



RICHARD BLAND
— C O L L E G E

Campus Belonging Campaign Strategic Plan
2025-2026 Updates

June 30, 2026



Richard Bland College

Campus Belonging Campaign Strategic Plan: Academic Year 2025-2026 Updates

Introduction & Rationale

Richard Bland College successfully launched the Campus Belonging Campaign in Fall 2025 as a campus-wide initiative aimed at enhancing student, staff, and community belonging. The campaign integrated response efforts to promote campus unity, laid the foundation for belonging training for supervisors and faculty, and utilized a mixed-methods approach to assess and better understand the perceptions of community cohesion across campus. In acknowledging RBC's close-knit and family-like atmosphere, the initiative began by exploring strategies to further cultivate meaningful connections among students, faculty, and staff. The value of these connections has continued to be demonstrated through the emergence of protective factors (e.g., supportive relationships) that enhance students' overall well-being and achievement. To that end, centering belonging as a core institutional value positioned RBC to reaffirm its commitment to fostering an environment in which every member of the community feels seen, valued, connected, and empowered to thrive.

Update: June 2026

The Campus Belonging Campaign at Richard Bland College continues to be effective in increasing the College's awareness of unity within our student body and among employees through the individual and group conversations conducted as part of our campus wide mixed-methods research study, which will continue through the Fall 2026 semester. The Inclusive Excellence Committee honored its commitment to transparency as the Chair and designated committee members provided updates at the Faculty Assembly and Presidential Council meetings. This work has emphasized the importance of valuing our shared experiences and common vision, which undergird all efforts to elevate student voices, uplift their talents, and reinforce a sense of Statesmen pride and belonging across campus. During the 2025–2026 academic year, the Inclusive Excellence Committee deepened its understanding of the benefits of campus connections and the transformative power of bringing the RBC community together. Through this reflection, we recognized that our students flourish most when the entire campus community joins in strengthening key protective factors, particularly supportive relationships, that empower them to thrive.

In alignment with the Richard Bland College's mission, our overarching goal became bringing the Bland community together with intention and care and creating an environment in which every student and employee feels connected, uplifted, and equipped to reach their highest levels of wellbeing and achievement.

Perspectives on Campus Belonging

Belonging in higher education is a fundamental component of student success, faculty engagement, and institutional effectiveness. Defined as the feeling of being valued, accepted, and connected within a community (Strayhorn, 2012), belonging has been widely recognized as a critical factor influencing persistence, well-being, and achievement. Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs positions belonging as a psychological necessity, highlighting that individuals must feel connected before reaching higher levels of personal and professional growth. Similarly, Tinto's (1993) model of student departure emphasizes that integration—both socially and academically—is essential for student retention. When students, faculty, and staff experience a strong sense of belonging, they are more likely to be engaged, motivated, and committed to their institution's success. For students, a strong sense of belonging leads to higher retention rates, academic achievement, and mental well-being (Strayhorn, 2018; Walton & Cohen, 2011). Research by Walton and Cohen (2011) demonstrates that interventions reinforcing belonging significantly improve academic outcomes, particularly for underrepresented students. Similarly, Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that a positive campus climate fosters a sense of belonging among students of color, contributing to greater persistence and success.

Faculty and staff also benefit from belonging, as it enhances job satisfaction, collaboration, and institutional commitment (O'Meara, Louder, & Campbell, 2014). Hence, postsecondary educators and administrators who feel valued are more effective in supporting students and fostering learning environments that inspire solidarity, intellectual flourishing, collaboration, and collective progression among their academic community members. Even so, to cultivate belonging, institutions must implement intentional strategies, such as mentorship programs, embrace pedagogy, and community-building initiatives. Harper and Quaye (2009) emphasized that fostering belonging requires structural change, not just symbolic gestures. Universities that prioritize a sense of belonging cultivate inclusive environments where students, faculty, and staff can fully thrive. This level of commitment not only enhances individual well-being and engagement but also strengthens the institution's academic quality, innovation, and overall excellence. As Strayhorn (2018) asserts, belonging is not just a moral imperative—it is a strategic necessity for higher education institutions to level

the playing field for students seeking opportunities to advance their achievement, retention, and progression on campus. These principles resonate with the RBC community's core values of nurturing the potential and fortitude of its members through various forms of assistance that activate and support students' vision and determination to reach the next step in their lives. In alignment with these values, the Campus Belonging Campaign at Richard Bland College was established to foster an environment in which all students, faculty, and staff feel valued, supported, and connected. By translating these values into meaningful action, the Campaign serves as a strategic vehicle for embedding a culture of belonging into the fabric of the institution. This transition from foundational principles to intentional practice is evident in our ongoing work, as articulated in the subsequent updates of the Inclusive Excellence Committee.

