

AGENDA
VIRGINIA GROWTH AND OPPORTUNITY BOARD
PROGRAM PERFORMANCE AND EVALUATION (PPE) COMMITTEE

September 15, 2026

10:00 – 10:30AM

[Virtual link](#)

LOCATION:

Brightpoint Community College
13101 Route 1, Chester, Virginia
Conference Room N141D

- | | | |
|------|---|----------------|
| I. | OPENING | |
| | a. Call to order | Chair |
| | b. Roll Call | Jack Honig |
| | c. Public Comment | Chair |
| II. | CONSENT AGENDA – <i>Action Item</i> | Chair |
| | a. Approval of May 29, 2026 Meeting Minutes | |
| III. | FY26Q4 CLOSED PROJECT REVIEW | James Clements |
| | a. Implementation | |
| | b. Planning, Feasibility, and Small-Scale Pilot | |
| IV. | NEXT MEETING | Chair |
| | a. Virtual Meeting TBD | |
| V. | ADJOURNMENT | Chair |



VIRGINIA INITIATIVE FOR
**GROWTH &
OPPORTUNITY**
IN EACH REGION

**VIRGINIA GROWTH AND OPPORTUNITY BOARD PROGRAM PERFORMANCE AND EVALUATION
COMMITTEE
May 29, 2026
1:00 PM
Virtual Meeting**

Members Present

Jim Cheng
Nancy Agee
Emily O'Quinn

Members Absent

Jon Peterson
Thomas Ransom

Call to Order Mr. Jim Cheng, Chair of the Virginia Growth and Opportunity (GO Virginia) Program Performance and Evaluation Committee, called the meeting to order.

Roll Call Mr. Billy Gammel, GO Virginia Senior Program Administrator for the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), called the roll and noted that a quorum was present.

Public Comment Mr. Cheng opened the floor for public comment.

No members of the public appeared before the Committee for the public comment period.

The public comment period was closed.

March 24, 2026 Meeting Minutes Review Mr. Cheng noted that the consent agenda consisted of the February 5, 2025, meeting minutes.

A motion was made by Ms. Emily O'Quinn and seconded by Ms. Nancy Agee to approve the minutes. The motion passed (Yea: Cheng, O'Quinn, Agee; Nay: None).

JLARC Recommendation #12 Ms. Dunnigan lead the discussion on JLARC Recommendation #12, which recommends the Board should revise its policies to clarify that only grant applications that seek a significant award amount are required to include an estimated ROI, and that the

return on investment (ROI) should be tailored to each project and calculated by experienced professionals using established methodologies, and the costs should be paid for the GO Virginia program out of its existing fund balances. Ms. Dunnigan walked the Committee through a proposed break-even analysis tool based off discussions held by the committee at the March 24, 2026 meeting. Ms. Dunnigan then explained how the applicant-provided inputs would be converted into a data-based equivalent level of jobs created by DHCD staff. Discussion by committee members then followed on how this process would work and how it would be communicated to applicants.

A motion was made by Ms. Emily O'Quinn and seconded by Ms. Nancy Agee to advance a recommendation to adopt the break-even analysis tool for ROI calculation to the state board for approval. The motion passed (Yea: Agee, Cheng, O'Quinn; Nay: None).

FY26 Quarter 3 Closed Project Review

Mr. Billy Gammel presented an overview of the 16 GO Virginia projects which closed out in quarter 3 of fiscal year 2026. Mr. Gammel noted that these 16 projects were split between 8 planning grants and 8 implementation grants, and that as a result of these grants multiple outcomes were achieved. These included over 730 businesses served, over 2000 individuals trained, over 650 industry recognized workforce credentials being awarded, 100 new apprenticeships placed, nearly 1000 acres advanced along the Virginia Business Ready Sites Program (VBRSP) scale, and \$48 million in capital raised by businesses served.

Mr. Gammel then provided a geographic overview of where projects had closed out, as well as a report on how achieved outcomes compared to committed outcomes for each grant. Discussion then followed regarding the outcomes presented in the report by the committee members.

JLARC Recommendation #4

Ms. Dunnigan provided an update for the next steps in addressing JLARC Recommendation #4 from the 2023 Report which speaks to assessing the long-term impacts of the program. Following the last meeting of the committee, an RFP had been issued by DHCD to evaluate the long-term impact of the GO Virginia program investments. Ms. Dunnigan noted that after issuing the RFP several issues had been identified with the RFP and that the scope may need to be changed for better results. Discussion then followed that staff had the tools in place to track closed projects

accurately. As such, the committee opted to not move forward at the moment with re-issuing the RFP.

Next Meeting Schedule Ms. Dunnigan briefly discussed the possibility of the next meeting of the Program Performance and Evaluation Committee occurring on September 15, 2026.

Adjournment The meeting was adjourned.

DRAFT



Memorandum

TO: GO Virginia Program Performance and Evaluation (PPE) Committee

FROM: DHCD

RE: FY26 Q4 Closed Projects

DATE: 09/15/2026

Background

Part of the Growth & Opportunity Board bylaws requires the PPE Committee ensure projects approved by the Board meet established criteria consistent with the GO Virginia mission by conducting regular review of funded projects. The enclosed detailed project performance closeout narrative includes all planning and implementation projects staff have reviewed and approved in quarter 4 of fiscal year 2026 (April - June 2026). The narrative description details project specific background, project impact, activities, outcomes (if applicable), sustainability, and lessons learned.

