



Virginia

Employer Alignment in Action

Through the state's workforce strategy, education and training corresponds with employers' talent needs, bolstering sustained economic growth.

Virginia stands out for its strategic workforce development efforts, aligning education and training with employer needs to drive economic growth. With support from business leaders and policymakers, the Virginia Economic Development Partnership has set an ambitious goal to establish Virginia as America's "Top State for Talent."¹ This objective is supported by a suite of workforce initiatives, including the Virginia Office of Education Economics,² the Tech Talent Investment Program,³ the Virginia Talent Accelerator Program,⁴ and the FastForward program. These initiatives collectively foster a data-driven, evidence-based workforce strategy that enhances employer alignment.

- ➔ Workforce development is central to Virginia's economic strategy, championed at the highest levels of state leadership.



PHOTO / VIRGINIA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP

Virginia's approach

Virginia's workforce strategy comprises a set of approaches that are integral to aligning education and training with employers' talent needs and ensuring sustained economic growth:

- **Integrated governance.** Aligning decision-making authority across agencies responsible for education, workforce, and economic development, enabling more coherent and aligned strategy and implementation across the state's efforts.
- **Data-driven decision-making.** Using comprehensive labor market and education data to guide policy, funding, and program development to ensure investments in postsecondary education are targeted to high-demand skills, jobs, and careers.
- **Integrated talent planning.** Coordinating education, workforce, and economic development strategies to work toward shared goals. Virginia's unified approach enables the state to anticipate employer needs and adapt talent pipelines accordingly.
- **Performance-based funding that recognizes program cost differences.** Linking funding to outcomes while accounting for the true costs of delivering programs in high-demand, high-cost fields, reducing the disincentives institutions face when enrolling more students in high-cost programs.
- **Targeted funding for short-term programs.** Supporting affordable, accelerated training options that help workers quickly gain industry-recognized credentials for in-demand jobs.

Alignment with goals of state leadership and key partners

Workforce development is central to Virginia's economic strategy, championed at the highest levels of state leadership. The Virginia Talent Accelerator Program was developed by VEDP in collaboration with the Virginia Community College System and other higher education partners. It launched in 2019 under Gov. Ralph Northam's administration with broad bipartisan support.

In 2021, the Virginia Office of Education Economics was established, a first-of-its-kind office that informs policy and practice at the intersection of education and workforce development. It is housed within the Virginia Economic Development Partnership.

In 2023, under Gov. Glenn Youngkin's leadership, Virginia established via bipartisan legislation a new agency under the Secretary of Labor called the Department of Workforce Development and Advancement, also known as Virginia Works.⁶ This new agency consolidated into a single department about 1,500 workforce development programs previously spread across 13 agencies and six secretaries. Its goal: streamlining and enhancing workforce development in Virginia, and integrating labor market information, apprenticeship, and public workforce system data.

Strategy

Virginia employs a comprehensive, multi-layered strategy to ensure workforce alignment with employer needs. This approach is rooted in four key pillars: data-driven decision-making, targeted investments, customized employer training, and accessible upskilling programs:

- **Data-driven decision-making.** A core element of Virginia's workforce strategy is the use of real-time labor market intelligence to guide training investments. The Virginia Office of Education Economics functions as the state's workforce research hub, aggregating and analyzing employment trends, tracking educational outcomes, and identifying high-demand industries. Virginia Works also plays a significant role in the state's data infrastructure by consolidating various data functions, including labor market information.
- **Targeted investments in high-demand sectors.** Recognizing the importance of a skilled technology workforce, Virginia has made significant financial commitments to expand the state's tech talent pipeline. The Virginia Tech Talent Investment Program, or TTIP, is a \$1.1 billion initiative designed to double the number of computer science graduates at the bachelor's and master's degree levels. This aligns with efforts to reduce barriers to high-wage, high-demand careers, particularly through investments in employer-aligned programs. TTIP provides direct financial incentives to universities that expand enrollment in these critical programs, ensuring that students have access to affordable, career-relevant education.
- **Customized training for businesses.** A key strength of Virginia's workforce strategy is its commitment to tailored training for employers. The Virginia Talent Accelerator Program provides customized recruitment and workforce training solutions for companies expanding or relocating to the state. It is ranked the second-best state workforce training program in the U.S. by *Area Development*⁷ and the best customized training program in the U.S. by *Business Facilities*.⁸

- **Work-based learning and career coaching.** Virginia's FastForward program, which provides short-term, affordable training in high-demand fields, reflects these priorities. The program's funding model reduces financial barriers by covering a portion of tuition upon credential attainment. Moreover, Virginia has expanded work-based learning initiatives through employer partnerships facilitated by the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, and regional workforce boards.

