

# BONNER CENTER FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT ATTUNEMENT FRAMEWORK



### WHAT IS AN ATTUNEMENT FRAMEWORK?

Seeking a strategic planning process that would be community-engaged from start to finish, the Bonner Center for Civic Engagement settled on the language of attunement: **tuning into who we are, how we support the University of Richmond campus and the Richmond region, and what we can do boldly and better.** This Attunement Framework emerges from the experiences and vision of our extended community and will guide our collective work in the years to come.

## **OUR PLANNING PROCESS**

The University's strategic plan names "experiential learning & community engagement" as one of its five strategic priorities and "a hallmark of the University of Richmond ethos and experience." The plan states that the University will continue to seek out, enhance, and grow meaningful opportunities for engagement in our city, region, and world.

Following the release of the University of Richmond Strategic Plan in 2023, the Bonner Center for Civic Engagement (CCE) undertook a community-engaged planning process. Launched in Spring 2024, this process was led by a six-person Steering Group made up of CCE staff members from varying roles in the Center and guided by participatory research methods expert Judy Pryor-Ramirez. The group grounded its work in the Story Circle Interview Method, designed to center the lived experiences of those deeply involved in community engagement work.

#### **PLANNING PROCESS GOAL**

TO DESIGN AND IMPLEMENT A
COMMUNITY-ENGAGED STRATEGIC
PLANNING PROCESS THAT WILL
JOYFULLY AND FULLY INVOLVE
STAKEHOLDERS IN COLLECTIVELY
PAINTING A BOLD VISION
FOR THE CCE'S FUTURE

Over three months, the CCE held 23 story circle interviews with 108 participants, including students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community partners. The Story Circle Interview Method opens conversation with a broad prompt. In our story circles, each person was invited to speak for 2-3 minutes for three rounds in response to these prompts:

- Tell a story about a time something positive happened because of your relationship with the CCE.
- Tell a story about a time when your experience with the CCE led to disappointment of some kind.
- Tell a story about a time when you encountered a barrier to your civic engagement (maybe your own knowledge or lack of a resource). What was the barrier, what was the circumstance, what did you do?

The story circle interviews were facilitated by CCE staff and recorded and transcribed using Otter AI technology. At the close of each story circle, participants were invited to reflect on the stories they heard by answering these questions:

•	Many of the stories had a theme of
•	A story that helped me best connect to the
	prompt was focused on
•	I learned through stories today that the CCE is
	special because of
•	Some stories of disappointment focused on
•	The CCE can take away from our stories' themes
	of

Each story circle group sorted their responses and chose a word or phrase that best represented the stories in each pile. Through this joint reflection activity,

107 themes were identified. These became key themes for the initial analysis of the data.

A second group of CCE staff called the Data Analysis Working Group further analyzed the qualitative data from the story circles. The working group sorted the initial themes for likeness and identified four broad areas (communication, collaboration + community, support, learning + feeling). These four categories provided a starting point for a participatory data analysis process conducted with Steering Group and Data Analysis Working Group members in which staff members sorted each story into one of the overarching four themes identified, then assigned the stories to a subtheme. In order to focus the next stage of analysis, the group decided that a subtheme had to have at least 8 stories for further analysis.

Overall, 208 stories were sorted into 18 subthemes which were each defined and illustrated with examples from the story circles. The findings were handed off to a project team charged with developing the draft attunement framework. It was in this stage that four action arenas were solidified.

To solicit broader input at this stage of the process, a final staff team created an activity called "imagine jams," inviting original participants and others to creatively respond to the draft action arenas. The **52 imagine jam participants** were introduced to the four action arenas and invited to "imagine forward" how they might engage with the CCE in one of these areas. Ideas from these sessions were critical to solidifying this attunement framework, launched in 2025.

