

# GROWTH4VA's 4-Point Plan to Transform Virginia into America's Talent-to-Opportunity Leader



**GROWTH4VA**  
Virginia Business Higher Education Council

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Business and higher education leaders across Virginia, joined by thousands of engaged citizens who support GROWTH4VA, are working together to make Virginia **the talent-to-opportunity leader for the Nation**.

By combining investments and innovations in our top-ranked higher education system with paid internships for all students and affordable pathways from learning to earning in Virginia, we can be the Nation's best at attracting, developing, and retaining talent. This will provide the well-prepared workforce needed to drive economic growth, make Virginia a winner in the competition for new investment, and create excellent job and career opportunities for all Virginians.

## The Time is Now

With our top-ranked higher education system and active business-education collaboration as competitive advantages, Virginia has an opportunity to lead, not only in attracting and developing talent, but in providing a diverse array of **AFFORDABLE TALENT PATHWAYS** through which students of varied backgrounds and interests can move efficiently and equitably from learning to earning, gaining work experience and employer connections along the way through paid internships and other work-based learning opportunities. These pathways will enable young Virginians to overcome historic obstacles to opportunity, stay in our state after graduation, and launch resilient and rewarding careers in a growing and diversifying Virginia economy.

Becoming best-in-class at paid internships and affordable talent pathways will put Virginia on the leading edge of one of the most significant educational and economic innovations in decades, making the Commonwealth a magnet for talented young people and business investment from around the country, and providing the skilled workforce needed to fuel business growth and job creation in all regions of the state. The impact on personal opportunity and upward mobility for Virginians, including many first-generation, minority, and economically disadvantaged young people and unemployed or under-employed adults, will be truly transformational.

## 4 Major Strategies

The “4” in GROWTH4VA refers to 4 strategically integrated sets of investments and innovations that will achieve this vision of talent-to-opportunity leadership. Developed collaboratively by college presidents/chancellors and business leaders under the auspices of the Virginia Business Higher Education Council, the 4 major strategies also align with and build on related talent initiatives in Virginia, including SCHEV’s “Pathways to Opportunity” strategic plan, the Virginia Talent and Opportunity Partnership initiative to expand paid internship opportunities, the education and workforce aspects of the Virginia Chamber’s “Blueprint Virginia” planning process, VEDP’s emphasis on talent as a competitive differentiator in economic development, GO Virginia’s data-driven focus on workforce development linked to regional growth opportunities, and recent bipartisan investments in talent development and affordable access by the General Assembly and Governor.

# 1. TALENT

## **Make Virginia the top state for talent by creating a diverse array of efficient and equitable pathways from learning to earning.**

### **Priority Goals:**

- ✓ Make a significant paid internship or other work-based applied learning experience available and accessible for every Virginia student who wants one.
- ✓ Promote the development of a diverse array of talent pathways defined by four key elements:
  - Collaboration by educational (secondary and postsecondary) and business/industry organizations to design and implement career-focused pathways.
  - Curriculum alignment to more efficiently produce graduates who possess the education and skills employers need.
  - Paid internships and other applied learning experiences that supply students with workplace skills and employment connections.
  - A Virginia-based job opportunity after graduation/completion.
- ✓ Increase the size and diversity of the talent pool in Virginia by providing affordable pathways that enable more low-income, first-generation, and under-represented students to access Virginia-based educational and job opportunities.
- ✓ Attract, develop, and retain top talent in Virginia, reversing the current net outmigration trend and its negative impact on Virginia families, communities, and enterprises.
- ✓ Support Virginia's business growth and economic diversification by addressing statewide and regional workforce needs.
- ✓ Institute rigorous measurement of progress in meeting all talent-related goals with an emphasis on employment and earnings as key outcomes.
- ✓ Assure Virginia's sustained standing as the best state for business, and achieve "best educated state" status (70% postsecondary degree/credential attainment) by 2030 in accordance with SCHEV's strategic goal and the 2011 Top Jobs Act.