Special attention should be focused on the enclosed two-page cover sheet, which is organized by implementation and planning projects, highlighting the portfolio snapshot of project results/performance and visuals of where the projects are geographically located.

This past quarter there were a total of 8 projects that were closed – 3 implementation and 5 planning projects. These are detailed in the following pages.

GO Virginia Implementation Projects Portfolio: FY26Q4

Closed Implementation Projects

Three Projects Across Three Regions | \$2.09M Total Investment | Performance Closeout Overview

This portfolio summarizes three GO Virginia implementation projects completed in Regions 2, 4, and 9 during the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2026, representing a combined investment of \$2,092,646. All three advanced the Workforce Development investment strategy across the talent pipeline — from middle school through adult re-engagement. In Region 4, CCAM installed seven GO TEC Career Connections Labs (against a target of four) enrolling 2,962 students to date. In Region 2, Lynchburg Beacon of Hope’s Career Acceleration Program exceeded its internship, credential, and business-engagement targets by wide margins while growing employer partnerships five-fold. In Region 9, Laurel Ridge Community College’s Technology Academies trained 107 learners in drones and robotics, exceeding its training target while falling short on placements and credentials — and redesigned its drone program around industry certifications in response.

PORTFOLIO SNAPSHOT

	Project	Region	Grant	Headline Result	Committed Outcomes	Sustainability
	Lynchburg Career Acceleration Program	2	\$540,000	261 internships completed (233%); 98 certificates vs 44 target; 60 businesses served (250%); employer partnerships grew 12 → ~60	Exceeded 233–250% across all three measures	Secured Employer support + scholarship resources
	GO TEC Career Connections Labs	4	\$1,150,571 (\$100,995.02 returned)	7 middle-school Career Connections Labs installed vs 4 targeted; 2,962 students enrolled to date (79% of 3,735 target)	Met/Exceeded Labs 175%; enrollment 79%	Secured School-sustained; IALR statewide plan
	Technology Academies for Fauquier & Rappahannock Counties	9	\$402,075 (\$129,472.84 returned)	107 trained (119%); 28 credentials (31%) and 28 dual-enrollment completers (35%); drone program redesigned for FAA Part 107 pathway	Mixed Training 119%; credentials 31%; placements 0%	Secured Tuition + college operations
	TOTAL	3	\$2,092,646	3 projects • 3,069 learners reached • 261 internships • 126 credentials	2 met/exceeded 1 mixed	3 secured 0 at risk

■ Workforce Development

Committed Outcomes compares achieved results to contracted targets: Exceeded (all measures above target), Met (all measures at target), Mixed (results vary by measure), Pending (results not yet final). Sustainability: Secured (continuation funding or institutional commitment in place), Partial (continuation being pursued), Not continuing. Technology Academies target performance varied sharply by measure: training 119%, credentials 31%, dual enrollment 35%, placements and internships 0%. Career Acceleration’s closeout table lists certificates at “123% of goal” while its narrative cites 361%; the computed figure from reported values (98 vs. 44) is 223% — raw counts are used here. GO TEC’s submitted outcomes table was the unmodified template example and is excluded; enrollment figures come from the narrative and accompanying workbook.

PORTFOLIO AT A GLANCE

Where the three closed implementation projects landed across GO Virginia’s nine regions, and how the quarter’s \$2.09M translated into results.