## **DESIGNING & LEARNING**February-March 2024

- Steering Group launch
- Story circle training
- Design research questions
- Pilot story circles
- Finalize project plan
- Schedule story circles

## FROM STORIES June-August 2024

- Clean, sort, organize transcripts for analysis
- Analyze stories
- Develop findings report

## **COMMUNICATING**January-September 2025

- Host "imagine jams" to pressure test findings and interpretations
- Design final product
- Communicate to stakeholders
- Begin to integrate final framework into forward planning and programming

## **PROJECT TIMELINE**

## LISTENING & DOCUMENTING April-May 2024

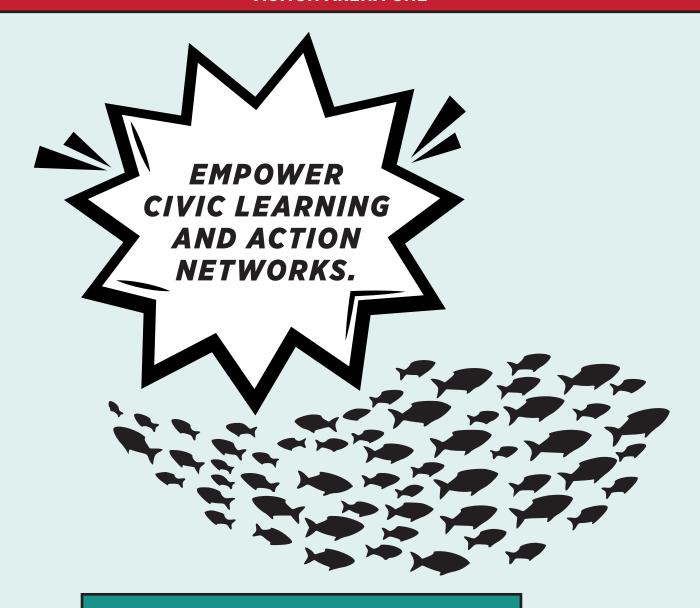
- Secure facilitators
- Prep facilitators
- Invite participants
- Host story circles

## **APPLYING OUR LEARNINGS**September-December 2024

- Synthesize findings from story circles with other key sources of data
- Draft attunement action arenas



FOUR ACTION ARENAS
WILL CENTER OUR
COLLABORATIVE WORK



# WE BELIEVE IN THE CAPACITY OF EVERY INDIVIDUAL TO LEARN, GROW, CREATE KNOWLEDGE, AND LEAD CHANGE.

These changemakers see the strengths in communities as well as the challenges and invite others to learn, imagine, problem-solve, and act together. The CCE supports individuals and their networks in connecting with one another and equips them for constructive collaboration.





## WE BELIEVE THAT HOW WE LEARN AND WORK WITH ONE ANOTHER MATTERS.\*

Institutions of higher education are important spaces for practicing habits of participation and community-building and for reinforcing norms of mutual obligation and interconnection which are central to democracy. As a center for civic engagement, it is our responsibility to support and model transparent and inclusive decision-making, so that people can advocate for what is meaningful to them, know that their voices matter, and exercise shared responsibility. This means that we care as much about process and relationships as we do about results.

\*We share this belief with the national consortium Imagining America. In addition, some of the language in this action arena is drawn from the American Academy of Arts and Sciences report *Our Common Purpose: Reinventing American Democracy for the 21st Century* (2020).





WE BELIEVE THAT UNIVERSITIES AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS ARE NECESSARY PARTNERS IN MEETING THE MOST PRESSING CHALLENGES OF OUR TIME.

We recognize the role civic engagement plays in enabling our institution to carry out its mission to "[prepare] students for lives of purpose, thoughtful inquiry, and responsible leadership in a diverse world." Through civic engagement, the University and its members can live out this responsibility with purpose, collaboration, and leadership.





#### **Bonner Center for Civic Engagement**

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## **MISSION**

The Bonner Center for Civic Engagement prepares students for lives of purpose and connects student, faculty, staff, and community stakeholders in social change efforts that value the knowledge and potential in our communities.

#### VISION

The University of Richmond will be a vital partner to a thriving Richmond region, catalyzing lifelong learning and civic engagement.

#### **VALUES**

We value COLLABORATION as a process of co-creation that enhances the communities of which we are a part.

We value LIFELONG LEARNING that is enriched by reflection and grounded in context.

We value FULL PARTICIPATION as an inclusive approach that seeks out and considers diverse perspectives, recognizes participants as whole people, and invites individuals to contribute meaningfully.

We value INTENTIONALITY as a commitment to making strategic and sustainable choices.