Implementation and oversight

Virginia's workforce initiatives are implemented through coordinated efforts among multiple state agencies and educational institutions:

- The **Virginia Office of Education Economics** ensures policy decisions are informed by accurate labor market insights.
- The **Virginia Tech Talent Investment Program**, funded by a combination of state appropriations, philanthropic contributions, and corporate partnerships, funds institutions based on achievement of agreed-upon computer science degree production targets.
- The **Virginia Economic Development Partnership's** administration of the Virginia Talent Accelerator Program further embeds skills-first workforce training into the state's economic development strategy.
- The **Virginia Community College System's** management of FastForward supports affordability and upskilling, reducing financial barriers to high-demand careers.
- **Virginia Works** consolidates and oversees various workforce-related data, labor market information, apprenticeship programs, and public workforce system data.

- A key strength of Virginia's workforce strategy is its commitment to tailored training for employers. The Virginia Talent Accelerator Program provides customized recruitment and workforce training solutions for companies expanding or relocating to the state.



PHOTO / VIRGINIA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP

I Measuring success

The Virginia Office of Education Economics produces an annual report that analyzes and tracks the outcomes of the Tech Talent Investment Program.⁹ Virginia's workforce programs have delivered measurable results:

- The Office has rolled out five public-facing data dashboards, built a comprehensive data model and cloud-based infrastructure, published six in-depth studies, and established a list of high-demand occupations.
- Virginia's Tech Talent Investment Program has exceeded expectations, graduating more than 7,400 students in its first three years — 148 percent of its planned net new degree production. The program set a goal of adding 5,000 degrees in targeted fields during its first three years but delivered 2,400 more than that. Over two decades, it aims to produce a total of 32,000 additional degrees.
- The Virginia Talent Accelerator Program has helped secure more than 17,000 new jobs.¹⁰
- FastForward has supported 52,900 individuals in earning credentials.¹¹
- Virginia Works has streamlined services, improved coordination, and unified governance across workforce, apprenticeship, labor market information, and public workforce systems.

TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Virginia has developed several tools and resources to support its efforts:

- [The Virginia Office of Education Economics'](#) data tools reflect better education-to-employment insights.
- [The Virginia Talent Accelerator Program's](#) employer-customized training model integrates businesses into highly customized workforce solutions.
- [FastForward's](#) outcome-based funding showcases an approach to affordability and upskilling.

Endnotes

- 1 Virginia: A Top State for Business. (Richmond, VA: Virginia Economic Development Partnership). <https://www.vedp.org/why-virginia>.
- 2 The Virginia Office of Education Economics. (Richmond, VA: Virginia Office of Education Economics, 2021). <https://voee.org>.
- 3 "Virginia's Tech Talent Investment Program." (Richmond, VA: Virginia Economic Development Partnership, 2019). <https://www.vedp.org/sites/default/files/vedp-media/key-industries/TTIP%20Brochure/Tech%20Talent%20Investment%20Program%20%28TTIP%29%20Brochure.pdf>.
- 4 Recruitment & Training Incentives: Virginia Talent Accelerator Program. (Richmond, VA: Virginia Economic Development Partnership, 2019). <https://www.vedp.org/incentive/virginia-talent-accelerator-program>.
- 5 FastForward. (Richmond, VA: Virginia's Community Colleges, 2016). <https://fastforwardva.org/>.
- 6 Virginia Works. (Richmond, VA: Department of Workforce Development and Advancement, 2023)., <https://www.virginiaworks.gov/>.
- 7 "Top States for Doing Business in 2024: A Continued Legacy of Excellence," (Jericho, NY: Area Development Magazine, 2024). <https://www.areadevelopment.com/top-states-for-doing-business/q3-2024/top-states-for-doing-business-in-2024-a-continued-legacy-of-excellence.shtml>.
- 8 "2025 State Rankings: Texas Clinches Best Business Climate, Virginia Leads In Customized Training," (Red Bank, NJ: Business Facilities, June 24, 2025). <https://businessfacilities.com/texas-virginia-earn-top-spots-in-2025-state-rankings>.
- 9 "Tech Talent Investment Program: January 2025," (Richmond, VA: Virginia Office of Education Economics, 2025). https://www.voee.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/FINAL-TTIP-Report-FY25_v3.pdf.
- 10 Mike Grundmann, "LEGO's Virginia AdvAntage." (Stamford, CT, and Nashville, TN: Chief Executive, August 2, 2024). <https://chiefexecutive.net/legos-virginia-advantage/>.
- 11 FastForward 2023 Year in Review: Celebrating Another Year Helping Students Earn Credentials for Careers That Matter. (Richmond, VA: Virginia's Community Colleges, January 4, 2024). <https://fastforwardva.org/fastforward-2023-year-in-review-celebrating-another-year-helping-students-earn-credentials-for-careers-that-matter/>.

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY

[Virginia Economic Development Partnership](#)