

# ***Virginia Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission***

## **FY2025 Competitive Education Program Round #2**

### **GUIDELINES & REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS**

***Application Due Date:***  
**February 17, 2025**



**Virginia Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission  
FY2025 Competitive Education Program**

**GUIDELINES & REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS**

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## I. GENERAL PROGRAM INFORMATION

### A. Purpose & Background

The Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission (“TRRC” or “Commission”) was established by the Virginia General Assembly in 1999, as a political subdivision of the Commonwealth. The Commission makes investments to revitalize and diversify the economy of the region it supports. Projects selected for funding include initiatives that will measurably advance the Commission’s priorities as a direct result of project success.

The Commission views post-secondary education and training as prerequisites for citizen participation in the highly competitive global economy and as essential for advancing productivity, innovation, and entrepreneurship; knowledge workers are vital to the process of revitalizing the region. The purpose of the Commission’s Competitive Education Program is to fund initiatives - including the creation or expansion of educational programs, equipment, and facilities - that will assist residents of the region in obtaining levels and/or types of education previously not available. The program prioritizes projects that will increase the education and skill levels of the region’s labor pools as a method to attract and retain employers.

The Competitive Education Program Guidelines and Request for Proposals (together, “RFP”) are issued to solicit applications through a competitive process in order to establish grant agreements for education projects in the region. Funding will be considered for projects which result in an increase in the education and skill levels of the region’s labor pools. Refer to *Attachment B - Eligible Counties & Cities for Tobacco Commission Funding*.

Approximately \$500,000 is available for the second round of the FY2025 Competitive Education Program. Applications seeking an award in excess of available funds will be rejected. While there is no formal limit on the amount of available funds that may be requested, a typical average award is approximately \$222,000. **The application deadline is February 17, 2025.** Award decisions are expected to be made at the Commission’s meeting in May 2025. **This round is limited to organizations for “shovel-ready” projects with immediate needs for support. Applications must document that the project must begin implementation within the next 6-12 months. Projects that do not appear to have an immediate need will not be considered until the FY26 funding round.**

### B. Eligibility – Eligible Applicants, Matching Funds, Uses of Funding

#### **Eligible Applicants**

Applications will only be accepted from governmental entities, non-profit organizations, and educational institutions that provide workforce development programs, services, or facilities in the Tobacco Region. Eligible applicants including the following:

- **Educational Institutions** - Public or private non-profit institutions of higher education, and other education or training institutions constituted and located in Virginia, or entities not constituted in Virginia but with significant, enduring investments and service delivery in the Tobacco Region.
- **Non-Profit Organizations** - Incorporated non-profit organizations designated as tax-exempt by the federal Internal Revenue Service, such as 501(c)(3) entities.
- **Governmental Entities** - Governmental entities within the Tobacco Region or their duly constituted political subdivisions. This includes the governing body of any city, county or town (“locality”); governing body of a local or regional industrial or economic development authority; regional authority, and other governmental units.

Guidelines for applications submitted by regional partnerships and for projects benefiting for-profit entities, are in Section III of the Commission’s Funding Policies discussed below.

### **C. Ineligible/Eligible Uses of Funding**

The Commission’s [Funding Policies for Grant Awards: Information for Applicants & Grantees \(Revised June 2020\)](#) (“Funding Policies”) contain information on general ineligible uses of funds, specific type of expenses not eligible for reimbursement, acceptable expense documentation for seeking reimbursement, match documentation requirements, and other important details about the Commission’s grants policies. Among other types of ineligible expenses, Commission funds may not be used for indirect expenses. Consult the Funding Policies for additional detail.

### **D. Matching Funds**

As required by the Code of Virginia, all awards of grant funds require at least dollar-for-dollar (1:1) matching funds spent on direct new project expenses, with no more than 25% of the match requirement from “in-kind” sources.

Expenses already included in the grantee or partner organization's operating budget such as personnel and other operating costs, presented as being reallocated for the project (i.e. existing staff), will only be considered as an in-kind contribution and will count toward the 25% in-kind limit.

Applicants for grant awards must submit details on the nature, source, and timing of match contributions to the project necessary for meeting the 1:1 match requirement. Once secured, matching funds must be committed to the project and available as needed, and must not be conditioned or encumbered in any way that may preclude their use for the project during the grant period. Applicants should provide a commitment letter or equivalent document signed by an authorized representative of the organization providing matching funds to document each source of match.