Update: June 2026

The Inclusive Excellence Committee has worked toward meeting its objective of identifying strategies that promote belonging across the College. Empowered by the notion that the learning and working communities on campus shape the student experience, the Committee recognizes that cultivating a sense of belonging requires the implementation of intentional strategies such as mentorship programs, inclusive pedagogy, and community partnerships that meaningfully support student success and advance the mission of Richard Bland College. Accordingly, the move beyond rhetoric to embed equity and belonging in the College's policies, practices, and culture has begun through its campus partnerships with the Student Conduct Board to make systemic changes pair with campus-wide efforts to support respectful conduct among citizens in the RBC community.

These restorative practices prioritize accountability and empower community members to transform incidents into reflective, teachable moments. They create structured opportunities to address maladaptive behaviors, repair harm, and reintegrate students into campus life through guided dialogue, mentorship, and follow-up support from campus and community partners. In doing so, they reinforce a sense of belonging and improve academic outcomes by honoring students' individual backgrounds and experiences. During the 2026–2027 academic year, the Inclusive Excellence Committee plans to expand this work to campus employees by partnering with college leaders and the appropriate administrators to develop employee-focused restorative initiatives, training, and supports that aligns with the policies of the Commonwealth of Virginia and mirror interventions that strengthen workplace belonging, and promote a culture of accountability, repair, and growth.

The Inclusive Excellence Committee believes that all employees should feel connected, supported, and able to contribute in meaningful ways at work. Considering this, the Committee is exploring the expansion of restorative and community-building practices to support positive outcomes for both students and employees. These efforts aim to cultivate a workplace in which every community member's sense of belonging enhances their well-being, engagement, productivity, and overall growth across Richard Bland College's academic and professional settings. Emphasized are initiatives designed to embed accountability and sustained support throughout the College, alongside the Inclusive Excellence Committee's campaign that will drive the spirit of belonging within the RBC community.

Campaign Overview

The Campus Belonging Campaign has begun to address several critical areas that support building a stronger sense of belonging at RBC. To bring this commitment to life, the campaign started focusing on the key strategic priorities outlined below:

Advancing Opportunity

Ensuring that all individuals have access to the resources needed for success will support their sense of belonging. The Inclusive Faculty Recruitment Strategy will enhance representation in the classroom, foster more inclusive learning experiences, while the Access Grants will provide funding for initiatives that expand educational pathways for underrepresented students.

Update: June 2026

Ongoing conversations about how RBC's Access Grants can provide targeted funding to support initiatives that reduce systemic barriers, promote equitable outcomes, and expand educational pathways for underrepresented students will continue as the Inclusive Excellence Committee partners with the Office of Research & Innovation. This collaboration will strengthen RBC's capacity to advance inclusive excellence and support student achievement.

Strengthening Campus & Community Connections

Belonging extends beyond campus walls, requiring meaningful relationships between the institution and the broader community. By bringing in community partners to engage with RBC and launching a community book club, the campaign will build bridges that reinforce a shared commitment to mutual growth.

Update: June 2026

A community book club will set the conditions for a welcoming space for dialogue, reflection, and the exchange of diverse perspectives and worldviews. In

acknowledgment of our collective strengths, it will also create opportunities for students, faculty, and community members to learn from one another and collaboratively co-create solutions to shared challenges. Through these intentional interactions, participants will deepen their understanding of one another's experiences, foster empathy, and strengthen connections that extend beyond the classroom, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and engaged institutional and community environment.

Research, Assessment & Engagement

To cultivate a lasting culture of belonging, RBC seeks to understand current perceptions and identify areas for improvement. Through mixed-methods research and assessment, the campaign measures belonging across campus, while monthly programming creates ongoing opportunities for dialogue, engagement, and connection. By focusing on these key areas, the Campus Belonging Campaign establishes a strong foundation for a more inclusive, supportive, and engaged campus community. Complementing this work, annual program assessments are implemented to systematically evaluate impact, inform data-driven decision-making, and support the continuous refinement of inclusive excellence initiatives.

Expected Outcomes & Impact of the Campus Belonging Campaign

The Campus Belonging Campaign will create meaningful change at RBC by fostering a more inclusive and connected campus environment. The following outcomes will serve as measurable benchmarks for success in the first and second years of implementation:

1. Increasing Belonging Across Campus

By integrating belonging-focused programming and initiatives, the campaign aims to increase students' and employees' reported sense of belonging by at least 10% in annual campus climate surveys. Programs under the "*You Belong Here*" campaign will provide regular opportunities for engagement that reinforce inclusion, connection, and support. While these initiatives aim to strengthen belonging across campus, the Committee identified departmental self-assessment as a critical first step in ensuring its effectiveness.

