

**Convergence Labs @VCU - AI+
Cluster Hire in Artificial Intelligence for Public Good**

**Process for Cluster Hires
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Background

During the 2023-24 academic year, The One VCU Academic Repositioning Task Force put forth recommendations for new structural models to enhance support of transdisciplinary research and collaboration including virtual consortia. The Convergence Labs @VCU initiative stems from these recommendations and is a partnership among the Office of the Provost, the Senior Vice President for Health Sciences, and the Vice President for Research and Innovation (OVPRI). Convergence Labs @VCU is a model for supporting a transdisciplinary, collaborative research culture and sustainable infrastructure to encourage exploration that fosters innovative advancements, diversifies faculty expertise, creates experiential learning opportunities for students and contributes curricular innovations. Convergence Labs @ VCU - AI+ is VCU's signature university-wide initiative focused on applied generative artificial intelligence for the public good.

As part of VCU's strategic commitment to advancing transdisciplinary research, collaboration, and curricular innovation, we are launching a university-wide cluster hire initiative focused on *Artificial Intelligence (AI) for Public Good*. This initiative seeks to recruit faculty members across a broad range of disciplines where AI can serve as a transformative tool for addressing critical and complex societal challenges.

A cluster hiring approach will rapidly expand our institutional expertise and capacity to advance strategic priorities and impact. By simultaneously recruiting multiple faculty across complementary specialties, VCU will be poised to build critical mass and create immediate opportunities for cross-pollination of ideas, collaborative projects and opportunities for student learning. This hiring model facilitates the growth of a cohesive research ecosystem where researchers tackle complex societal challenges from multiple angles, share resources and infrastructure, while creating more compelling funding proposals through their collective expertise. Cluster hires also send a strong signal about VCU's commitment to transdisciplinary research, collaboration and investment in faculty. The collective arrival of multiple faculty can help establish new research directions and curricula more quickly than gradual hiring, while also providing

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mutual support and mentorship that aids in retention and accelerates the development of a vibrant research community.

Scope of the Cluster Hire

The *AI for Public Good* cluster hire will hire tenure-eligible/tenured faculty with demonstrated expertise in areas that harness the power of AI to improve public outcomes, including but not limited to:

- Clinical and Biomedical Sciences: Experts from medicine, nursing, pharmacy, dentistry, public health, and other health professions to apply AI to clinical care, drug discovery, population health, and medical research.
- Ethics, Policy and Society: Exploring the ethical dimensions of AI, including fairness, accountability, transparency, mitigating bias in AI systems and implications for society.
- Healthcare and Medicine: Using AI to revolutionize healthcare through personalized treatment plans, predictive diagnostics, health informatics and bioinformatics, and precision medicine.
- Mental Health: Leveraging AI for mental health support, diagnostics, and interventions.
- Sustainability: Applying AI in areas such as climate modeling, resource management, renewable energy, and sustainable urban planning.
- Teaching and Learning: Designing AI-powered personalized learning platforms that adapt to individual students' needs; using AI to enhance teaching and learning (e.g., automating grading, generating personalized feedback, and identifying at-risk students); leveraging AI to make high-quality education more accessible, affordable, and inclusive.

The Office of the Provost will oversee the cluster hire process. A total of 10-15 hires are anticipated across schools and colleges for the 2025-26 and 2026-27 academic years. Faculty recruited for this cluster hire may be housed within any academic unit where AI is a central, or emerging, disciplinary focus, including but not limited to: Education, Engineering, Health Sciences, the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences.

Cluster Hiring Lines and Funding

Salary Support

There are two options related to cluster hiring for Convergence Labs. Summary table is below.

1. **Option A: Traditional**. This option provides for one faculty line for which the Office of the Provost provides 75% salary support and the School/College provides 25% salary support (also explained in the Convergence Labs Operating Manual).
2. **Option B: College/School Match**. This option provides one convergence lab faculty line for which the Office of the Provost provides 100% salary support that is matched by the School/College (1 general faculty line at 100% salary support).