### **Key Initiatives:**

- Rapidly scale up the Virginia Talent and Opportunity Partnership (VTOP) to increase paid internship capacity and facilitate student-employer connections across the Commonwealth, establishing a clear baseline, scale-up goals, and metrics for measuring progress.
  - Incentivize and support creation of on-campus internship centers to develop internship/pathway relationships with employers and provide students with adequately resourced internship placement and preparatory services on each campus.
  - Create or adapt a primary online portal to serve as a user-friendly platform for students and employers to connect for paid internships, to recognize employers and higher education institutions for outstanding performance in scaling up internships, and to collect, track, and provide access to relevant data on internships and talent pathways.
  - Provide need-based financial aid to offset housing, transportation, technology, and other costs incurred by participating student interns.
  - Increase the availability of for-credit internships and other transcript-worthy work-based learning experiences in undergraduate programs and curricula without extending the time to degree completion.
  - Design and implement robust marketing to employers and students, building out the VTOP regional collaboratives with business, higher education, and other key organizations to promote and facilitate internship/pathway opportunities.
  - Track and report progress on, among other things, the number of paid internships (credit and non-credit) for students attending Virginia's higher education institutions, the impact on net migration to and from the Commonwealth, graduate success landing first jobs in Virginia in their field of study, and the impact on short- and long-term earnings by graduates.
- Establish a statewide, public-private talent pathways infrastructure and grant program to incentivize collaborative development and implementation of educator- and employer-validated pathways that align with Virginia's strategic economic and workforce goals, including meeting the workforce needs of the industry clusters with the highest growth potential in each region.

- ▶ Provide funding for coordinated pathway development, placement, and workforce-related initiatives across higher education institutions, including assistance in defraying up-front costs associated with collaborative (by educators and employers) development of industry-specific curriculum modules that can be used repeatably across two- and four-year higher education institutions throughout the Commonwealth.
- ▶ Build out a comprehensive employment data gathering, analysis, and dissemination capability through the new Virginia Office of Education Economics.
- ▶ Support regional development of talent pathways and related workforce initiatives through the GO Virginia program, with a data-driven emphasis on current workforce shortages, skills gaps, and high-growth industry clusters targeted for strategic development.
- ▶ Develop a state and national public-private marketing initiative that emphasizes Virginia's top rankings for higher education and initiatives to provide paid internships and talent pathway opportunities for all students, with the goals of (a) encouraging young Virginians to stay in the Commonwealth for post-secondary education, (b) encouraging non-Virginians to come to the Commonwealth for post-secondary degree and credential programs, and (c) encouraging Virginia and non-Virginia resident students to stay in Virginia for full-time employment after graduation/completion.
- ▶ As part of a comprehensive talent pathways framework, align, replicate, and/or expand current pathway-related initiatives, including the Tech Talent Investment Program, Commonwealth Cyber Initiative, Fast Forward/New Economy Workforce Credential Grants, G3 Program, Virginia Talent Accelerator Program, GO-TEC, Ignite Internships Program, Virginia Values Veterans (V3) Program, and Institutional Partnership Performance Agreement (IPPA) pilot projects.
- ▶ Make targeted performance-based investments modeled on the Tech Talent Investment Fund to expand degree/ certificate programs in additional high-demand fields, including health care, engineering, data science, teaching, and other disciplines where severe workforce shortages exist.
- ▶ Encourage formation of diverse partnerships between individual colleges and business organizations to advance state economic and workforce development priorities using the Six-Year Plan and Institutional Partnership Performance Agreement (IPPA) process.
- ▶ Expand the Online Virginia Network and other collaborative remote learning platforms to provide innovative on-ramps for veterans and other adults seeking to complete degrees and/or gain new or enhanced work skills.
- ▶ Support both credit-bearing and non-credit credential programs through the Virginia Community College System, with financial incentives aligned to foster both types of programs and to encourage development of repeatable, employer-validated curricula for use across multiple campuses.

## 2. AFFORDABILITY

**Ensure that all Virginians have affordable access to excellent educational and job opportunities located in the Commonwealth.**

### Priority Goals:

- ✓ Prepare Virginians to participate and lead in the new economy by ensuring that every Virginia resident is able to achieve the highest level of education that suits his or her aspirations and abilities, whether that is a skilled trade certificate, an associate's or bachelor's degree, or a graduate or professional degree.
- ✓ Provide low- and middle-income Virginia resident students with affordable access to the full range of degree/certificate programs offered in our top-ranked higher education system, and reduce the average student loan debt of graduates.
- ✓ Promote inclusive excellence throughout Virginia's higher education system by closing gaps to access and completion, including gaps associated with race/ethnicity, gender, region, income, disability, and language proficiency.

- ✓ Build on recent higher education investments by the General Assembly and Governor to reverse the two-decade-old cost shift to tuition-paying families by addressing the chronic under-funding of Virginia’s higher education system: Ranked 31st nationally in state support for higher education, Virginia in FY 2022 provided only \$8,283 in average state support per Virginia resident student. In contrast, North Carolina and Tennessee each provided well over \$12,000 per student; Maryland spent nearly \$10,000 per student; and the national average was \$10,237 per student—24% more than in Virginia.
- ✓ Enhance affordable access for veterans and other adults to degree completion and up-skilling/re-skilling programs aligned with workforce needs.
- ✓ Remedy the persistent digital divide by ensuring that all Virginia residents have access to key technology (broadband and devices) and proficiency with online instructional programs and educational resources.