Update: June 2026

During the first year of implementation, the Inclusive Excellence Committee agreed that a departmental self-assessment was essential before launching any belonging-focused programs or initiatives. Therefore, before moving to a broader campus-wide evaluation, members of the RBC Inclusive Excellence Committee reflected on how their own departmental work supports the community's sense of

belonging. Understanding how each department has contributed, and continues to contribute, across campus provides a critical baseline for identifying strengths, addressing gaps, and informing our future assessments and initiatives. This self-assessment was necessary because examining our departments' convictions and supportive practices offers valuable opportunities to discover both strengths and blind spots, while enabling us to approach the campus-assessment process with greater awareness, compassion, and accuracy as we strive to interpret data through the lenses of our campus study's respondents.

2. Expanding Faculty Diversity & Inclusive Hiring

A strategic Inclusive Faculty Recruitment Strategy will be developed to improve hiring and retention of diverse faculty. The goal is to increase the percentage of faculty from underrepresented backgrounds by 5% within the first year, ensuring that students see themselves reflected in the classroom.

Update: June 2026

The Richard Bland College Human Resources Team's investment in inclusive hiring strengthens the Campus Belonging Campaign by ensuring that its learning and working communities encounter a diverse, culturally responsive, and representative workforce. As a component of this effort, the HR team will continue to utilize HireEd.com, which expands their recruitment outreach to a broad and diverse pool of applicants, including underrepresented candidates and veterans. Our recruitment strategy is designed to enhance faculty diversity and ensure that RBC's workforce reflects the backgrounds and experiences of our students who deserve to feel represented, supported, and valued.

3. Improving Learning, Retention, & Graduation Outcomes for Historically Marginalized Students

A strong sense of belonging is linked to student persistence and academic success. Through targeted interventions such as belonging training for faculty and staff, expanded support programs, and access to opportunity grants, the campaign aims to improve first-year retention rates by at least 5% and increase graduation rates for all student populations, especially first-generation college students, over time. Research has shown that when students feel a sense of belonging, they are more engaged in their coursework, leading to better academic performance and degree completion.

Update: June 2026

During the Fall 2026 semester, designated members of the RBC Inclusive Excellence Committee will collaborate with faculty to review and refine

strategies designed to improve retention and graduation outcomes for historically marginalized students, while expanding pathways to support their entry into honors programs at RBC and at their four-year transfer institutions.

4. Providing Training & Certification in Belonging & Inclusion

Starting October 2026, five annual training courses on topics related to belonging will be offered to faculty, staff, and student leaders. The courses will equip participants with the strategies and skills needed to cultivate inclusive spaces. A Campus Belonging Certificate Program will be established to allow participants to earn a certificate upon completion of multiple sessions, thus reinforcing a long-term commitment to building a campus community that promotes belonging.

5. Launching a Grant Program for Belonging Initiatives

A new Access & Opportunity Grant will fund at least five programs or initiatives per year that promote belonging and student success. These grants will empower faculty, staff, and student organizations to develop innovative projects that enhance campus belonging.

Update: June 2026

As the RBC Inclusive Excellence Committee continues to observe the sustainable implementation strategies of the Access & Opportunity Grant and evaluate the ways in which it is impactful and aligned with our commitment to inclusive excellence, we will include any refinements to its structure, the strength of its reach, and the extent of its effectiveness in the 2026–2027 report with regard to advancing inclusion, belonging, and campus members' perceived success across the institution.

6. Establishing a Bias Impact Response Team & Framework

A Bias Impact Response Team (BIRT) will be created to address incidents of bias and discrimination on campus. This team will implement a structured reporting and response framework, ensuring transparency, accountability, and restorative action. By the end of the 2026-2027 academic year, RBC aims to process and respond to 100% of reported incidents through this system.

Update: June 2026

Although the RBC Inclusive Excellence Team has engaged in reflective dialogue to inform the development and implementation of its bias impact response efforts, this work will continue to be a priority during the 2026–2027 academic year. The College is actively establishing partnerships with campus offices, faculty, students, and local agencies to strengthen and expand its capacity to deliver effective, campus-wide

bias training. Through a measured and intentional approach, these efforts will remain inclusive, evidence-based, and responsive to the evolving needs of the community. As part of the foundational phase, the campus will engage in implicit bias, unconscious bias awareness, and sensitivity trainings to build a shared understanding and reinforce a collective commitment to fostering a more inclusive, welcoming, and supportive environment. As the Inclusive Excellence Team advances this work, the goal is to move beyond basic awareness toward applied practice. This progression will elevate our training experiences to include case-based analysis, guided dialogue, critical reflection, and a meaningful group engagement, following established frameworks that support sustained learning and behavioral change.