If the Commission awards a grant to an applicant who has not secured acceptable matching funds at the time of award, the applicant will have up to 12 months from the date of the award to secure matching funds or else the Commission may rescind the award and de-obligate its funds.

## **E. Application and Submission Information**

Proposals must be submitted by midnight on February 17, 2025, through the Commission's online application portal: [https://vtc.smartsimple.com/s\\_Login.jsp](https://vtc.smartsimple.com/s_Login.jsp).

Applicants will select the Competitive Education Program application. In addition to text fields of the application, up to 10 pages of additional project description may be submitted as an attachment.

Applicants must certify they have read this RFP, that they will agree to be bound by the Commission's Funding Policies if an award is made, that the information in their applications is true and correct, and that documentation for any claims and representations made can be made available upon request from Commission staff. The certification must be made by an authorized representative of the applicant organization.

All information expressly required by this RFP and in the online application must be included. Failure to submit all required information may result in delayed consideration until a future request for proposals opportunity is available. *Proposals which are substantially incomplete or lack key information may be declined for review and consideration.*

## **F. Evaluation**

The Commission's Education Committee will evaluate applications submitted in response to this RFP. Staff recommendations to the Commission's Education Committee will be based upon requirements in this RFP and the Evaluation Scoring Criteria provided in Attachment A. Approval of funding is at the sole discretion of the Commission. The Commission reserves its right to cancel this RFP, to not proceed with any or all applications, to condition its award upon additional terms and conditions, or to recommend a loan to an applicant who sought a grant.

## **G. TRRC Staff Contact Information**

TRRC staff are available to assist with applications. For technical assistance with logging in or setting up an account with the Commission's online grants portal, please contact:

- Suzette Patterson, Grants System Manager (*Richmond, VA*)  
(804) 894-9662, [spatterson@revitalizeva.org](mailto:spatterson@revitalizeva.org)

To obtain feedback prior to submitting a full application, eligible organizations are strongly encouraged to complete the pre-application form available on the Commission's website. The pre-application is an optional, non-binding process that is used for providing informal feedback. Contact TRRC's grants staff for assistance with project design or to discuss a pre-application:

- Emily Van Pelt, Southern Regional Grants Specialist (*Rocky Mount, VA*)  
(540) 483-0179 ext. 2139, [evanpelt@revitalizeva.org](mailto:evanpelt@revitalizeva.org)
- Sara Williams, Southwest Regional Director (*Abingdon, VA*)  
(276) 619-4325, [swilliams@revitalizeva.org](mailto:swilliams@revitalizeva.org)
- Vicki Humphreys, Grants Program Director (*Richmond, VA*)  
(804) 894-9658, [vhumphreys@revitalizeva.org](mailto:vhumphreys@revitalizeva.org)

## **II. PROGRAM DETAILS**

Objectives for this program are to enhance workforce readiness through support for proven and/or innovative programs and to focus on gaps between education supply and employer demand. Applications presented in response to this RFP must accomplish one or more of the following:

- Develop or expand regional programs to increase educational achievement as reflected by degree or credential completion in GED attainment, work-readiness certification, or post-secondary higher education;
- Initiate or expand training programs and facilities that result in industry-led national certifications for high demand careers, as defined in partnership with regional businesses and industries, including STEM-H;
- Support existing private sector companies through industry-led workforce training or retraining of current and prospective workers for targeted high-demand employment opportunities, including work-based opportunities such as registered apprenticeships and on-the-job training programs; or
- Assist communities and institutions in development of new employment training opportunities including physical improvements, construction, or equipping of education facilities for development of distance learning centers and/or on-site education programs that were previously unavailable to residents of the region.

The Commission at its discretion may entertain other types of projects, provided they meet all other requirements of this RFP. Applicants who wish to bring a project outside of the scope of this RFP must contact and receive the concurrence of TRRC's Grants Program Director in advance.