## Key Initiatives:

- Significantly increase state funding of student financial assistance, including financial aid to Pell-eligible students and others with demonstrated need attending public higher education institutions, tuition assistance (TAG) grants for students at nonprofit independent colleges and universities, and workforce credential grants through the Virginia Community College System.
- Relieve tuition pressures on Virginia resident students and their parents by raising state support of higher education to the level prescribed in the 2011 Top Jobs Act (67% of total educational costs rather than the current 54%).
  - Provide tuition moderation incentive base funding that public higher education institutions can access through voluntary tuition moderation actions by their governing boards.
  - Enable multi-year tuition moderation commitments via institution-specific agreements backed by a state funding set-aside to ensure the promised level of state support.
  - Provide funding to offset the impact of inflation and unfunded mandates (state and federal).
- Expand paid and for-credit internship opportunities statewide by providing grants and/or tax credits to participating employers, need-based aid to offset costs incurred by participating students, and adequately resourced internship placement and preparatory services on campuses.
- Improve student health, success, and completion without increasing student fees by having the Commonwealth directly support health/mental health services, mentoring, and academic support services for students attending public higher education institutions.
- Provide state support for educational benefits for veterans, including covering the institutional impact of scholarships for disabled veterans and their dependents.
- Provide increased state support for access and completion at historically black colleges and universities (HBCU’s), community colleges, and other institutions that enroll high percentages of low-income, first-generation, and under-represented students.
- Expand alternative avenues for affordable degree/certificate attainment, including dual enrollment, advanced placement, community college transfers, online programs, and expedited completion.
  - Support initiatives to enable students to graduate from high school with an industry-recognized credential or associate’s degree by expanding access to dual enrollment opportunities and career and technical education.
- Expand the FastForward program to accelerate and scale up public-private collaborations on adult retraining and career restart initiatives to meet industry workforce needs.
- Encourage and reward institutional performance that bends the cost curve, including: greater collaboration by colleges, universities, and community colleges to reduce duplication through administrative and academic resource-sharing, designating centers of excellence, and developing model curricula; broad-based collaboration by higher education institutions and businesses; development of public-private partnerships; upgrading systems using new technology; expanding use of open education resources (OER); and streamlining coursework to move students more efficiently through their studies into internships and full-time jobs.
- Use federal and state resources to support statewide broadband deployment and major technology and facility upgrades at public higher education institutions.

# 3. INNOVATION

## Enhance entrepreneurship, resilience, and the quality of life throughout Virginia through advanced research and problem-solving innovation.

### Priority Goals:

- ✓ Significantly increase federally and privately sponsored university research.
- ✓ Strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystem to boost startups and to facilitate taking new processes and products to market.
- ✓ Make higher education institutions hubs of resilience that lead efforts to improve the readiness and resilience of our communities, commonwealth, and country in the face of mounting threats to health, safety, security, infrastructure, and supply chains for everything from IT and energy to food and medicine.
- ✓ Make higher education institutions the focal point for improving Virginians' health, heeding lessons from the pandemic regarding the institutions' crucial roles in (a) meeting public health needs, (b) reducing disparities in health care access, (c) training medical science and public health professionals, and (d) innovating in crucial areas ranging from life-saving medical procedures and wellness strategies to rural health care delivery and telemedicine.
- ✓ Lead by example in education reform and foster a national conversation on how colleges can best serve the public interest in a time of division and rapid change, act as engines of prosperity for individuals and society, deliver inclusive excellence, affordable access, and pathways to rewarding careers, empower higher education consumers to make sound choices, and measure and reward performance based on beneficial outcomes.