7. Developing a Campus-Wide Book Club & Common Read

A Community Book Club & Common Read Program will be introduced to engage students, faculty, staff, and community members in meaningful conversations around belonging. The goal is to have at least 200 participants in the first year, fostering dialogue and shared learning experiences.

Update: June 2026

During the month of October, the Inclusive Excellence Committee will invite the head librarian to a planning meeting to discuss the best ways to use the campus' Book Club & Common Read Program to help new students feel connected to Richard Bland College. However, in our preliminary conversations with the head librarian, the idea of instituting a Book Club & Common Read for our first-year studies classes emerged as a promising strategy. Committee members will be interested in hardcopy and digital sources related to campus belonging. Our ongoing efforts will focus on identifying and implementing innovative strategies to enhance the program and maximize its impact on student engagement, shared learning, and campus belonging.

8. Strengthening Community Ties

RBC's goal is to strengthen relationships between the college and the greater community, including local government, businesses, and civic organizations. The goal is to forge new partnerships that enhance student engagement and career opportunities.

Update: June 2026

Efforts to strengthen community partnerships are already underway to reinforce our internal reflections and to shape future outward-facing collaborative experiences. As part of this work, the Committee will be reexamining the most effective ways to

engage local organizations to expand our collective capacity to support campus members' sense of belonging. By intentionally leveraging the resources, expertise, and opportunities extended to RBC through our local partners, we aim to create a more connected, responsive, and supportive environment for students, faculty, and staff. These partnerships will not only enhance the reach of our belonging initiatives but will also cultivate shared responsibility across the broader community. These actions will ensure that our inclusion and equity work is strengthened both within and beyond the College.

9. Sustaining Belonging Efforts Under the “You Belong Here” Initiative

The “**You Belong Here**” campaign will continue to host programs, events, and initiatives throughout the year. These efforts will ensure a strong and visible commitment to belonging at RBC. Success will be measured by event participation, student and faculty feedback, and increased collaboration across campus departments. As previously stated, the Inclusive Excellence Committee (IEC) determined that departmental self-assessments were necessary prior to moving forward with any campus programming

Update: June 2026

As a demonstration of our commitment to fostering a sense of belonging at Richard Bland College, members of the IEC engaged in departmental self-assessments, which provided opportunities to reflect on how their respective areas contribute to cultivating belonging within the campus community. The below self-assessment reports were received from Enrollment Services, Student Success, Instructional Faculty, Human Resources, and Counseling Services. In response to the question of how departments supported campus members' belonging at Richard Bland College, the following information was provided:

RBC ENROLLMENT SERVICES

- Enrollment Counseling – Each student is assigned an Enrollment Counselor, ensuring a personal connection and one-on-one support from the start.
- Marketing – encompasses targeted and inclusive marketing strategies designed to support and engage first-generation students.
- Eliminate Language Barriers – New to RBC during the 2025-2026 this year were the translation services for texts, emails, and phone calls are available through the Element AI bot, which increases access for Hispanic and international student populations.

- Enrollment Events – These events are enrollment opportunities, including admissions fairs, on-site admissions and orientations at local high schools led by enrollment counselors, and summer orientation sessions for students representing all regions of Virginia.
- Admissions Review – Rolling admissions and a holistic review process provide broader access and opportunity for a wide range of students.

RBC STUDENT SUCCESS

- Validating the Student – Aligning with Rendón’s Validation Theory, the Student Success Team affirms students’ academic and personal potential through academic advising that fosters a sense of belonging.
- Academic Advising - RBC’s academic advising, facilitated by Learner Mentors, is intentional and purpose-driven as it supports students in identifying their strengths rather than emphasizing deficits that may contribute to lower self-concept in academic settings. This department considers students’ strengths and social capital to be essential in fostering a sense of belonging in academic spaces that may otherwise feel exclusionary.
- Degree Planning
The degree planning experience is both collaborative and personalized. Students work closely with their Learner Mentors to explore and clarify their educational journey. This partnership allows students to envision their academic pathway, which helps reduce uncertainty--a key factor in fostering a sense of campus belonging.
- First Generation College students:
Members of the Student Success Team partner with the RBC’s University Center to host a celebration week each November to raise awareness and help bring First Gen students. The department is working on getting a First Gen Club together as well.
- In partnership with the RBC University Center, Student Success hosts a First Gen Graduates Celebration to honor their achievements at Richard Bland College. This initiative fosters a sense of belonging by recognizing and celebrating the achievements of first-generation students, which is an opportunity that affirms that their experiences and accomplishments are valued within the RBC campus community. The on-campus partnership with the RBC University Center to host a First Gen Graduates Celebration, Student Success creates an inclusive space where students feel seen, supported, and connected, reinforcing their identity and place at Richard Bland College.