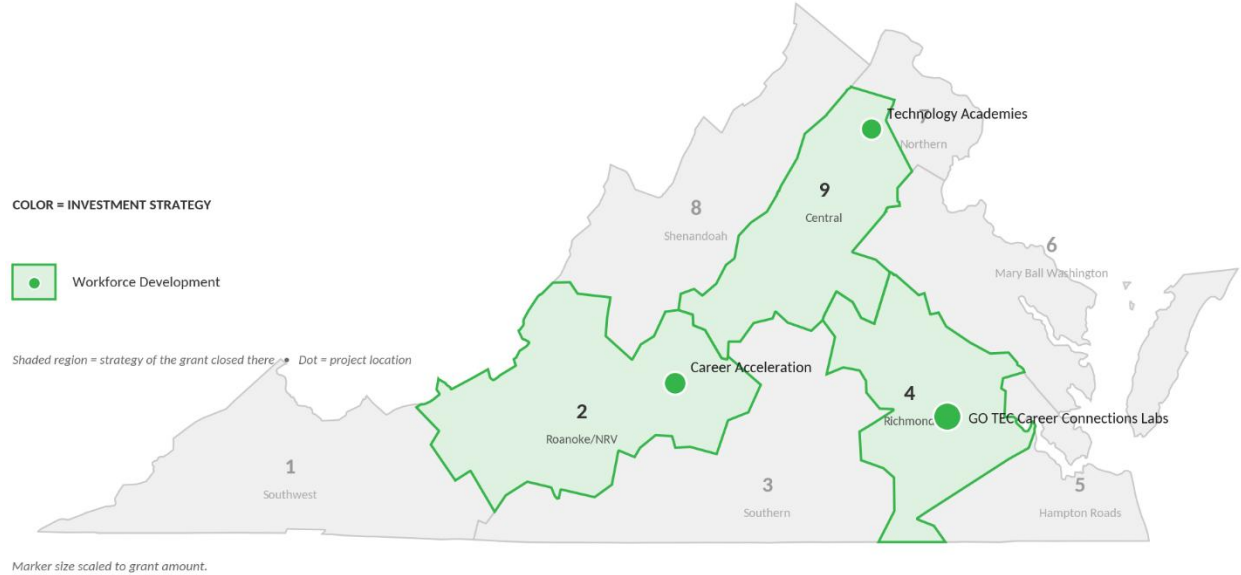
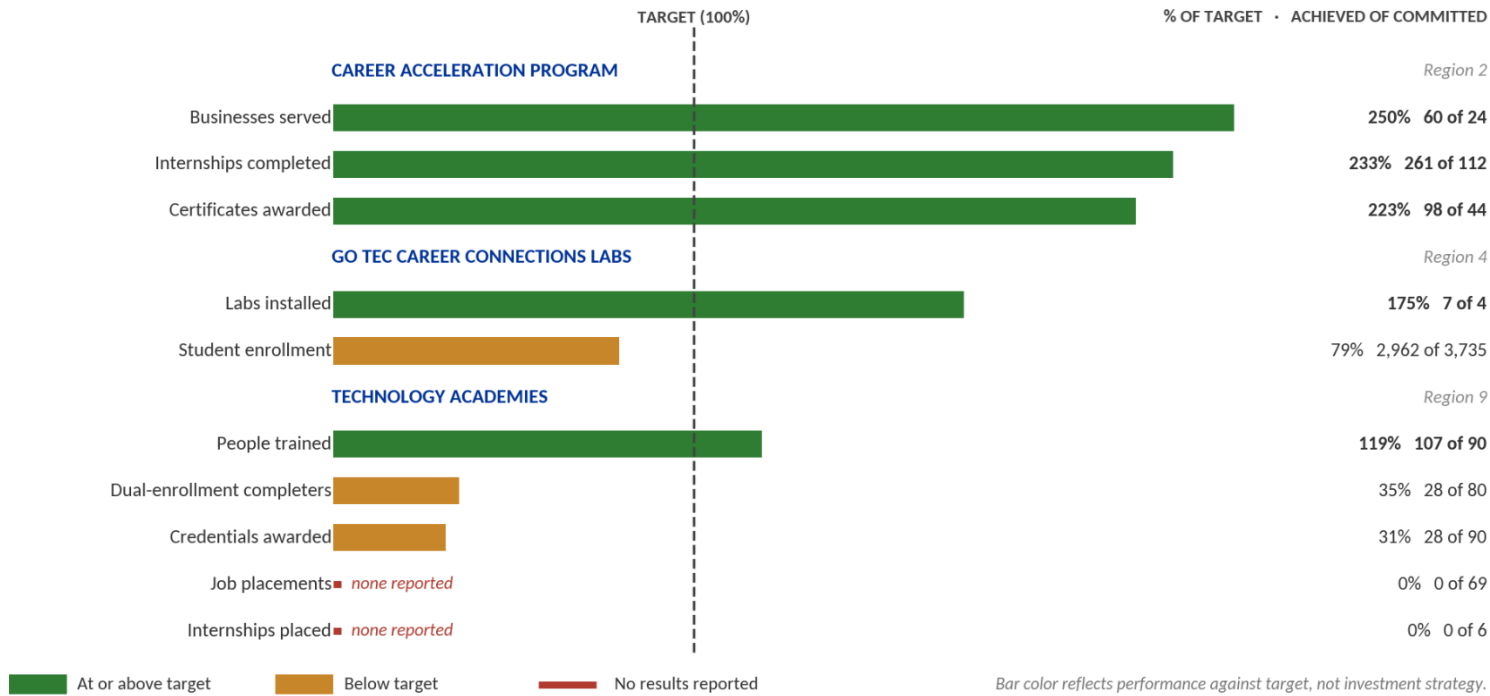


EXHIBIT A · RESULTS AGAINST COMMITTED OUTCOMES



Career Acceleration Program

Region 2 • \$540,000 • Lynchburg Beacon of Hope • Project Director: Leidra McQueen

PROJECT BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

The Career Acceleration Project addressed Region 2's need to strengthen its talent pipeline by retaining local high school graduates, re-engaging adults with some college but no credential ("Pausers"), and connecting two-generation households to living-wage employment in targeted industries. Aligned with Region 2's Growth and Diversification Plan, the Promise Career Acceleration model integrated secondary education, postsecondary training, and employer demand through intensive career coaching, work-based learning, and industry-aligned pathways — piloting a scalable, partner-driven model in Lynchburg and Altavista.

PROJECT IMPACT & APPROACH

Beacon of Hope strengthened connections between high schools, the community college, and regional employers by supporting re-enrollment and credential attainment, expanding paid summer internships for high school students and Pauser cohorts, and increasing outreach through trusted community networks. Employer partnerships grew from 12 to nearly 60 — a five-fold increase driven by hiring managers who experienced program participants' quality firsthand — and program graduates securing employment and promotions became advocates for the program themselves.

KEY OUTCOMES & PERFORMANCE METRICS

The project exceeded every contracted measure: 261 internships completed against a target of 112 (233%), 98 certificates awarded against a target of 44, and 60 businesses served against a target of 24 (250%). Projected participant wage outcomes are equally strong: a projected median hourly wage of \$25.14 (\$52,300 annually), an 86% increase over participants' median baseline of \$28,080, and a projected economic impact of \$40,752 per participant — more than \$1 million in total projected salary impact for the Lynchburg region.

SUSTAINABILITY & FUTURE OUTLOOK

Project activities will be sustained through employer support, existing scholarship resources (including the Stay Close, Go Far scholarship), and continued coordination with community partners. Internships continue with direct corporate support, and Pauser and two-generation participants will be served through ongoing college and career coaching. The project did not generate direct income, but the cross-sector collaboration it built allows services to continue without GO Virginia funding, and Beacon of Hope continues to pursue employer engagement, philanthropic support, and alignment with regional funding streams.