Option A: Traditional

1. The Office of the Provost provides faculty lines for the cluster hire:
 - Each faculty line in a cluster hire belongs to the Office of the Provost.

- If a hire is not made or a hired faculty member leaves the University within the period that funding is provided by the Provost's Office, the line will return to the Office of the Provost to be re-assigned.
 - If the faculty member leaves the University after the period of funding from the Provost's Office ends, then the Dean of the School/College will need to request approval from the Office of the Provost to fill the line.
2. The Office of the Provost provides salary support for up to 75% for each faculty hire within the cluster for up to 6 years and will consider start-up costs.
 - Reviews are required every 3 years to inform decisions about continued funding by the Office of the Provost and, if appropriate, determine the timeline for reverting funding to the unit and/or any bridge funding based on the potential for continued productivity and contribution of the faculty member. These decisions will involve discussions between the Office of the Provost, the Dean of the School/College, and the Convergence Lab lead/co-lead as applicable.
 3. The School/College will provide the remaining 25% of the faculty salary as well as any additional increases.

Funding for Convergence Lab Faculty Hires*:		Office of the Provost	School/College
Option A	Faculty Lines	1	0
	Salary	75%	25%
	Provost support	Up to 6 years	–
	Review period	3 years	–
Option B	Faculty Lines	1	1
	Salary	100%	100%
	Provost support	Up to 6 years	–
	Review period	3 years	3 years

* Faculty for Convergence Labs must be tenured/tenure-track.

Option B: School/College Match

1. The Office of the Provost provide a faculty line for the Convergence Lab hire:
 - The faculty line belongs to the Office of the Provost.
 - If a hire is not made or a hired faculty member leaves the University within the period that funding is provided by the Provost's Office, the line will return to the Office of the Provost to be re-assigned.
 - If the faculty member leaves the University after the period of funding from the Provost's Office ends, then the Dean of the School/College will need to request approval from the Office of the Provost to fill the line.
2. The Office of the Provost provides 100% salary support for the convergence lab hire for up to 6 years and will consider start-up costs.
 - Reviews are required every 3 years to inform decisions about continued funding by the Office of the Provost and, if appropriate, determine the timeline for reverting funding to the unit and/or any bridge funding based on the potential for continued productivity and contribution of the faculty member. These decisions will involve discussions between the Office of the Provost, the Dean of the School/College, and the Convergence Lab Lead/Co-Lead as applicable.
3. The School/College will provide a second faculty line and provide 100% of the salary. The second faculty line belongs to the School/College.

Cluster Hire Search Process

Committee Specifications

- Composed of faculty members from multiple disciplines and academic units reflective of the interdisciplinary nature of the *AI for Public Good* cluster.
- Is diverse in terms of disciplinary expertise, rank and gender, race, and other underrepresented groups.
- Committed to a rigorous assessment of each candidate's potential to contribute to the university's strategic goals for the *AI for Public Good* cluster, including their capacity to build collaborative and innovative partnerships across campus and with external stakeholders.
- Reflects best practice in accordance with institutional Human Resources guidelines, including the disclosure of any conflicts of interest.
- Participating schools/colleges will submit two names for committee membership and one will be selected by the Provost.

The search committee will make recommendations to the Office of the Provost.

Position Announcement

Active recruitment involves widely disseminating information about the positions. Position advertisements must mention the hiring of a specific number of faculty as a cluster or expected participation in the cluster. Recommended language includes: The successful candidate for this position will be expected to participate actively in an ambitious new transdisciplinary initiative in *AI for Public Good*. New faculty with expertise in disciplines represented by proposed new faculty in the cluster will

complement the University's considerable existing expertise in these areas to form the core of this innovative transdisciplinary initiative. Participation in the Convergence Labs @VCU – AI+ will be an important component in performance evaluations.