### **A. Investment Strategies**

Applicants will use the Competitive Education Program application and will select from the following investment strategies:

- Advanced Manufacturing Workforce Training
- Post-Secondary Programs with a focus in STEM-H
- Workforce Training Programs
- High School Equivalency Programs

## **Priorities**

Priority consideration will be given to proposals that:

- Are focused on Advance STEM-H and/ or Advanced Manufacturing workforce training.
- Provide training in conjunction with a private company's commitment to create new jobs and/or fill existing job openings where there are direct articulated employment linkages between program graduates and employers.
- Support the development or expansion of high demand workforce training programs that offer non-traditionally timed instruction.

*Student financial aid is not a priority of the Competitive Education Program and will not receive a positive Staff recommendation. Financial assistance for students is funded through the Commission's Workforce Financial Aid Program.*

## **III. REQUIRED INFORMATION**

*This section provides an overview of the content required for the online application.*

### **A. Project Description Section**

- 1. Project Summary:** Provide a clear and concise summary of the proposed project. This should convey your project concept(s) assuming no prior knowledge of the project. The project summary should be suitable for distribution to the public and may be published by the Tobacco Commission.
- 2. Existence of, and distance to, similar offerings** - Applicants are required to identify known instances of similar offerings, the distances to other locations where similar programs are offered, and to explain why those programs cannot or do not fully serve the needs of residents of the Commission's service area.
- 3. Pre-Requisite Requirements for Program Admission** – What skills, etc. will candidates for your program need to demonstrate, who is providing that pre-requisite training, and how will your work with those providers to identify candidates for recruitment?
- 4. Required Resources** – These include site, equipment, manpower, operating funds, etc. Be specific and make sure that the resources described align with the proposed budget for both TRRC and matching funds.
- 5. Credentials to be Achieved** – Provide a brief summary. Specific numbers will be requested in the Results and Accountability section.
- 6. Demand Analysis** – Be specific and include names of local employers when possible. Include starting wages and number of positions currently open.
- 7. Private employer reviews** - Applications are required to include at least two written reviews from private sector employers in the applicable service area that address the value proposition of the project. The preference is for letters that identify specific numbers and types of positions currently needed or expected to be filled in the near future. Generic letters of support are not suitable.

## **B. Program Specific Attachments**

All applications submitted to the Competitive Education Program require the following documents. Additional requirements may be necessary, depending on the specific project. These documents are described below:

- 1. Service Area and Project Location Map** – Maps of the project’s service area should be provided for projects where more than one specific area is served.
- 2. Biographical Sketches** – Attach brief bios to summarize qualifications for staff in key leadership roles (max of 1-page in length for each individual).
- 3. Letters of Support** - Applicants are encouraged to provide letters from project partners, beneficiaries and others that demonstrate the commitment of resources to the project or document demand for the project. *Redundant form letters of support are discouraged.*
- 4. Additional Attachments**

The nature of the project may require applicants to submit other documents to adequately inform the Commission and its staff about all pertinent aspects of the project. As these will vary by project type, this list is not exhaustive and applicants should submit any other documents they believe will assist during the review process.

- **Business Plan or Operating Plan** - A Business Plan or Operating Plan that describes the operational requirements for the project and how those requirements will be met should be submitted, if applicable.
- **Feasibility Study** - A feasibility study or similar analysis that demonstrates that the proposed business concept is technically and economically feasible should be submitted, if applicable.
- **Marketing Plan** - A marketing plan to describe the project’s target market and the plan to capture that market must be described in the application, if applicable.
- **Operating Agreements** - Agreements (Memoranda of Understanding or similar documents) between project partners or beneficiaries should be submitted, if applicable. If such agreements are not yet finalized, proposed term sheets will suffice.
- **Sub-Awards** - When the project will result in sub-awarding TRRC funding to other recipients, the details of any sub-award arrangements must be provided, including a draft of any proposed agreements.

## **C. Results and Accountability**

Applicants must clearly articulate how the project relates to the goals of the program. All projects must clearly define outputs that will occur during the project period and directly relate to the use of Commission funds and matching funds. The following are examples of Competitive Education metrics:

- Number of tobacco region residents receiving a nationally recognized workforce credential or degree
- Number of jobs expected to be created or filled
- Quality of jobs expected to be created or filled (e.g., projected wages or salaries, type of work, skills required, etc.)
- Number of private sector employers assisted

- 1. Milestones** – Please list the primary project milestones associated with the proposed project.
- 2. Deliverables** – Please list the primary project outputs.
- 3. Programs and Credentials Worksheet** - Please refer to online application for specific instructions.



