

Vision Team 6: Aligning Workforce and Economic Development Strategies

Charge: Vision Team 6 was charged with identifying strategies to strengthen alignment between JMU's academic programs, institutional systems, and partnerships with workforce and economic development needs across the Shenandoah Valley and the Commonwealth. The team focused on identifying high-demand workforce areas, recommending academic program opportunities, and proposing systems and structures that enable JMU to respond more intentionally and effectively and at scale.

Approach: The team analyzed regional and statewide workforce data, reviewed economic development priorities, and engaged faculty, academic leaders, and external stakeholders. A consistent theme emerged: JMU possesses strong assets in talent development, applied learning, and community partnership, but institutional impact is limited by structural fragmentation, limited coordination, and barriers to scalability.

Recommendations:

Integrated Economic Impact Framework

Establish a coordinated framework to align workforce development, research, community engagement, and partnerships across JMU. This includes shared data, clearer coordination, and improved data integration, and public-facing reporting to support strategic and responsive decision-making and communication of JMU's economic and community impact.

Workforce-Aligned Academic Programs

Expand and strengthen academic programs in high-demand areas where JMU's strengths align with workforce needs. Priority areas identified include AI and data science, cybersecurity, engineering, healthcare, advanced manufacturing, energy, agriculture, and education. The team emphasized interdisciplinary programs, flexible pathways, non-credit and professional education options, and JMU's distinctive strengths in applied learning and power skills.

Regional Business and Innovation Ecosystem

Strengthening JMU's role as a regional partner by improving access points and navigation pathways for businesses and innovators, coordinating access to existing university resources, and intentionally integrating students into innovation and small business engagement. This will support job growth, talent retention, and regional economic vitality.

Build on Existing Strengths

Scale programs where JMU already demonstrates strong workforce and community impact, including Lab School, TEMPO program, and the proposed JMU LIFE program.

Conclusion: Collectively, these recommendations position JMU to strengthen alignment between its academic mission and workforce and economic development priorities. By improving coordination, expanding targeted programs, and leveraging existing strengths, JMU can enhance its responsiveness and advance its role as the Commonwealth's preferred partner for workforce development and regional prosperity.