

## **Exploring Community Engagement in the Richmond Region**

How do you make a difference in your community? It's not just about individual efforts - businesses have a vital role to play too! By investing in the well-being of their communities, businesses not only uplift those around them but also enjoy shared benefits from their contributions.

Finding ways to contribute can be a challenge for both individuals and businesses. That's where ChamberRVA steps in with two key initiatives: the Business Community Engagement Collaborative (BCEC) and the Civic Action Conversation (CAC) Series. These initiatives guide businesses in discovering meaningful ways to contribute that resonate with their missions, showcasing their commitment to community involvement and ensuring they are proactive and accountable.

### **What are RVA Engage and the Business Community Engagement Collaborative?**

In Richmond, community engagement is all about collaboration to enhance our civic life. It involves nurturing the knowledge, skills, values, and motivations necessary to effect change. RVA Engage, a coalition of community engagement professionals from the nonprofit, corporate, and educational sectors, is at the forefront of this effort. Their goal? To unite regional stakeholders in addressing community-identified needs through volunteer engagement and service.

Another key initiative is the Business Community Engagement Collaborative (BCEC). Launched in 2021 as a partnership between ChamberRVA and the Community Foundation for a greater Richmond, it has grown to include the United Way of Greater Richmond and Petersburg, and InUnison. BCEC's programs assist business community members in giving back to their region, especially those starting Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs or leading community engagement efforts.

Both RVA Engage and BCEC use Points of Light's Civic Circle as a foundation for their work. The Civic Circle offers various ways for individuals or institutions to serve their community, such as staying informed, volunteering, and providing services. RVA Engage unites members from Richmond's business, nonprofit, education, and philanthropic communities to focus on community needs through education and service.

In 2023, Serve Virginia launched the Virginia Community Engagement Index (VCEI) to spark community impact. This index enables organizations to understand community engagement in the state, including who is engaged, their priorities, and their methods of engagement. Many RVA Engage and BCEC organizations were part of the VCEI Coalition, which explored these questions across four dimensions: policy, community education and outreach, donations and philanthropy, and volunteerism and service. This valuable data from the VCEI empowers lead service organizations to make

informed decisions, engage more individuals and organizations in community efforts, and enhance BCEC programming and resources. Through these collaborations, Richmond continues to nurture a vibrant, civically engaged community.

### **What Programs Do These Initiatives Offer in Our Region?**

RVA Engage adopts a dual approach to encourage community involvement. Firstly, they started hosting quarterly virtual Civic Action Conversations (CAC) during the pandemic to highlight various community issues such as affordable housing, workforce development, and early childhood education. These sessions aim to educate the public and provide attendees with tangible opportunities to engage in activities addressing these issues. Last month, RVA Engage hosted its first in-person CAC on affordable housing, featuring a panel discussion with industry experts, table discussions, and information on how attendees could get involved in solving housing affordability issues in our region. The next CAC, focusing on Education & Workforce Development, is scheduled for September 18th.

In addition to the CACs, RVA Engage facilitates quarterly meetings between mobilizing organizations and activating organizations. Mobilizers are those looking to contribute human and economic resources (volunteers, funds, supplies, expertise) to address community needs, while Activators are organizations that accept these contributions to advance their missions and meet those specific needs. These meetings foster meaningful partnerships and exchanges of support, further uplifting the necessary work in our community.

The Business Community Engagement Collaborative (BCEC) also hosts programs tailored to help businesses align their resources with community issues, reinforcing their missions. BCEC events help organizations in building their CSR programs with sessions like CSR 101, Making the Business Case, and Employee Engagement. In May, BCEC kicked off its programming with the Power of Purpose workshop, which covered essential CSR principles for those considering establishing a CSR program. Participants received a Community Action Guide to help them think through the foundations of beginning their program. Their next session on August 28th will focus on best practices around marketing community engagement plans.

Through these efforts, both RVA Engage and BCEC are making significant strides in promoting community engagement, encouraging businesses and individuals to actively participate in and support their communities.

### **Start Making an Impact**

Across the nation, volunteerism has been on the decline. However, our region is rich with resources aimed at reversing this trend. It's essential for everyone living and working in a community to give back, whether through their time, treasure, or talent.

Here in Richmond, we're lucky to have dedicated organizations leading the way in community engagement.

Our role is to stay informed and continue to act with community engagement in mind. By doing so, we ensure a thriving, supportive community for all. Let's embrace the spirit of giving back and make a lasting impact in our region. We're counting on you!