- Campus Workshops

The Student Success team offers a variety of academic workshops designed to support students and foster a sense of inclusion within the campus community.

These workshops include transfer fairs, transfer-focused sessions, time management, degree planning, career preparation, and registration support.

Through this process, students feel seen and supported. RBC Learner Mentors take pride in understanding each student's goals, backgrounds, and challenges. The department's personalized approach reinforces students' value within the campus community and affirms that they matter and belong. Learner Mentors use degree planning tools to help students visualize their academic progress and explore options such as course selection, major identification, and co-curricular opportunities that align with their interests. These interactions often lead to a deeper sense of purpose and connection. They not only reinforce the relevance of academic information but also promote meaningful engagement with faculty, peers, and academic communities, thus strengthening students' sense of belonging across campus.

INSTRUCTIONAL FACULTY (MATH)

- Teaching Practices & Learning Advocacy – A Richard Bland College instructional faculty member emphasized the importance of promoting student advocacy by supporting learners' ability to communicate their academic needs, access resources, and engage confidently in their learning environment. Efforts to eliminate barriers to learning include:
 - Universal Design for Learning – Incorporates multiple methods of presenting material to better meet the diverse needs of neurodiverse learners.
 - Flexible Engagement and Expression – Encourages varied approaches to student engagement and allows multiple ways for students to demonstrate competency.
 - Student Advocacy – Supports students by incorporating current, research-based learning methodologies tailored to today's learners.
 - Strength-Based Math Support – Recognizes students' strengths, challenges in math, and provides strategies to leverage strengths in overcoming math anxiety.
 - Communication Guidance – Provides students with strategies for effectively communicating their needs to professors, tutors, and peers.

- Metacognitive Development – Encourages students to engage in metacognitive practices that deepen their understanding of learning, strengthen their voice, and promote engagement in math courses while fostering a sense of belonging.
- Building Relationships – Promotes a learning community in which meaningful personal connections can be established.
- Creating a Welcoming Environment – Cultivates a classroom setting where students' questions are encouraged and valued.
- Creating Positive and Supportive Learning Conditions – Establishes an academic environment that supports student growth, allowing for learning, development, and mistakes within a respectful space.

Mentoring and advising students were also highlighted in the math professor's submitted report. Emphasis was placed on the supportive roles demonstrated through mentorship, advising, and the provision of emotional support and encouragement. The following roles were noted by a math faculty member, whose mentorship of students includes encouraging their:

- Interests in pursuing math as a major.
- Engagement in research opportunities.
- Participation in academic support programs that address various forms of academic anxieties.
- Recognition and management of math anxiety through compassionate support.
- Celebration of small wins and progress.
- Self-efficacy, confidence, and a sense of capability as competency in mathematics are visualized, built, and demonstrated.

RBC HUMAN RESOURCES

The assessment report submitted by the Department of Human Resources indicated their continued efforts to ensure inclusive, equitable, and diverse recruitment and hiring practices. The department's commitment to fostering a workforce that reflects the diversity of the campus community acknowledges its role in cultivating an inclusive environment in which all employees feel valued and respected. These intentional practices will continue to support a culture of belonging, equity, and engagement. These critical elements strengthen institutional effectiveness and positively impact the campus experience for both students and employees. To sustain a sense of campus belonging among employees and students, the department's report outlines the following intentions:

- Recruitment

The Richard Bland College Human Resources Team actively participates in local job fairs to increase institutional visibility and build connections with a diverse and qualified talent pool. Through this outreach, the College engages directly with prospective candidates, including individuals from underrepresented backgrounds, recent graduates, and professionals seeking career advancement opportunities. By maintaining a presence in the local and regional community, the Human Resources Team strengthens recruitment pipelines and enhances awareness of employment opportunities at RBC. These efforts also allow the College to communicate its commitment to inclusive hiring, workplace belonging, and employee support initiatives. Further, the College's participation in job fairs creates opportunities to share information about its culture, mission, and values. The Human Resources Team considers this approach to be a viable way to attract candidates whose experiences and perspectives align with RBC's goal of fostering a diverse and inclusive campus environment. This proactive recruitment approach supports the institution's broader strategy to attract, hire, and retain talent that reflects and enriches the student population and overall campus community.

- Inclusive Hiring & Onboarding

Engage in thoughtful and equitable hiring practices while implementing intentional onboarding processes that help new employees feel welcomed, supported, and integrated into the campus community.

