



Richard Bland College

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

MEMORANDUM

TO: Chair, House Committee on Appropriations; Chair, House Committee on Education; Chair, Senate Committee on Education and Health; Chair, Senate Committee on Finance and Appropriations

RE: Progress Report: Exploring and Expanding Partnership Opportunities

DATE: July 1, 2025

Virginia Code Title 23.1 (6), Chapter 28, requires Richard Bland College to file annually on or before July 1 a report to the Chairs of the House Committee on Appropriations, the House Committee on Education, the Senate Committee on Education and Health, and the Senate Committee on Finance and Appropriations regarding the institution's progress in exploring and expanding partnership opportunities for shared services and academic programming with other higher education partners.

In accordance with this requirement, Richard Bland College (RBC) respectfully submits the following progress report.

Partnership Opportunities

Third-Party Partners

Auxiliary Services

RBC manages an auxiliary services enterprise designed to generate new revenue while, at the same time, improving performance and customer service outcomes across non-mission-critical operations. In-house dining, catering, and student housing account for most of the revenue generated (85%). For FY25, RBC exceeded budget projections for residential students as the College exceeded full capacity, generating revenue of approximately \$6M, which includes proceeds from the final year of a 3-year contract to house Virginia State University (VSU) students. In addition to VSU, the College leases space to myriad private and non-profit entities—including DroneUp, Live! Casino and Hotel, and various regional agencies.

The auxiliary enterprise is further supported through cash sales at various events, a campus market, and vending commissions. To drive additional revenue streams, RBC moved away from a commission-based online store managed by a third party and created a new, fully self-operated online store where RBC apparel and other items can be directly purchased. This new initiative has grown the campus market revenue by 38% year-over-year.

Other third-party relationships improve performance and customer service while, at the same time, offsetting expenses. For example, BI Ellucian Managed Services is Bland's IT provider, and the registrar and internal audit functions are outsourced to a third-party vendor.

Each year as part of the planning and budgeting process, Bland rigorously evaluates the cost-benefit of outsourcing non-mission-critical operations and is committed to continue to generate new revenue, reduce cost and improve service through a robust auxiliary service enterprise.

High School Partners

Dual Enrollment

Dual enrollment allows students taught at home or through a public/private high school to take college-level courses and earn college credits while completing their diplomas. RBC's dual enrollment program gives students an edge by allowing them to earn college credits or obtain an associate degree while simultaneously completing high school coursework. RBC offers three unique ways to access dual enrollment courses:

1. Students can take a virtual course(s) anywhere they have an internet connection.
2. Students can take their course(s) in an RBC classroom with a college professor; this mode is known as the Middle College program.
3. Students can take their course(s) in a high school classroom with a high school teacher who has the educational credentials to teach at the college level.

Twenty-five partnerships have been established with Governor's schools in Petersburg and Fredericksburg, private schools throughout the Commonwealth, and public school divisions across central and northern Virginia. During the 2024-2025 academic year, RBC helped more than 2,062 students earn college credits, with 89 graduating with an associate degree. This resulted in a 4% increase in student enrollment and a more than 38% increase in associate degree completion.

The enrollment increases are a direct result of two new school partnerships, course expansions, and associate degree-seeking pathways at two additional high schools. A new off-campus instructional site has been approved, bringing the total number of high school sites to five, which will offer more than 50% of a degree program. The number of sections in dual enrollment course offerings increased by 13.7%, totaling 357 sections, with 58 being online asynchronous sections. With over two dozen school partners, RBC's dual enrollment program has enabled thousands of students to reduce their time in college, save money on tuition, and accelerate their careers.

Health Careers – Bon Secours Partnership

In partnership with Bon Secours Southside Medical Center, Richard Bland College hosted a hands-on Health Careers Exploration Camp aimed at introducing students to the wide spectrum of career opportunities within the healthcare field. This collaborative initiative exposed participants to real-world healthcare environments while fostering early interest in health sciences and patient care.

Throughout the camp, students engaged in interactive simulations and skill-based activities—ranging from learning CPR techniques to operating medical tools—all led by experienced Bon Secours clinicians and healthcare staff. In addition to clinical exposure, students had the opportunity to interact with professionals from a variety of healthcare roles, including nursing, radiology, emergency services, physical therapy, and hospital administration. These personal interactions helped students understand the many educational and career paths available in healthcare.

