

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



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A Campaign of the 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 calling on our incoming Governor and General Assembly to seize this once-in-generations chance to make transformational investments and innovations that will make Virginia the ***talent-to-opportunity leader for the Nation***.

Awarding Virginia repeat honors in 2021 as the best state for business, CNBC stressed the Commonwealth’s “world-class higher education system” and high-performing schools. “Going into the pandemic and coming out of it,” CNBC observed, “Virginia’s greatest strength has been its ability to nurture and retain talent.”

Cementing Virginia’s distinction as the top state for talent and building on that foundation to ***create excellent job and career opportunities for all Virginians*** must be our focus for the future.

Now is the Moment

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. These pathways will enable young and adult Virginians to overcome longstanding barriers to opportunity, gain access to in-demand jobs here in the Commonwealth, and launch resilient and rewarding careers in a growing and diversifying Virginia economy.

Becoming best-in-class at 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 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 accessible pathways from earning to learning.

Priority Goals:

- ✓ 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.
- ✓ Make a significant paid internship or other work-based applied learning experience available and accessible for every Virginia student who wants one.
- ✓ Increase the size and diversity of the talent pool in Virginia by providing and promoting 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.
- ✓ 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:

- Establish a statewide, public-private talent pathways infrastructure to incentivize collaborative development and implementation of educator- and employer-validated pathways that align with Virginia's strategic economic and workforce goals, including criteria and procedures for certifying qualifying pathways and financial support for pathways that receive certification.
- Rapidly expand paid and for-credit internship opportunities statewide by:
 - Providing tax credits to participating employers.
 - Providing need-based aid to offset housing, transportation, technology, and similar costs incurred by participating student interns.
 - Providing adequately resourced internship placement and preparatory services on each campus.



- ▶ 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 repeatedly 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 pathway-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 for Virginia's talent pathways program, including a one-stop online portal through which young and adult students, employers, higher ed institutions, economic development professionals, and other interested parties can readily access consumer information concerning degree/certificate pathway programs and internship/job/career opportunities.
- ▶ 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, Innovative Internship Fund/ Virginia-TOP, Fast Forward/New Economy Workforce Credential Grants, Virginia 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, 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.

2. AFFORDABILITY

Ensure that all Virginians have affordable and equitable 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.
- ✓ Reverse the two-decade-old cost shift to tuition-paying families by addressing the chronic under-funding of Virginia’s higher education system: Ranked 39th nationally in state support for higher education, Virginia in FY 2020 provided only \$6,519 in average state support per Virginia resident student. In contrast, North Carolina and Tennessee each provided well over \$10,000 per student; Maryland spent nearly \$9,000 per student; and the national average was \$8,636 per student—32% more than in Virginia.
- ✓ Accelerate Virginia’s recovery from pandemic-aggravated unemployment and under-employment by enhancing 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 highlighted during the pandemic 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 workforce credential grants through the community college system.
- ▶ Relieve tuition pressures on Virginia resident students and their families 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 50%).
 - 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.
- ▶ Expand paid and for-credit internship opportunities statewide by providing 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 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.
- ▶ Expand the FastForward program to accelerate and scale up public-private collaborations on adult retraining and career restart pathway initiatives.



- ▶ 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 nonrecurring federal funding 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 nation 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 the post-pandemic transformation of higher education nationally, fostering a 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).
- ▶ Prioritize the concerted 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.
- ▶ Encourage colleges, universities, and community colleges in each region to play a leadership role in developing the entrepreneurial ecosystem for the region 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.
- ▶ 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 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 parent 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 affordable talent pathway options and how to explore and access them.
- ▶ Develop a comprehensive talent pathways portal that provides students and parents with readily accessible information on cost and return on investment (ROI), 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.
- ▶ Promote the development of certificate options within bachelor's degree programs that reflect particular competencies (digital, financial, etc.) valued by employers, including, where appropriate, internship 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 economic and financial literacy.

We need you!

Throughout the 2021 election season and transition and leading into the 2022 legislative session, GROWTH4VA will be calling attention to this transformational opportunity and the specific initiatives and investments needed to seize it. We will be inviting statewide and 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.

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, and it strives to secure the support needed for the Commonwealth's colleges, universities, and community colleges to rank among the nation's best.

CONTACT FOR MORE INFORMATION

Kirk Cox

President

Virginia Business Higher Education Council

kirkcox@vbhec.com

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Growth4VA.com



@GROWTH4VA



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