- Training and Development

Foster a community that is aware of and responsive to the diverse needs of employees and students through ongoing training and development initiatives.

- Policy Development and Enforcement

Develop and uphold policies related to non-discrimination, accessibility, and workplace respect. These policies help create a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment for all campus members while reinforcing a strong sense of belonging.

- Employee Engagement and Wellness

Promote and implement programs that support employee engagement and wellness. Richard Bland College Human Resources supports initiatives that promote positive mental health through its Employee Assistance Program (EAP) counselors for employees and the Counseling Services Department for student workers. Work-life balance initiatives and employee recognition programs coordinated by RBC HR further contribute to a positive campus climate. These efforts foster a sense of

belonging among employees by ensuring they feel connected to the institution. When campus members experience this level of care and engagement, they are more likely to extend that same level of support to students. In turn, these interactions strengthen relationships and enhance the overall sense of community across campus.

- Collaboration with Campus Departments

To cultivate a cohesive and unified campus experience, RBC Human Resources regularly partners with departments across campus to support institutional initiatives.

- Conflict Resolution and Mediation Services

Maintain a healthy campus culture by facilitating fair and respectful resolutions of workplace conflicts. RBC Human Resources mediation services contribute to a respectful work environment for employees and foster a positive atmosphere for students.

RBC DISABILITY SERVICES

Disability Services play a critical role in fostering campus belonging by ensuring that all students, regardless of ability, feel included and supported at RBC. The Disability Services provider affirms neurodivergence and disability as valued identities and, therefore, advocates for inclusive practices that honor and reflect every student's identity. This commitment is reflected in several key areas of practice, including accessibility, advocacy, and community-building efforts. The Disability Services Department's assessment revealed how its efforts align with institutional goals by fostering accessibility, advancing equity, and strengthening students' sense of belonging through:

- Accessibility and Equity

The department ensures that buildings, classrooms, and campus facilities are accessible to all students.

- Academic Accommodations

Providing tools such as note-taking assistance, extended test time, and alternative

formats for materials signals that the institution values equity, helping students with disabilities feel a sense of belonging.

- Advocacy and Empowerment

Disability Services advocates students' rights and needs, helping them navigate systems that may otherwise exclude them. Empowering students to self-advocate builds confidence and fosters a sense of ownership over their college experience.

- Community Building
The department helps students foster a sense of shared identity and community, which is essential to belonging. It also promotes social integration and reduces stigma, helping students with disabilities feel more accepted.
- Collaboration with Faculty and Staff
Working with faculty and staff on inclusive teaching practices and universal design helps create a more welcoming classroom environment. This collaborative experience enables instructors to be informed and responsive. This contributes to students feeling respected and understood.
- Holistic Support
Disability services often work with Learner Mentors, Office of Residence Life, student life, and Counseling Services to provide wraparound support. This integrated approach helps students feel that their whole person is acknowledged, not just their disability.

RBC COUNSELING SERVICES

Richard Bland College Counseling Services plays a vital role in advancing campus belonging by supporting students' emotional well-being, strengthening their sense of connection, and helping them engage more fully in the campus community. Recognizing that mental health is closely tied to students' ability to feel included and appreciated, Counseling Services provides intentional, student-centered support that reduces isolation, affirms individual experiences, and connects students to meaningful resources and relationships. Through therapeutic interventions, safe and affirming spaces, and proactive outreach efforts, The Counseling Services Department helps students build resilience, develop a sense of mattering, and cultivate the confidence needed to participate in the academic and social life at RBC. These are elements that contribute to a strong and sustained sense of belonging across campus. These core contributions are reflected more specifically in the following areas of impact:

Increase Emotional Support and Reduces Isolation

RBC Counseling helps students regulate their stress, anxiety, and depression. As these variables trigger campus and community disconnection, the counselor's top priority is to use approaches that help students feel emotionally supported. Such practices empower emotional balance among students who seek to engage with peers, faculty, and campus life, which are important factors that contribute to fostering belonging.

Create Safe & Affirming Spaces

RBC Counseling Services serve as a safe location in which students can express their feelings and thoughts without judgment. This is especially important for students who have struggled with their poor self-conceptions and the lack of personal, academic, and social efficacy—factors that often contribute to belonging uncertainty. Feeling accepted, understood, and embraced by a campus community that values students’ concerns reinforce their sense of mattering.

Connect Students to Resources and Communities & Normalize Mental Health Support

Through outreach campaigns, RBC Counseling Services has helped the campus community to normalize help-seeking attitudes and behaviors. The counselor’s referrals for campus groups, identity-based organizations, peer support networks, and academic resources through its Well-Track Platform have helped students build relationships and find communities where they feel they belong. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Counseling can help students understand that feelings of not belonging are common and often temporary. This reframing of thought reduces stigma and encourages persistence through difficult transitions.