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By bringing together a respected regional healthcare provider and a two-year public college, this partnership exemplifies RBC's commitment to:

- Expanding academic and career-connected programming for students,
- Enhancing community engagement through experiential learning,
- Promoting equitable access to high-demand workforce sectors, and
- Strengthening shared service opportunities that align with Virginia's broader educational and economic development goals.

This initiative not only cultivates student interest in the health professions but also builds a bridge between classroom learning and career readiness, supporting the Commonwealth's need for a future-ready healthcare workforce.

STEM Summer Camp

In July 2025, Richard Bland College will host its second annual STEM Summer Camp as part of a growing partnership initiative to expand academic programming and early STEM exposure for K-12 students. This collaborative effort brings together RBC faculty, staff, and external STEM professionals to deliver a 3-day, 2-night immersive experience on campus from July 21–23, 2025.

Through interactive workshops, field trips, and college-life activities, students will explore cutting-edge topics such as drone technology, artificial intelligence, robotics, esports, and innovation leadership. The camp also includes sessions on mindfulness, mental wellness, and diversity, providing a holistic developmental experience aligned with RBC's commitment to student-centered learning.

This partnership:

- Strengthens the STEM pipeline by offering early exposure to high-demand fields,
- Promotes access and equity for students traditionally underrepresented in higher education,
- Builds bridges between the College and regional families, enhancing community trust and engagement, and
- Aligns with RBC's mission to expand academic programming and foster innovative pathways to college and career readiness.

The STEM Camp initiative reflects the College's ongoing investment in creative, student-focused partnerships that support shared goals across K-12 education, workforce development, and higher education access.

Business Partners

DroneUp Flight Academy

DroneUp, a drone flight and delivery service company headquartered in Virginia Beach, offers drone delivery services for businesses across the United States. With a need to train drone pilots to fulfill this contract, Richard Bland College (RBC) in 2022 was selected as the site for DroneUp's training, research, and development facility. This partnership led to the construction of a dedicated drone launch facility and flight academy on the RBC campus, enabling the training and credentialing of hundreds of drone pilots over the past few years. The partnership also included a land lease agreement for the flight academy, as well as the rental of campus housing, office, and classroom space.

While the formal agreement between RBC and DroneUp will conclude at the end of FY 24–25, the collaboration helped position the College as a regional leader in drone pilot training and innovation.

RIC Drone Flight Academy

Building on the foundation from the DroneUp Flight Academy, RBC recently launched its own Uncrewed Aerial Systems (UAS) pilot course, fully funded by the U.S. Department of Labor through the Back on Track program—an initiative designed to strengthen workforce readiness. The inaugural class enrolled 16 students, offering industry-aligned instruction at no cost to participants. Though the program does not generate direct tuition revenue at this stage, it significantly enhances the College's workforce training portfolio, deepens community engagement, and opens doors to future funding opportunities.

Looking ahead, RBC aims to expand the UAS program by increasing enrollment to 25 students per cohort within the next year, exploring partnerships with local industries and municipalities, and introducing advanced UAS certifications. Bland is also evaluating opportunities to integrate drone technology into other academic and workforce development programs, which could drive additional revenue through continuing education, contract training, and certifications.

Richmond International Airport

Richard Bland College has partnered with Richmond International Airport (RIC) to launch a groundbreaking Drone and Aviation Fellowship Program that prepares students for high-demand careers in uncrewed aerial systems (UAS). This innovative initiative blends academic instruction, industry mentorship, and hands-on training to equip students with advanced drone operation skills and real-world experience in an active airport environment.

Fellows are selected through a competitive process after completing a foundational UAS certification program at RBC, which includes FAA Part 107 licensure preparation, drone mechanics, and flight training. Once selected, students engage in a semester-long fellowship featuring:

- Direct mentorship from RIC aviation professionals
- On-site training in airport perimeter security, maintenance detection, and safety surveillance
- Weekly engagement sessions and guest lectures from UAS industry leaders and FAA representatives
- A capstone project addressing real-world aviation and public safety challenges

This partnership not only enhances workforce readiness for participating students but also positions RBC as a regional leader in drone workforce development. Fellows receive paid, practical experience and build connections with key stakeholders in the drone and aviation industries—strengthening the College's mission to align education with emerging economic opportunities.