## **D. Financial/Budget Attachments**

- 1. Line-Item Detailed Budget** - All requests must include a line-item detailed budget with supporting details on proposed project costs, including how Commission resources and matching funds will be used. A template available in the online application may be used to provide this information. Other line-item detail formats will be accepted provided they contain all pertinent information.
  - **Operating Funds** – Requests for operating costs should specifically show how funding from the Commission and other sources will be used during the start-up period of the request. The proposal should explain why proposed costs by line items are essential for implementing the project as well as details for the basis of the requested amounts. Applicants are encouraged to show declining support from the Commission, with the applicant assuming more responsibility for expenses over the course of the grant (e.g., TRRC at 75% Year 1, 50% Year 2, 25% Year 3).
- 2. Budget Summary Worksheet** – Please submit the worksheet template provided in the online application which summarizes budget and funding source information.
- 3. Operating Budget/Pro Forma & Sustainability** - All requests, whether for capital assets or operational funds, are expected to demonstrate how operation of the new/expanded program or facility are expected to be sustained beyond a start-up period of no more than three years (the maximum time period typically allowed for support from Commission funds). An operating budget or pro forma (with revenues, including tuition, and expenditures) must be provided showing projections for how the program/facilities will be supported over a period of at least five years from grant award.
- 4. Other Attachments**

*Depending upon the proposed use of TRRC funds, the following supplemental information should be provided in addition to the items requested above.*

  - **Cost Estimate from Engineer or Construction Contractor** – Requests for construction expenses must provide a current written cost estimate from a licensed architect, engineer or contractor, as appropriate for the project. In addition, applicants must provide additional supporting documents including preliminary engineering reports, other relevant A&E documents, building plans, etc. with the application.
  - **Detailed Equipment List and Equipment Quotes** – Requests for the purchase of equipment, must provide a detailed equipment list and quotes from product vendors.

## **IV. REQUIREMENTS OF FUNDING**

### **A. Grants and Loans**

Staff will typically recommend that loans be awarded to projects that are expected to generate sufficient revenues to service debt even when the application sought a grant. TRRC loans offer competitive interest rates and will entertain flexible loan terms, such as forbearance periods during construction or startup periods and interest only payments. In addition, the Commission will also entertain applications for a combination of a grant and a loan as part of the same award.

The Virginia Resources Authority (VRA) and the Virginia Small Business Financing Authority administer TRRC loans, and applicants to whom loans are awarded must provide any additional documentation that VRA, VSBFA or TRRC requests.

### **B. Award Information**

It is anticipated that the Commission will approve multiple awards as a result of this RFP. After the Commission makes award decisions, agreements will be issued for the amounts and with any conditions as approved by the Commission.

The Commission will typically use its standard restricted or unrestricted grant agreements for projects to which grants are awarded. All grantees are required to follow the Commission's Funding Policies as a condition of the award. The standard grant agreement and the Funding Policies are available on the Commission's webpage. The Commission reserves the right to update its standard grant agreement and Funding Policies at any time.

### **C. Payment of Grant Funds**

Payment of grant funds will be subject to the terms of the grant agreement and will be disbursed on a reimbursement basis. Expenses incurred prior to the award date are not eligible for reimbursement. The standard reimbursement period is quarterly, unless otherwise agreed to by Commission staff. The grantee is required to provide appropriate documentation of the expenditures and use of required matching funds for the project. The Commission's Funding Policies contain additional information that applicants should review closely.

### **D. Reporting**

Grantees must provide annual reports on the financial and quantitative progress made toward completion of the project's milestones and outputs and provide a narrative discussion of progress. A final report including a narrative on the success of the project, attainment of proposed outputs, and a description of the long-term expectations and achievements for the project is required at the close of the project. The Commission will not process the final payment request until all the grantee has satisfied all reporting requirements.

Additionally, grantees must provide any additional or interim reporting information the Commission may request to ensure the provisions of the grant agreement are properly carried out, administered and enforced.

### **E. Assets**

As a condition of awarding a grant, the Commission will have a claim to all property and assets in which Commission grant funds were invested and the Commission must approve any conveyances of such property and assets. This applies to investments in real property, intellectual property, and equipment purchase greater than \$5,000. The details of these requirements are included in the grant agreement and the Commission's Funding Policies.