Serving as a critical foundation for cultivating campus belonging, Counseling Services address students’ emotional, social, and psychological factors that influence their ability to connect with and flourish in the campus community. Through its commitment to reducing isolation, creating affirming spaces, and linking students to supportive networks, Counseling Services helps cultivate a campus environment in which students feel seen, heard, and valued. These efforts not only enhance individual well-being but also strengthen the broader campus community by encouraging engagement, persistence, and meaningful connections and ultimately reinforcing a culture of belonging for all students.

As this year’s Strategic Plan Update from the Richard Bland College Inclusive Excellence Committee provides an opportunity to reflect on how we have supported and will continue to strengthen students’ sense of belonging, we recognize the importance of tracking participation rates, retention and graduation data, climate survey results, and program engagement. Through intentional departmental self-assessment, RBC will ensure that the Campus Belonging Campaign drives measurable and lasting impact this year and beyond as we continue to call our campus to action.

Call to Action – 2026 Updates

The Campus Belonging Campaign continues to be more than an initiative. It is an ongoing institutional commitment to cultivating a campus environment in which every student, faculty, and staff member feels supported, and empowered to flourish. As we move into the 2026-2027 academic year, achieving this vision requires purposeful

collective action and sustained engagement from the entire RBC community. We encourage students, faculty, staff, and community partners to deepen their involvement by attending campus events, participating in professional development and belonging-focused trainings, engaging in the Community Book Club and Common Read, and contributing to programs that strengthen connection, inclusion, and well-being across campus. Departments and student organizations are invited to expand their impact by applying for the Access & Opportunity Grant to develop innovative initiatives that foster belonging, equity, and engagement. Additionally, we call on all campus stakeholders to support data-informed efforts by participating in surveys, assessments, and program evaluations to help guide continuous improvement. Together, we can ensure that the Campus Belonging Campaign not only reinforces our shared values but also drives measurable and sustainable outcomes that enhance the student experience, strengthen our campus community for years to come, and guide our next steps.

Next Steps with Additional Updates:

1. Formalize the Bias Impact Response Team & Framework –

Update: June 2026

The Inclusive Excellence Committee has remained committed to strengthening practices that promote accountability and fairness across campus. As part of this work, the Committee continues to develop a clear and effective Bias Impact Response framework, using ongoing assessment and feedback to ensure these efforts reflect our shared commitment to inclusion and institutional excellence. In collaboration with the RBC Student Conduct Board, the Committee has worked to revise and clarify the College's racial discrimination policies, making them more accessible, transparent, and easier for all members of the campus community to understand. These updates will help ensure that everyone feels informed, supported, and confident in how the College responds to concerns. Looking ahead, the Richard Bland College Inclusive Excellence Committee will continue to offer training on implicit bias, unconscious bias, and sensitivity throughout the 2026–2027 academic year. These opportunities are designed to build awareness, encourage reflection, and strengthen our ability to engage respectfully and effectively with one another. Additionally, the RBC Disability Services Coordinator will provide Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) training for students and faculty. These sessions will promote greater understanding of accessibility, highlight important legal protections, and support practices that ensure all members of our community can fully participate in campus life.

Launch Inclusive Faculty Recruitment Strategy – Establish targeted recruitment and retention strategies to increase faculty diversity.

Update: June 2026

As Richard Bland College moves forward with its inclusive faculty recruitment strategy in the 2026-2027 academic year, campus stakeholders are committed to supporting the success of newly hired faculty through the development of a comprehensive mentoring program. This program will be designed to provide structured support, professional development opportunities, and meaningful connections to campus resources. The mentoring initiative engages experienced employees to support new faculty as they navigate the College's culture, expectations, and community throughout their first-year experience. Integrating new hires in this manner promotes a strong sense of belonging and contributes to increased engagement, satisfaction, and long-term success among faculty at RBC.

Roll Out Training & Certification Program – Implement at least five belonging and inclusion trainings per year, leading to a certificate of completion for participants.

Update: June 2026

During the fall 2026 semester, the College will launch the Training and Certification Program, delivering at least five belonging and inclusion trainings designed to equip participants with the knowledge and practical skills needed to carry out inclusion and equity in their personal and campus lives. This program will be open to both students and employees and will provide structured opportunities to build knowledge, develop skills, and advance inclusive practices across the campus community. In August 2026, the IEC will determine whether digital copies of employees' certificates will be forwarded to their department chairs as recognition of their training accomplishments. Also discussed will be the best ways to ensure that students receive digital and hardcopy versions of their certificates of participation.

