ‘translation services’ to empower parents as active advocates in their children's education.”

KATRINA JACKSON

AFFILIATIONS

Regional Engagement Coordinator, Richmond Public Schools

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Carver Elementary Community, Family Liaisons (10 Schools)



“She builds enduring bonds of trust that allow our partnership with Carver to flourish through visionary leadership and an unwavering commitment to community innovation.”

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**THANK YOU FOR
JOINING US!**