LESSONS LEARNED & RECOMMENDATIONS

Participants routinely navigated structural barriers — missing driver's licenses, educational prerequisites, documentation — that extended timelines and required individualized support; program design must account for these from the outset. Employer capacity proved a real execution constraint, with some key Region 2 target-industry employers at capacity without open roles, and government-funded partner offerings (such as CDL training) subject to availability shifts. The most significant lesson: relationship-building is critical infrastructure — the most effective outreach was word of mouth through trusted community members, pointing to a replicable community-ambassador model for reaching Opportunity Youth, two-generation families, and Pausers.

GO TEC Career Connections Labs Region 4

Region 4 • \$1,150,571 • Commonwealth Center for Advanced Manufacturing (CCAM) • Project Director: Lorin Sodell

PROJECT BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

Region 4's Growth and Diversification Plan targets job creation in advanced manufacturing, IT, and logistics, but the region faces a clear shortage of young people actively pursuing these career pathways. GO TEC (Great Opportunities in Technology and Engineering Careers) closes that gap by giving middle school students meaningful hands-on exposure to STEM fields. CCAM's charge under this project — building on its role as Region 4's In-Region Coordinating Entity established through the IALR statewide competitive grant — was to establish a strong GO TEC presence across a broad cross-section of Region 4 school divisions.

PROJECT IMPACT & APPROACH

Against a goal of deploying at least four middle school Career Connections Labs, CCAM leveraged the grant alongside direct support from The Cameron Foundation and recent STEM equipment purchases by participating school divisions to install seven labs — all operating and thriving today. The Teacher Training Lab at CCAM (funded through the companion competitive grant) anchors the regional model, and CCAM now hosts prospective employers, political leaders, and other decision-makers at the training lab or directly in the middle schools at least monthly — with GO TEC increasingly showcased as a business-attraction asset for Region 4 and the state.

KEY OUTCOMES & PERFORMANCE METRICS

Total enrollment across this project's schools reached 2,962 students to date against a target of 3,735 (79%). The structural challenge in measuring GO TEC's ultimate impact is the long lead time between middle school exposure and career entry — the first Region 4 GO TEC students remain a couple of years from high school graduation. IALR has engaged the Weldon Cooper Center to study outcomes; initial 2025 results indicate students are clearly better informed about the showcased career pathways, while data on whether they ultimately choose those pathways remains inconclusive and is being used to continuously improve the program.

SUSTAINABILITY & FUTURE OUTLOOK

All seven labs are fully operational and require relatively minimal supplies and maintenance beyond teacher costs; participating schools acknowledge responsibility for eventual equipment replacement, and the relationships CCAM built across teachers, administrators, and localities support sustainment. At the state level, IALR — GO TEC's statewide home — is developing a business and sustainability plan centered on standardized curriculum, experienced professionals, and curated equipment, with long-term private-sector sponsorship engaged through GO TEC Advisory Councils operating in most deployed regions.

LESSONS LEARNED & RECOMMENDATIONS

The 79% enrollment result taught CCAM to better understand upfront how each school division intends to deploy the program — divisions operate differently and achieve different results with the same tools. One identified action is engaging family members more actively in the course-selection process to widen student exposure. A strongly positive effect: local, regional, and state economic developers and political leaders now showcase GO TEC as a key business-attraction mechanism, with site visits increasingly happening directly in the middle schools where decision-makers can see student impact firsthand.

Technology Academies for Fauquier and Rappahannock Counties

Region 9 • \$402,075 • Laurel Ridge Community College • Project Director: Rachel Dodson

PROJECT BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

Laurel Ridge Community College, in partnership with Rappahannock and Fauquier County K–12 school systems, implemented a Talent Development project targeting Region 9 Growth Plan sectors: IT, food and beverage, and light manufacturing — under the plan’s charge to “develop sector-driven credentialing, apprenticeship, and internship opportunities for target industries.” The Technology Academies offered college-level courses in robotics and drones to high school seniors without solidified post-graduation plans and to adult learners.

PROJECT IMPACT & APPROACH

Conceived amid pandemic-era uncertainty when organized drone and robotics training in the college system was limited, the project pursued economic prosperity, income mobility, and equitable technology access by advancing education, credentialing, apprenticeship, and internship opportunities in drones and robotics. The original vision built on existing high school relationships to engage dual-enrollment students and develop work-based learning across IT/communications, food and beverage manufacturing, and light manufacturing. Equipment was purchased early — fronted by the Laurel Ridge Educational Foundation against accumulating match — to keep supply-chain delays from disrupting class launches.

KEY OUTCOMES & PERFORMANCE METRICS

The project trained 107 people against a target of 90 (119%), but under-delivered on downstream measures: 28 credentials awarded against a target of 90 (31%), 28 dual-enrollment program completers against 80 (35%), and no job placements (target 69) or internships (target 6) recorded during the grant period. A primary barrier to FAA Remote Pilot (Part 107) completion was limited availability of authorized testing centers; as the program closed, 10 students requested exam vouchers and one has since earned the Part 107 license post-grant.