Post announcement in:

- College website, Department/s website, Office of the Provost website (can link across sites)
- Chronicle of Higher Education
- Disciplines' professional associations and conferences
- URM related associations listservs
- Request URM faculty to post/share among their professional networks

Guidance Document for Search Committee

The search committee will follow VCU's standard procedures and guidelines and should consider the following in the applicant review and selection process:

- Determining how and if applicants move through the review process
- Defining the review and scoring criteria
- Rank order the list
- Create long and short lists of candidates
- Communicating with applicants
- Constructing of interview protocols
- Selecting finalists for the cluster positions; lists of finalists require approval of departments, schools/colleges
- Inviting finalists for on-campus interviews and structuring the itinerary
- Gathering feedback from stakeholders who met with the finalists
- Making the final selections
- Communicating to Non-selected finalists by search committee chair
- Checking references
- Making offers: by Dean/Chair of tenure home department
- Making and negotiating the offer with the candidate

Review of Applications

The review of applications should involve a systematic process conducted by members of the search committee. Each member of the search committee should review all of the applications. Administrative staff may provide support for the organization and development of review materials.

It is recommended that a spreadsheet is created to document discrete information about each applicant, including:

- Name (Last name, First, M)
- Discipline
- Current Position
- Degree/School
- Date Received (PhD or terminal degree in the discipline)
- Criteria specific to the required and preferred qualifications listed in the job posting. For example:
 - Scholarly productivity
 - Substantive importance of research program
 - Likelihood of external funding

- Teaching/mentoring
- Collaboration
- Innovative
- Each search committee member will rate each applicant on each criterion using a three-point scale 3=excellent, 2=good, and 1=modest. The rating process will be independently completed by each committee member.
- The Search committee chair will compile total score for each candidate.
- The search committee will meet to discuss the applicants and ratings and finalize a ranked list to invite for interviews.
- Whether to solicit reference letters (Yes/No/Maybe)
- The Office of the Provost will approve the list of candidates to be interviewed in the support of the department, the dean, and the cluster hiring search committee.

Interviews

- Virtual interviews should be conducted with a diverse pool of applicants to work towards a short-list of position finalists.
- A set of questions, or interview protocol, should be used to ensure a common set of questions is asked of each applicant.
- The interview should include an opportunity for the applicant to ask questions
- All interviews should be scheduled for the same length of time.
- Following the interviews, each member of the search committee will provide an overall evaluation at this stage to construct a short-list of position finalists. The overall evaluation will be: “yes, include on short-list,” “possibly include,” or “no, do not include.”
- Search committee chair will summarize the evaluation for each candidate and convene a meeting with the search committee to finalize the short-list of finalists.
- The Provost, Senior Vice President for Health Sciences and Vice President of Research and Innovation will approve the list of finalists for the on-campus visit, with support of the department, the dean, and search committee.

On-Campus Visits

- Campus visits are coordinated by the search committee.
- Search committee members must meet with candidates.
- Candidate’s department/s must be involved in the interview visit.
- Feedback/input from search committee members, department/s faculty and any other stakeholders to be considered by the search committee.
- Search committee deliberates and presents list of candidate strengths and limitations to the hiring authority.
- Department chair and department representative on the search committee present the recommendation to department faculty. Department may choose to vote – this can be reinforcing but may also be confrontational.

Selection and Appointment

- Offer is made, negotiated and finalized.
- Potential Offer Letter - should include expectations to conduct research, or creative work, pursue funding specific to the cluster area and be expected to participate in cluster activities.

- If an offer is declined, the Dean/Dept Chair will inform the search committee Chair who will communicate with the Office of the Provost to decide whether to go down the ranking order or repeat a cluster search the following cycle. If this is late in the hiring cycle, then the position is moved to the following year.

Post Hiring Engagement

Following the cluster hire on-boarding efforts will focus on ensuring productive engagement with the cluster and Convergence Lab. Additionally, the progress of new faculty will be longitudinal tracked for professional growth, productivity in order to effectively support continued career progress. Convergence Lab cluster hires will be covered by the Convergence Labs @VCU Operating Manual.