



Strategic Plan Executive Summary

VCU Alumni leads the university's efforts to strengthen and promote an invested alumni community and inspires lifelong loyalty that advances Virginia Commonwealth University.

VCU Alumni's strategic plan is guided by this aforementioned mission statement. This plan articulates the office's priorities and serves as a resource for those who share in our efforts to engage VCU's more than 190,000 alumni worldwide.

As the VCU community commemorates in 2018 the 50th anniversary of the Wayne Commission, VCU Alumni is the primary gateway for alumni to access VCU's global alumni community. With the adoption of an inclusive, non-dues membership model, the path ahead is clear for us to engage tens of thousands of alumni who previously did not find a way to connect with their alma mater. Over the next five years, we will enhance our current offerings to strengthen our role of providing rewarding and relevant engagement opportunities for alumni. These opportunities include ways for alumni to enrich the university, celebrate their VCU experience, and create meaningful peer-to-peer connections.

Our staff partnered with alumni leaders and other key university stakeholders to create this strategic plan. This plan is titled: **ELEVATE: Expanding Leadership, Enrichment & Volunteerism for Alumni Through Engagement**.

ELEVATE outlines the specific strategies and tactics we will employ in the coming years. We will enhance our alumni outreach efforts, strengthen reunion and recognition programming already underway and grow new initiatives in areas focused on career development, professional networking and lifelong learning. We will develop new volunteer roles for alumni and will focus staff time and programming on the recruitment, training, retention and stewardship of volunteer leaders. We will build new business partnerships and find new opportunities for mutually beneficial collaboration. We will build a culture of philanthropy in which every alumni volunteer is also a donor. And that is just the beginning. Everything we do will have one shared outcome – to elevate the alumni experience.

Central to this vision is our framework for creating and facilitating lifelong alumni engagement. This framework recognizes the dynamic nature of alumni involvement with the university and establishes a continuum of four key dimensions by which we define, develop and measure our engagement initiatives.

The four key dimensions of engagement are:

- **Awareness:** Alumni are informed about university news, initiatives and events and are engaged through social media. They are *Ambassadors* in staying informed and sharing content.
- **Activity:** Alumni are active participants (in person or online), utilize resources and have connections both peer-to-peer, with students and with the institution. They are *Ambassadors* and *Advocates* for VCU.
- **Volunteerism:** Alumni are heavily invested through the active donation of their time and personal and professional talents as *Ambassadors*, *Advocates* and *Advisers*.
- **Philanthropy:** Alumni are invested financial stakeholders in the success of the institution. They are *Askers*. These alumni ask not only themselves but also others to read emails, attend events and volunteer their time and energy. Moreover, these alumni ask not only themselves but also others to give a gift of any amount to a VCU department, school, unit, initiative or priority of their choice. These are our *VCU Champions*.

Assumptions

We recognize that: 1) The engagement efforts undertaken by VCU Alumni will continue to require successful, ongoing collaborations with campus constituents, off-campus partners, and all alumni; 2) A full audit must be completed to assess all programs currently offered by VCU Alumni to determine which should continue, which need to be altered moving forward, and which should be retired; 3) Diversity and inclusion are valued by VCU Alumni and should be role modeled and visible in all aspects of our work, from the programs we offer and how we recruit volunteers to the practices we use in engaging with alumni and the professional staff we employ; 4) As we consider our engagement

footprint, greater consideration should be given to programming in areas with significant alumni concentrations particularly in the Richmond, greater Washington, D.C., Hampton Roads, the Triangle, N.C., Los Angeles, Atlanta and New York City metropolitan areas; and 5) Volunteers play significant roles as Advisers, Ambassadors, Advocates and Askers in our engagement efforts. This includes the VCU Alumni Board of Governors and members of our MCV Alumni Association Board of Trustees – our key volunteer partners.

Within this context, the following strategic goals will guide and propel our work and are applicable, to varying degrees, across all functional teams within VCU Alumni. A strategic planning matrix that accompanies this document further develops these strategic goals and lays out VCU Alumni's strategic direction for the next five years.