SUSTAINABILITY & FUTURE OUTLOOK

The project generated match income through in-kind contributions from a private foundation, the school systems, and federal Perkins funding; instructional costs will continue through student tuition, with the college seeking private and public support as equipment requires replacement. Laurel Ridge is evaluating becoming a PSI testing center to remove the certification-access barrier, and has redesigned its Small Unmanned Aerial Systems (sUAS) Drone Operator Career Studies Certificate to align with current industry needs — now preparing students for multiple industry-recognized certifications, including FAA Part 107.

LESSONS LEARNED & RECOMMENDATIONS

The project navigated compounding execution challenges: high-level administrative turnover at both the college and the school systems, school–college scheduling misalignment that left students already committed to other courses before learning of the Academies, and initial difficulty ensuring Technology Academies courses counted toward graduation credits. The experience underscores the importance of early scheduling integration with school divisions, securing graduation-credit treatment before launch, and — for certification-dependent programs — addressing exam access as core program design rather than a downstream detail.

GO Virginia Planning Grants Portfolio: FY26Q4 Closed Planning Grants

Five Planning Grants Across Four Regions | \$644,226 Total Investment | Performance Closeout Overview

This portfolio summarizes five GO Virginia planning grants completed in Regions 3, 4, 6, and 9 during the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2026, representing a combined investment of \$644,226. Three projects advanced the Workforce Development strategy and two advanced Cluster Scale-Up. The Virginia Chamber’s statewide AI assessment engaged 520 Blueprint Tour attendees across all nine regions and produced 34 recommendations. VCU’s FALCN grant concluded the proposed Region 4 hybrid cloud ecosystem lacks a sustainable funding model, so it will not advance — a valid planning outcome. In Region 6, Cyber Titans VIP piloted a cybersecurity internship model that met or exceeded every goal. Region 9 closed two: Venture Central designed a food and beverage accelerator and secured early PATH Foundation funding, and BioBridge TPI delivered a TEconomy-led bioscience talent strategy.

PORTFOLIO SNAPSHOT

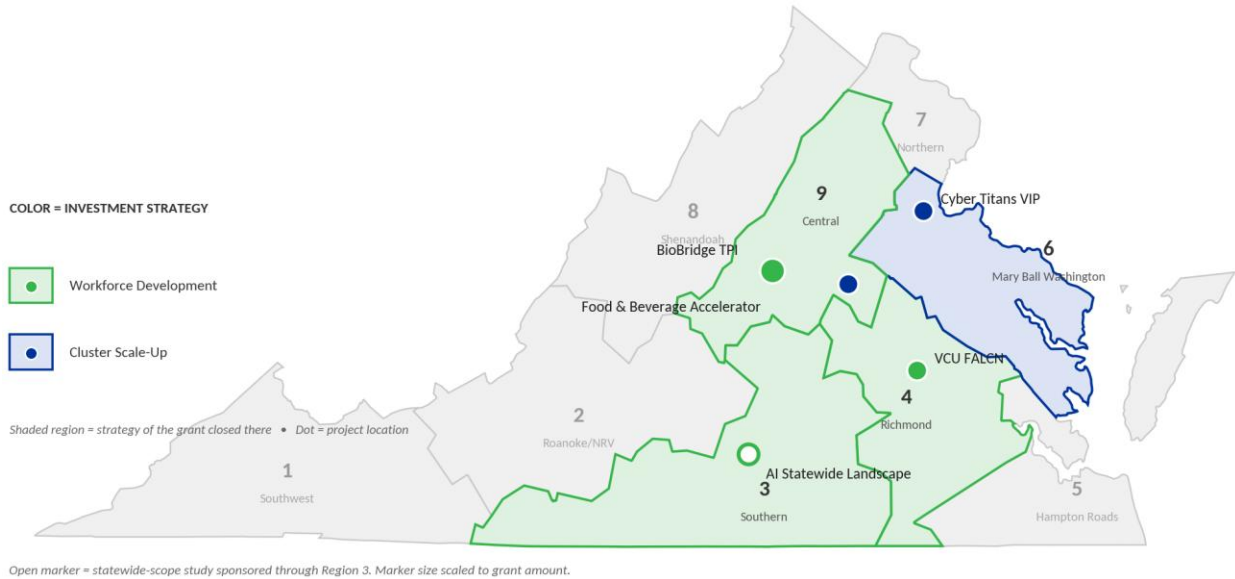
	Project	Region	Grant	Headline Result	Committed Outcomes	Sustainability
	Artificial Intelligence Statewide Landscape Assessment	3	\$100,000 (\$8,530.21 returned)	520 Blueprint Tour attendees across all nine regions; 38 employer interviews; 34 recommendations	Met Assessment + 34 recommendations	Secured Purpose served; recommendations in motion; led to successful implementation grant awards
	VCU FALCN Planning Grant	4	\$100,000	Workforce assessment delivered; 12+ stakeholders engaged; new IBM mainframe course; hybrid cloud ecosystem judged unsustainable	Met Plan, course, and feasibility finding	Not continuing No viable multi-partner funding model
	Cyber Titans Virginia Internship Program (VIP)	6	\$99,826 (\$1,203.17 returned)	10 interns placed with 8 businesses; 9 earned CompTIA Security+ vs goal of 7; replicable model + playbook produced	Exceeded 100% placement; 9 credentials vs goal of 7	Secured Implementation grant awarded
	Food and Beverage Business Accelerator	9	\$100,000	Accelerator business plan, budget, and funding strategy delivered; \$25,000 PATH Foundation grant secured	Met All four contracted deliverables	Secured \$25,000 PATH grant; implementation grant awarded
	BioBridge Talent Pathways Planning (TPI)	9	\$244,400 (\$2,008.29 returned)	Bioscience talent strategy delivered (TEconomy); occupations mapped to training pathways; 40+ stakeholders convened	Met Strategy, roadmap, and Council briefing	Partial Implementation funding being sought
	TOTAL	4	\$644,226	5 projects • all nine regions engaged • 4 sector strategies + 1 piloted internship model	5 met or exceeded	3 secured 1 partial · 1 not continuing