### Key Initiatives:

- Leverage state investments in university research to promote industry-specific collaborations, especially in growth sectors targeted for strategic development (e.g., Commonwealth Cyber Initiative).
- Provide operating and/or capital support for major research-related projects that promise significant positive impacts on regional economic growth and development.
- Prioritize the development of research collaborations and talent pathways in rapidly innovating, high-impact fields that are crucial to readiness and resilience, such as life sciences, public health, data analytics, and artificial intelligence.
- Support Virginia higher education institutions in transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary research initiatives designed to address the "grand challenges" of the 21st Century and to solve pressing national and global problems.
- Encourage and support colleges, universities, and community colleges in each region in playing leadership roles in developing the regional entrepreneurial ecosystem, including providing access to incubators, accelerators, and other resources needed by new businesses, and in supporting knowledge-based economic development through GO Virginia and other public-private partnerships.
- Support the current work by SCHEV and ensuing efforts to develop a new funding model for the Virginia higher education system in which innovation is incentivized, performance is measured and rewarded, and institutions are granted optimal managerial flexibility in exchange for greater outcomes-focused accountability (including internships and post-graduation employment and earnings outcomes).
- Establish and brand Virginia as a primary incubator/accelerator for innovation in American higher education, convening reform-focused thought leaders from around the country to discuss new pedagogical, technological, and logistical approaches, and showcasing Virginia college presidents/chancellors' leadership on internships, talent pathways, and other innovations at the intersection of educational and economic opportunity.

# 4. OPPORTUNITY

**Create opportunities for Virginians of diverse backgrounds to attain rewarding careers, live fulfilling lives, and improve their communities, commonwealth, and country.**

## Priority Goals:

- ✓ Create a Commonwealth of Opportunity in which Virginia excels not only in developing talent but in creating opportunities for people of diverse backgrounds to have rewarding careers and fulfilling lives in an economically strong and cohesive self-governing community.
- ✓ Empower students and parents as higher education consumers by providing transparency and practical information on educational and career opportunities, cost, and return on investment.
- ✓ Enhance the sustainability and efficacy of liberal arts programs to prepare the next generation of Virginians for lifelong success and contributions as good citizens, leaders, and collaborative problem-solvers who tackle our toughest challenges.

## Key Initiatives:

- Develop a coordinated statewide outreach/marketing program to raise awareness among students and parents in under-represented communities regarding the availability of paid internships and affordable talent pathway options and how to explore and access them.
- Develop user-friendly online tools that provide students and parents with readily accessible information on the cost and return on investment (ROI) of degree/certificate programs and talent pathway options, including the net cost of degree/certificate completion, available financial assistance, expected debt levels, paid internship and work-study opportunities, graduation rate and pace, job placement success, and earnings of graduates.
- Enhance academic advising and career coaching to assist students in considering employment and earnings potential data and ROI when choosing among academic programs, internship opportunities, and other educational and extracurricular options.
- Promote the development of certificate options within bachelor's degree programs that reflect particular competencies (digital, financial, etc.) valued by employers, including, where appropriate, internships and other applied work-based learning experiences.
- Attract and retain diverse, highly qualified faculty at Virginia's public institutions of higher education by offering nationally competitive compensation and rewarding stand-out performance.
- Promote core values essential for democratic renewal, including active citizenship and civic engagement, free expression and respectful discourse, the ability to engage collaboratively with people of diverse backgrounds and perspectives, and information, data, economic, and financial literacy.

## WE NEED YOU!

Throughout the 2023 election season and transition and continuing during the 2024 legislative session, GROWTH4VA will be calling attention to these transformational opportunities and the specific initiatives and investments needed to seize them. We will be inviting legislative candidates and elected officials to embrace these ideas and share their own views. And, we will be enlisting the support of additional community leaders, organizations, and grassroots Virginians who share this vision and want to help make it a reality.

## ABOUT GROWTH4VA

GROWTH4VA is a broad-based bipartisan coalition of business, education, and political leaders and Virginians from all walks of life who believe that higher education is a crucial economic engine for our Commonwealth. Our coalition is founded by the Virginia Business Higher Education Council and supported by all 16 public colleges and universities in Virginia, the Virginia Community College System, and Virginia's non-profit private institutions. We are promoting investment and innovation in the Virginia higher education system, including expansion of paid internships and affordable talent pathways.

## ABOUT THE VIRGINIA BUSINESS HIGHER EDUCATION COUNCIL

The Virginia Business Higher Education Council (VBHEC) was founded in 1994 by Virginia business leaders on the principle that the prosperity of Virginia and the well-being of its citizens is fundamentally tied to access to a strong system of public colleges and universities. A nonprofit, nonpartisan partnership between Virginia's business community and higher education leadership, VBHEC's mission is to enhance the performance of Virginia's public colleges, universities, and community colleges and their funding by state government so they can produce the greatest possible positive impact on Virginia's economy. VBHEC is committed to educating the public about higher education's crucial role in Virginia's economy. It strives to secure the support needed for the Commonwealth's colleges, universities, and community colleges to rank among the Nation's best.

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**CONTACT:**

**Kirk Cox**  
*President*

Virginia Business Higher Education Council  
kirkcox@vbhec.com