Business Innovation Park

The Richard Bland College Foundation Board is positioned to develop and manage an innovative business park on historically unutilized campus property. The Business Innovation Park, a 75-acre parcel of undeveloped land adjacent to the main campus, will complement regional and statewide economic development efforts by attracting businesses and emerging industries that would be interested in a mutually beneficial relationship with RBC. Specifically, Business Innovation Park partners would enjoy all the benefits of RBC's central location; access to rail, highway, and air transport; high-speed internet; and the amenities of a college campus. In return, they would be required to provide Bland students with paid internships and faculty with professional development opportunities. The property will remain state property and be utilized by businesses for specified periods through ground lease agreements.

Development of the Business Innovation Park master plan is complete, and the site is certified for Tier 4 construction opportunities. The master plan includes seven defined parcels for lease, roads, access points, and construction standards. Businesses selected to lease parcels in the park will sign a long-term

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ground lease, formally committing to a relationship that contributes to RBC's educational mission. In addition to the lease, RBC will receive income from room and board, as well as rentals of classrooms or other spaces on campus.

To support site development and planning processes, an ad hoc Business Innovation Park Committee was officially created to 1) ensure that all terms and conditions of the ground lease are followed; 2) devise plans and strategies in alignment with College priorities to achieve established academic, economic development, and fiscal goals of the Business Innovation Park; and 3) lend expertise in areas of real estate, economic development, law, etc., to ensure compliance and project integrity. The Committee regularly provides the Foundation Board of Directors progress updates and performs all duties assigned to it by the Board of Directors.

Progress is also being made with industry partners regarding infrastructure development. Mid-Atlantic Broadband Communities Corporation recently installed fiber to the RBC campus that will deliver high-speed internet to the campus and all its partners.

The Business Innovation Park will generate rental revenue for the College, and students will gain valuable work experience in emerging industries, preparing them for a competitive job market. In addition, the Business Innovation Park businesses will create new, high-paying jobs in Dinwiddie and Prince George Counties, as well as the Petersburg metropolitan region.

Petersburg Live! Casino and Hotel

Richard Bland College, in partnership with the City of Petersburg and Live! Casino and Hotel, is launching the RBC Table Dealers Institute. The Institute will prepare approximately 200 trainees to conduct table games, starting with Blackjack, with plans to introduce Roulette and Baccarat in the future. Throughout the 12-week program, students will be immersed in a curriculum focused on customer service, game integrity, and industry regulations. Additionally, the Institute will emphasize responsible gaming practices to ensure learners are fully prepared for the ethical challenges they may encounter in the field.

This revenue-generating initiative aligns with Richard Bland College's commitment to workforce development in Petersburg, the Tri-Cities area, and throughout the Commonwealth.

Grant Partners

Federal, State and Local Grantors

In 2022, Richard Bland College established the Office of Research and Innovation (ORI) to expand institutional grant capacity and support strategic initiatives with the goal of raising \$100,000-\$200,000 at the outset. In its first year (FY23), ORI secured approximately \$3.2 million in grant funding, surpassing its initial goal of \$ 1 million. Funding sources included the National Science Foundation, congressional spending requests, U.S. Study Abroad, State Government – World Learning, Anthem, the Department of Labor, and the Department of Justice's Office on Violence Against Women. These grants supported a broad range of initiatives, including STEM and industry programs, campus engagement activities, mental health services, and international travel for faculty and students.

This funding positively impacted the College's resources and infrastructure, enabling:

- The hiring of a Grants Manager and Grant Coordinators
- The purchase of outcome-tracking software

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- Development of faculty-student internships, scholarships, experiential learning opportunities, and paid work experiences

In FY24, the College secured \$1.5 million in funding. As a result, Bland was awarded an additional \$4.5 million in grants for fiscal year 2024, bringing the total awarded funding to \$6.1 million. These awards included significant support from the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia's PIV initiative.

At the end of FY24 and the beginning of FY25, the launch of International RBC (iRBC), Bland's global engagement initiative, marked a milestone in innovation. The program organized the College's first two international trips in coordination with in-country partners:

1. Madagascar, Africa (June 2024) – focused on biodiversity research and humanitarian assistance
2. London, United Kingdom (August 2024) – focused on art, literature, theater, screenwriting, and robotics.

Both programs were funded by the U.S. Department of State's IDEAS Program and aim to provide global learning experiences for students and faculty/staff. iRBC is designed to establish a sustainable exchange program, supported by college leadership, faculty, staff, and the broader community.

In addition to outbound programs, iRBC expanded to include "incoming" international students. RBC is actively engaging with educational consultants in Spain, Africa, China, France, India, and Australia to strengthen global student exchange and increase international enrollment.