■ Workforce Development
■ Cluster Scale-Up

Committed Outcomes: Exceeded / Met / Mixed / Pending against contracted commitments. Sustainability: Secured (funding or institutional commitment in place), Partial (being pursued), Not continuing. FALCN is Not continuing though its planning purpose was fully served. Where a narrative left the template’s sample outcomes table unmodified, narrative outcomes are used.

PORTFOLIO AT A GLANCE

Where the five closed planning grants landed and what each grant produced.



WHAT WAS DELIVERED

Project	Primary Deliverables	Engagement / Reach	What It Sets Up Next
AI Statewide Landscape Region 3 · \$100,000 · VA Chamber	Statewide AI impact report with sector-specific analysis across all nine regions; 34 recommendations organized under five goal areas	520 Blueprint Tour attendees in all nine regions; 38 employer interviews; online survey. 83.7% of attendees already deploying or considering AI	Regional AI implementation strategies; NVRC has issued an RFP for a regional study and summit
VCU FALCN Region 4 · \$100,000 · VCU	Curriculum gap analysis; new IBM mainframe computing course; governance and sustainability framework; final planning report	12+ stakeholders across banking, cybersecurity, cloud computing, local government, and higher education	Ecosystem will not advance — no viable multi-partner funding model. IBM course and curriculum analysis remain in place
Cyber Titans VIP Region 6 · \$99,826 · Cyber Bytes Fdn.	Piloted internship model, training curriculum, and internship syllabus; Strategic Plan and Playbook for replication	10 interns placed with 8 regional businesses across cybersecurity, IT, and defense; 9 CompTIA Security+ credentials earned against a goal of 7	GO Virginia implementation grant plus DOL, DoD, NIST, and EDA sources; WIOA stipend support
Food & Beverage Accelerator Region 9 · \$100,000 · Venture Central	Needs assessment report; accelerator business plan with selection criteria and program structure; budget and funding strategy; partner letters of support	Interviews and focus groups with food businesses, industry experts, and economic development officials across participating counties	\$25,000 PATH Foundation grant seeding a regional resource hub; implementation grant funded
BioBridge TPI Region 9 · \$244,400 · CvilleBioHub	TEconomy bioscience talent report; high-demand occupation-to-training pathway map; workforce strategy	40+ stakeholders at the culminating convening; Advisory Coalition across three working sessions	Implementation proposal in development; K–12, higher education, and industry partners engaged for the next phase

	Project	Primary Deliverables	Engagement / Reach	What It Sets Up Next
		presentation to the Region 9 Council		

Color bar indicates investment strategy, matching the map above. Engagement figures reflect different activity types by project design and are not directly comparable across grants.

Artificial Intelligence Statewide Landscape Assessment

Region 3 • \$100,000 • Virginia Chamber of Commerce (VACC) • Project Director: Andrew Sinclair

PROJECT BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

Use of Generative AI tools and software is growing faster than any new technology previously introduced, and AI deployment is widely expected to change many jobs, make some obsolete, and create new types of work — with impacts varying widely by the tasks associated with each occupation. Through surveys, focus groups, and interviews in all nine GO Virginia regions, a review of current literature, and data forecasting, this study set out to understand the current climate for AI in the Commonwealth and predict potential workplace and workforce impacts.

PROJECT IMPACT & APPROACH

Using the data and information collected, the project developed a series of actionable recommendations to position the Commonwealth to mitigate AI impacts and capitalize on AI-related opportunities over the next few years, and to provide a foundation for the more detailed regional workforce assessments that will be needed to prepare Virginia workers for expected AI impacts. The study also functioned as a pipeline-builder for future GO Virginia implementation projects, guided by an advisory workgroup with representation from the other GO Virginia regions and state partners.

KEY OUTCOMES & PERFORMANCE METRICS

AI-related feedback was collected from 520 attendees at the Virginia Chamber's Blueprint Tour stops across all nine GO Virginia regions: 83.7% of attendees represented organizations already deploying or considering AI; fewer than one-fifth reported adjusting hiring practices due to AI (another fifth were unsure); and only 27% indicated AI training resources were readily available in their region — flagging resources as a focus area. An online survey and 38 employer interviews supplemented the tour data. The resulting report quantifies the order of magnitude of potential impacts on Virginia occupations and industries and has been cited in multiple news reports and used to support subsequent grant proposals.

SUSTAINABILITY & FUTURE OUTLOOK

The project was designed as a foundational validation study to document business-community perspectives on AI in the workplace and strategically inform state and regional workforce development leaders. Identified next steps include regional AI implementation strategies, workforce training across three goal areas (universal AI literacy, incumbent workers, displaced workers), business AI-optimization support, and infrastructure to grow and attract AI-related businesses — fundable through GO Virginia or other relevant programs. Momentum is already visible: the Northern Virginia Regional Commission has issued an RFP for a regional AI landscape study and summit, and workforce organizations statewide are launching new training initiatives consistent with the strategy's recommendations.