Strategic Goals

Enhance the overall engagement of alumni within affinity, shared-interest, identity, academic, industry, and regional chapters and networks

To remain relevant in the lives of our alumni, we must meet them where they are and provide engagement opportunities that fit with their professional and personal interests. We must consider not only where they live and work, but also how they define their relationship with VCU. We will accomplish this by:

- Taking the lead in planning and executing regional alumni programming in coordination with the regional giving team and school / unit-based development teams
- Developing best practices for communications and marketing within these communities
- Growing and promoting identity-based alumni networks to provide strong social and support communities for students and alumni from diverse social identities
- Implementing sustainable and robust industry network programs
- Increasing collaborations among affinity, shared-interest, identity, academic, industry and regional chapters and networks
- Enhancing programming in ways that encourage broader and greater participation by all alumni

Enhance the quantity and variety of staff-led engagement programming

As an academic institution, VCU's obligation is to educate future citizen-leaders. VCU Alumni extends this student experience by offering a rich array of both social and educational resources to our alumni. To ensure the highest quality programming for alumni, we will enhance the quantity and variety of staff-led engagement. We will accomplish this by:

- Building a programming model that delivers a variety of offerings appealing to both professional and personal interests
- Building career and professional development programming for alumni of all ages and life stages
- Developing a comprehensive portfolio of lifelong learning opportunities featuring faculty and exemplary alumni
- Bringing the classroom experience to alumni to promote personal growth, to highlight university priorities and cutting-edge research and to reconnect them with the university via a regional roadshow

Increase and enrich interactions with current students

The function of alumni relations is to honor the past, celebrate the present, and lay the foundation for the future. Our students represent that future. To build a strong and sustainable global alumni network, we must focus on strengthening our students' connections to alumni, which helps to model the importance of lifelong engagement. We will increase and enrich student-alumni interactions by:

- Fostering additional growth of Students Today Alumni Tomorrow (STAT)
- Creating student-alumni program templates to be used across campus, which acknowledge the differences between the undergraduate and graduate student experience
- Connecting students and alumni in ways they identify as most meaningful to them
- Producing meaningful and sustainable alumni-student mentoring opportunities

Increase and enrich interactions with recent graduates

A strong global alumni network is enhanced by quickly and effectively engaging new alumni every year and by building and executing programming that is meaningful and relevant, both personally and professionally, for the first decade post-graduation. We will increase and enrich the alumni experience of recent graduates by:

- Fostering additional growth of “flash” volunteering opportunities that allow alumni to make a maximum impact in a moderate amount of time
- Creating opportunities for collaboration and team-based engagement
- Designing programming focused on personal and professional development with a strong focus on programming tailored to graduate and professional students that de-emphasizes a one-size-fits-all approach
- Producing meaningful, sustained mentoring opportunities that connect seasoned alumni with recent alumni

Increase and enrich interactions with seasoned (senior) alumni

The backbone of a strong and sustainable global alumni network is a focus on the seasoned (senior) alumni who provide mentorship, experience and perspective to our alumni organizations and programs. They are the role models showcasing the importance of lifelong engagement. We will increase and enrich seasoned alumni engagement by:

- Building an Alumni Emeriti Society to honor alumni 50-years post-graduation or 70 years of age

Expand and strengthen our volunteer programs

Volunteers are central to our ability to develop an invested alumni community. Therefore, we must find opportunities to reconnect alumni with VCU in a variety of meaningful ways. We will deliver a consistent and comprehensive volunteer experience by:

- Designing a process to facilitate ongoing volunteer engagement
- Crafting a strategy to recruit and retain a diverse cadre of alumni volunteers
- Creating additional volunteer opportunities
- Developing a comprehensive training program for alumni volunteers and VCU staff volunteer managers
- Improving volunteer stewardship

Expand business partnerships to ensure a sustainable future for VCU Alumni

Maintaining a financially stable organization capable of securing funds, sponsorships and annual gifts for alumni programs and volunteer groups is critical to the success of VCU Alumni. To accomplish this, we will focus on:

- Expanding internal and external partnerships that produce substantial funding and mutually beneficial long-term relationships
- Focusing on the promotion of alumni-owned businesses as alumni benefit providers, event sponsors and lead major gift donors

Further integrate philanthropy into the VCU alumni relations enterprise

By creating quality engagement opportunities for alumni, VCU Alumni will play an active and important role in the fundraising pipeline. Our programs will allow us and our colleagues to discover, qualify, cultivate, solicit and steward current and future donors. We will help alumni understand how their support impacts the university. We will continue to strengthen our part in this by:

- Providing staff and volunteer training annually to reinforce the integration of philanthropy and alumni relations
- Working closely with internal partners – specifically Annual Giving, Donor Relations and Prospect Development – to identify best practices and integrate them into our VCU Alumni tactics
- Appropriately leveraging events as opportunities for discovery, qualification, cultivation, solicitation and/or stewardship
- Creating and maintaining a culture of philanthropy with current undergraduate, graduate and professional students