2. **Kick Off Mixed-Methods Research & Assessment** – Conduct campus-wide surveys and focus groups to measure belonging and inform future strategies.

Update: June 2026

- The RBC Campus Belonging (Student-Version) Study was approved by the College's Institutional Review & Human Subjects Board in February 2026. This mixed-method study began in March 2026 and will continue through April 2027.
- A proposal for the RBC Campus Belonging (Employee-Version) will be submitted to the RBC Institutional Review & Human Subjects Board in the Spring 2027 semester for approval. Once approved, the study will launch in Fall 2027.

3. **Initiate Community Engagement Efforts** – Expand the campus belonging events, build local partnerships, and introduce new opportunities for community involvement.

Update: June 2026

- During the 2026-2027 academic year, the Inclusive Excellence Committee will partner with Greater Reach Community Service Board to offer targeted training and engagement opportunities for students and employees. To support the goals of increasing campus members' sense of belonging, this partnership will offer:
 - Sessions that teach practical life skills and proper adjustment behavior. Resources that support participants' personal development, leadership, and overall well-being will also be shared.
 - Services to include treatment and recovery programs, gambling and gaming awareness, and prevention resources designed to promote healthier decision-making and lifestyle choices.

Through this partnership, interactive workshops and training sessions will equip participants with tools to effectively navigate personal, family, and community dynamics while contributing to a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment in which individuals feel affirmed, validated, and included. By increasing access to mental health support and resources related to addictions, the initiative will help reduce barriers that can hinder engagement and belonging. Essentially, this partnership will reinforce a culture of care and inclusion and enhance the overall campus experience through the strengthening of support systems that enable all

community members to thrive and feel a genuine sense of belonging in both their learning and work environments.

- In terms of campus events, we will retool them to align more intentionally with our commitment to fostering belonging. These redesigned experiences will move beyond awareness by incorporating structured dialogue, case-based learning, and guided reflection to deepen engagement and promote inclusive practices across the campus community.

4. Host Belonging Programs Under the "You Belong Here" Campaign –

Organize events that foster dialogue, engagement, and a sense of connection across campus.

Update: June 2026

- During the Spring 2026 semester, President Sydow facilitated a student satisfaction session to engaged students in a meaningful dialogue and gathered feedback to better understand their lived experiences on campus. The session created an open and inclusive forum where students were encouraged to share their perspectives on campus climate, sense of belonging, academic engagement, and access to support services. Students expressed the strengths and areas for growth at Richard Bland College. Moreover, they offered valuable insight into how RBC can continue to evolve to meet their needs. This engagement reinforced the College's commitment to student-centered and growth-focused leadership, shared governance, and transparency by ensuring that student voices remain central in the institutional decision-making process. In addition to identifying themes related to belonging and engagement, the session offered opportunities to reflect on the need to strengthen communication on campus, the expansion of support resources, as well as the enhancement of the overall student experience.

The Campus Belonging Campaign represents a transformative and sustained commitment by Richard Bland College to create an environment in which every campus member in our learning and working community feels connected and empowered to succeed. As demonstrated throughout this strategic plan and its 2026-2027 updates, belonging at RBC is not regarded as a singular initiative, but as a foundational principle embedded within institutional practices, policies, and campus culture. Through collaboration, data-informed

decision-making, and department-driven innovation, the College has begun to build a comprehensive framework that supports belonging across academic, co-curricular, and professional spaces. The insights gained from the departmental self-assessments, student engagement efforts, and ongoing research will continue to guide the evolution of this work and ensure that our initiatives remain responsive, inclusive, respectful, and impactful. The collective efforts outlined in this plan—from strengthening supportive relationships and expanding access to opportunity, to advancing restorative practices and inclusive excellence demonstrate that belonging is a shared responsibility. Each department, program, and individual plays a vital role in shaping a campus climate that fosters connection, respect, and community.

As RBC moves forward, the continued success of the Campus Belonging Campaign will depend on our sustained engagement, accountability, and willingness to reflect, adapt, and grow. By maintaining a strong focus on measurable outcomes, continuous assessment, and inclusive participation, the College will be well-positioned to create lasting change. This work affirms that when belonging is prioritized, students are more likely to achieve and persist, and employees are more satisfied and engaged. Our College, therefore, becomes better positioned to fulfill its goal of cultivating a thriving and flourishing academic community. Richard Bland College remains committed to advancing a culture of belonging that not only supports individual success but also strengthens the future outcomes of the campus community.

Respectfully submitted,

The Inclusive Excellence Committee
Richard Bland College

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