LESSONS LEARNED & RECOMMENDATIONS

The comprehensive AI report included sector-specific impact analysis of key business sectors across the nine GO Virginia regions and 34 strategic recommendations organized around five goal areas: (1) pursue universal AI literacy across the Commonwealth; (2) provide workplace training and resources for incumbent workers; (3) provide reskilling, upskilling, and re-employment resources for workers impacted by AI deployment; (4) help Virginia businesses and organizations optimize the impact of AI — especially small and mid-sized firms; and (5) ensure infrastructure — electric capacity, sites, and capital — is in place to grow and attract AI-related businesses, where Virginia is better positioned than most states.

VCU FALCN Planning Grant

Region 4 • \$100,000 • Virginia Commonwealth University • Project Director: Azim Eskandarian

PROJECT BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

The FALCN Planning Grant was created to assess how Region 4 could strengthen its advanced-computing workforce and support economic growth in high-demand technology sectors. Consistent with the Region 4 Growth and Diversification Plan, the project evaluated workforce needs in artificial intelligence, hybrid cloud computing, cybersecurity, and enterprise systems while identifying educational strategies to better align talent development with employer demand.

PROJECT IMPACT & APPROACH

Through stakeholder engagement, curriculum analysis, and sustainability planning, the project provided a roadmap for developing talent in strategic technology sectors, supporting GO Virginia's goals of workforce development, economic diversification, and regional competitiveness. More than a dozen stakeholders across banking, cybersecurity, cloud computing, local government, and higher education were engaged to validate workforce needs and shape educational strategy.

KEY OUTCOMES & PERFORMANCE METRICS

Deliverables included a completed curriculum gap analysis, a new mainframe computing course developed in partnership with IBM, a strategic framework outlining governance, sustainability, and educational pathways for a hybrid cloud ecosystem, and a comprehensive final planning report documenting workforce needs, stakeholder feedback, and recommendations. As a planning grant, the project reported deliverables rather than quantified employment outcomes.

SUSTAINABILITY & FUTURE OUTLOOK

The planning process determined that sustaining the proposed hybrid cloud ecosystem would require significant ongoing operational funding and multi-partner financial commitments that were not identified during the planning period; as a result, VCU does not intend to advance the project into implementation at this time. The planning effort nonetheless achieved its intended purpose — a rigorous feasibility determination is itself a planning-grant outcome, avoiding a larger implementation investment in a model without a viable funding structure, while the IBM mainframe course and curriculum analysis remain in place.

LESSONS LEARNED & RECOMMENDATIONS

The central lesson: workforce demand and industry interest alone are not sufficient for long-term sustainability — successful advanced-computing initiatives require clearly defined governance structures, dedicated operational leadership, and committed multi-partner funding models. The process also demonstrated the value of engaging employers early to inform curriculum development. Other regions pursuing similar initiatives should conduct sustainability and funding assessments early in planning, using stakeholder engagement to validate demand before making significant implementation investments.

Cyber Titans Virginia Internship Program (VIP)

Region 6 • \$99,826 • Cyber Bytes Foundation • Project Director: Nancy Patillo

PROJECT BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

The Cyber Titans VIP project addressed the growing demand for skilled cybersecurity professionals within Region 6's targeted Information and Emerging Technologies cluster, a priority identified in the region's Growth and Diversification Plan. The program responded to workforce shortages by creating industry-aligned internships, certifications, and career pathways to strengthen the regional talent pipeline and support higher-wage job creation, aligning education, industry, and government around a sustainable cybersecurity ecosystem.

PROJECT IMPACT & APPROACH

The project designed and piloted an industry-aligned internship model connecting education, workforce development, and employers, creating structured pathways for participants to gain real-world experience, professional skills, and credentials supporting entry into high-demand, high-wage careers in the Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services and IT clusters. It also produced a replicable internship model and strategic playbook, positioning the program for expansion across additional regions and partners with reduced startup costs.

KEY OUTCOMES & PERFORMANCE METRICS

The program trained 10 participants and placed all 10 as interns with 8 regional businesses across the cybersecurity, IT, and defense sectors. Nine of ten participants earned the CompTIA Security+ certification, exceeding the original goal of 7 credentials. Key scalability products included a structured internship model, training curriculum, internship syllabus, and a comprehensive Strategic Plan and Playbook to guide future implementation — collectively reflecting 100% achievement of internship placement goals and above-target credential attainment.

SUSTAINABILITY & FUTURE OUTLOOK

The program will continue through pursuit of a GO Virginia Implementation Grant plus additional state and federal sources including the U.S. Department of Labor, Department of Defense, NIST, and EDA, with workforce development partners continuing to support stipends and training through WIOA funding. Industry partners have demonstrated strong interest in continuing participation — hosting interns, providing mentorship, and exploring sponsorship or cost-share models for future cohorts. The pilot validated both demand and effectiveness; rather than concluding, the project is positioned to scale.

LESSONS LEARNED & RECOMMENDATIONS

Key successes included strong employer engagement, high certification attainment, and real-world learning experiences that improved workforce readiness. Lessons highlighted the importance of early administrative planning (particularly around WIOA processes), stronger upfront intern–employer matching, and flexible program structures accommodating participant schedules and employer needs — with continuous feedback loops and mid-program placement adjustments proving critical. The experience demonstrates that structured, employer-driven internships combined with industry-recognized credentials can rapidly build workforce capacity in a high-demand field.