ORI has also expanded U.S.-based experiential learning opportunities, which now include:

1. Utah – Paleontology Dig
2. New York City – Culture, Arts, and History
3. Savannah & Tybee Island, Georgia – Culture and Ecosystems
4. Miami, Florida – Diversity in Healthcare

In FY25, ORI exceeded its funding goal for the second consecutive year, securing \$1.7 million in new grants. These include awards from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, SCHEV, and The Cameron Foundation. Notably, support from The Cameron Foundation has allowed RBC to expand its Health Careers programming, reaching more students interested in healthcare and health professions.

In FY26 the College is expected to secure \$1 million in new funding, building on the extraordinary momentum established over the past three years.

RBC Health: University-Led Telehealth & STEAMh Expansion

In FY25, Richard Bland College continued expanding its regional impact through a grant-funded initiative known as *RBC Health*, which provides mobile telehealth services, mental health prevention education, and STEAMh learning opportunities to 12 rural and economically challenged school communities across southern Virginia.

Funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development Program, this initiative exemplifies how strategic grant funding and university collaboration can address both educational and health equity gaps in medically underserved areas.

Key partners include:

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- Virginia Commonwealth University – Health
- Virginia State University Public Health Institute
- The College of William & Mary
- New College Institute
- Bon Secours Southside Medical Center

Through this partnership, RBC and its collaborators are:

- Equipping K–12 schools with distance learning technology and mobile telehealth access,
- Delivering mental health prevention education and community health programming,
- Expanding dual enrollment offerings and facilitating hands-on STEAMh research experiences at RBC for high school students,
- Supporting interdisciplinary mentoring and professional development for students and educators across the region.

This initiative reflects RBC’s leadership in uniting health systems, universities, and local school divisions to create scalable solutions that support student achievement, workforce readiness, and public health.

University Partners

University College

Richard Bland College maintains guaranteed admission agreements with more than 40 public and private universities in Virginia and beyond.

The University College, established in 2022, continues to serve as an innovative model for expanding transfer options for Richard Bland College (RBC) graduates. Through strategic partnerships with Virginia State University (VSU) and Virginia Wesleyan University (VWU), RBC students can pursue a Baccalaureate degree while remaining on the RBC campus for an additional one or two years, or they may take classes at the VWU or VSU campuses. This model promotes affordability by allowing students to maintain RBC tuition rates while enrolled at the partner institution.

VWU expanded its offerings beyond Psychology and Business to include most transfer majors (excluding Nursing), broadening access for Beacon Scholars. This expansion led to a notable increase in enrollment, with eight students transferring to VWU for the Fall 2025 semester.

These students received generous scholarships of \$25,000, making their tuition comparable to RBC’s cost.

Service Partners

Transfer Scholars Network

Since 2023, Richard Bland College has been a member of the Aspen Institute’s Transfer Scholars Network (TSN) and is one of only two TSN college partners in Virginia. TSN connects high-achieving two-year college students with admissions representatives from some of the nation’s most selective four-year institutions, which offer generous financial aid packages.

In its first year as a full member, RBC celebrated a major milestone: one student was admitted to Amherst College—an institution with a transfer acceptance rate below 4%—and will graduate debt-free thanks to a \$96,000 annual financial aid package. That same student was also named a Jack Kent Cooke Foundation Scholar, receiving up to \$55,000 annually for up to four years. This year, two RBC students

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were named semifinalists for the Jack Kent Cooke Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship, though no Virginia students were selected as finalists.

One RBC student was admitted to four TSN partner institutions—Williams College, Princeton University, Johns Hopkins University, and Yale University. She received exceptional financial awards, which will allow her to graduate as a pre-med major with no student debt.

TSN partner institutions include:

- Amherst College
- Bates College
- Bowdoin College
- Columbia University
- Cornell University
- Johns Hopkins University
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)
- Mount Holyoke College
- Northwestern University
- Pomona College
- Princeton University
- Rice University
- Smith College
- Swarthmore College
- Wesleyan University
- Williams College
- Yale University

While admission is not guaranteed, TSN students have a significantly higher acceptance rate than comparable non-TSN applicants.

Summary

Over the past decade, Richard Bland College of William and Mary has intentionally set and achieved its sustainability goals. Through extensive reorganization for efficiency, new strategic partnerships, and innovative programming, RBC is emerging as a model for higher education in the Commonwealth. This new model of higher education prioritizes clear and well-demarcated pathways for student credentialing and an accelerated path to well-paying jobs in high-demand fields.

Sincerely,



Debbie L. Sydow, Ph.D.
President