Food and Beverage Business Accelerator

Region 9 • \$100,000 • Venture Central • Project Director: Hope Lawrence

PROJECT BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

This project served the Food and Beverage Manufacturing industry, a key targeted sector in Region 9's Growth and Diversification Plan, focusing on value-added food production and non-alcoholic beverages. The Accelerator planning project aimed to support existing small to medium-sized food businesses — enhancing their ability to scale up, create higher-paying jobs, and increase out-of-state revenue — by evaluating the need for and design of an accelerator for Region 9. Unlike incubators, which support early-stage startups, an accelerator targets established companies seeking resources and expertise to scale.

PROJECT IMPACT & APPROACH

The project fostered collaboration among local businesses, existing resource providers, higher education, local governments, and regional agriculture to design a program that maximizes economic impact and sustainable growth in food and beverage manufacturing. The goal was for Region 9 business owners to access the resources, expertise, and networks needed to start, grow, and stay in Region 9 — ultimately creating higher-paying jobs and traded-sector tax revenue. Key activities centered on stakeholder engagement: interviews and focus groups with food businesses, industry experts, and economic development officials across participating counties, alongside engagement of retail partners, distributors, existing service providers, and successful food entrepreneurs to serve as a mentor and connection network for future accelerator companies.

KEY OUTCOMES & PERFORMANCE METRICS

The grant produced four final deliverables: a report on engagement and needs assessment findings from industry stakeholders; a business plan recommendation for the accelerator including selection criteria, program structure, and the reasoning behind each choice relative to Region 9 findings; a budget and funding strategy for implementation; and letters of support from key partners and stakeholders. As a planning grant, the project reported deliverables rather than quantified business or employment outcomes.

SUSTAINABILITY & FUTURE OUTLOOK

Potential funders for the implementation project have been identified, and the PATH Foundation has awarded Venture Central a \$25,000 grant to support initial development of a regional business resource hub serving food and beverage entrepreneurs across Culpeper, Fauquier, and Rappahannock counties. That early investment allows core infrastructure to begin taking shape while Venture Central continues work on a GO Virginia implementation grant application.

LESSONS LEARNED & RECOMMENDATIONS

The planning grant validated both the need for and the design of a specialized accelerator serving growth-stage food and beverage manufacturers in Region 9. Stakeholder interviews, focus groups, and surveys confirmed a significant gap in support services for businesses in the “messy middle” — those generating revenue but unable to scale beyond \$1 million without targeted assistance. Key successes included the depth of stakeholder engagement, strong alignment with BEACON, Carver, the SBDC, and the Virginia Specialty Food Association, and a research-grounded program model. The most important lesson: food businesses face industry-specific scaling challenges — regulatory compliance, co-packer negotiations, distribution relationships — that general business programs cannot adequately address. A second lesson is that coordination with existing regional resources, rather than duplication, is essential for buy-in and long-term sustainability.

BioBridge Talent Pathways Planning

Region 9 • \$244,400 • CvilleBioHub • Project Director: Nikki Hastings • Talent Pathways Initiative (TPI) Planning Grant

PROJECT BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

The Talent Pathways Initiative (TPI) planning grant focused on strengthening the Biotechnology & Biomedical sector in GO Virginia Region 9, an emerging market where biotechnology has seen a 20% increase in job growth and a 30% rise in funding since 2020. The 2023 Region 9 Growth and Diversification Plan highlighted biotechnology as one of the region's top three highest-paying sectors and emphasized investing in talent development to sustain growth within high-impact industries, including biotech. BioBridge TPI builds directly on that priority.

PROJECT IMPACT & APPROACH

CvilleBioHub engaged TEconomy Partners to conduct quantitative and qualitative analysis of the regional bioscience sector, guided by an Advisory Coalition that met twice in person and once virtually to respond to findings. On December 11, CvilleBioHub hosted the project's culminating celebration at Piedmont Virginia Community College, convening the coalition with more than 40 attendees from education, workforce, and industry to close out the research phase and set the stage for implementation-oriented conversations in 2026. The project also reinforces concurrent Region 9 investments — VITAL and the Innovation Corridor — and its sector-specific approach can be replicated across other target sectors.

KEY OUTCOMES & PERFORMANCE METRICS

The project delivered a published bioscience talent pathways report and a workforce strategy presentation to the GO Virginia Region 9 Council (January 2026), producing updated, accessible data on the sector's economic impact and growth trajectory in Central Virginia. TEconomy identified high-demand occupations and mapped associated training requirements, providing an actionable foundation for implementation, which is now in development. As a research-phase planning grant, the project reported deliverables rather than quantified employment outcomes.

SUSTAINABILITY & FUTURE OUTLOOK

The grant supported a planning phase producing a data-informed implementation roadmap and stronger cross-sector alignment among industry and education partners; it was not designed to generate income. CvilleBioHub intends to pursue implementation funding to advance the recommendations, and stakeholders across K–12, higher education, and industry have expressed continued interest in the next phase. Partners are actively exploring additional public and private funding sources to sustain the work.

LESSONS LEARNED & RECOMMENDATIONS

The project demonstrated the value of a deep, sector-specific approach: unlike prior multi-sector talent initiatives, the focused analysis revealed workforce needs, priority roles, training pathways, and coordination strategies unique to bioscience. Engaging a consultant concurrently supporting other sector strategies (through the Innovation Corridor planning grant) enabled cross-sector insight while preserving sector depth. The process also surfaced structural challenges — fragmentation across partners, limited capacity for sustained coordination, and barriers to smaller firms — and the region currently lacks infrastructure to translate shared insights into coordinated, system-level action.