## **V. ATTACHMENTS**

- Attachment A – Evaluation Criteria
- Attachment B – Tobacco Region Map of Eligible Localities

**TRRC Competitive Education Program  
Evaluation Criteria**

**Technical Merit (40 points)**

- The significance and strategic fit of the project to the community, demonstrated by assessment of needs or opportunities; evidence of community support; through approach and planning of the proposal, readiness for immediate implementation, qualified and committed leadership (10)
- How effectively the proposed budget leverages the Commission's funds with other appropriate sources of funds (10)
- Sustainability of the program beyond the term of the grant funding (10)
- The ability to clearly demonstrate or evaluate the proposal's effectiveness (10)

**Education Potential (40 points)**

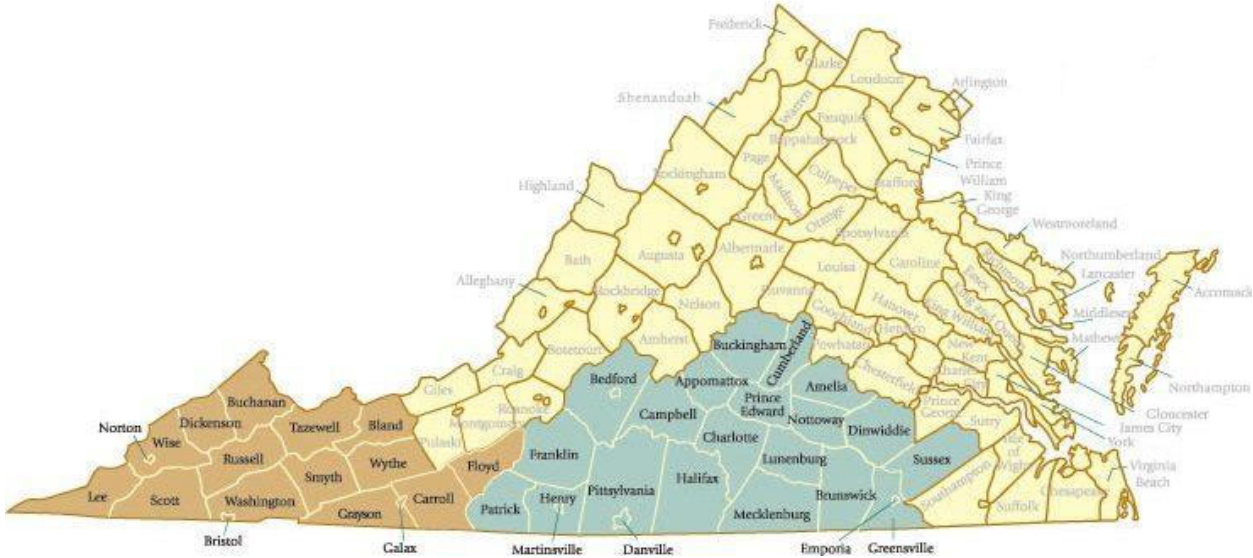
- Number of students/residents receiving a nationally recognized academic/workforce credential (certificate/degree) (10)
- Quality of jobs expected to be created or filled based on projected wages/salaries, type of work, skills required, etc. (10)
- Targets educational and career pathways that support tobacco region employers for which there is documented demand (e.g., existing or projected job openings). (10)
- Provides access to program or facilities not previously available in tobacco region service area (10)

**Significance to Commission's Mission (20 points)**

- Strategic fit with the Commission's Strategic Plan and Competitive Education Program Guidelines (10)
- Regional or multi-organizational cooperation and/or financial collaboration for this project (multiple localities or institutions) (10)

**Counties & Cities Eligible for Tobacco Commission Funding**

The service area for the Virginia Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission includes 40-tobacco-dependent localities in the Southern and Southwest areas of Virginia. Eligible applicants serving these localities are eligible to apply to the Commission’s grant programs for projects that will enhance the economic growth and development of the region.



**SOUTHWEST AREA**

**Counties:**

- |           |                       |
|-----------|-----------------------|
| Bland     | Washington            |
| Buchanan  | Wise                  |
| Carroll   | Wythe                 |
| Dickenson |                       |
| Floyd     |                       |
| Grayson   | <b><u>Cities:</u></b> |
| Lee       | Bristol               |
| Russell   | Galax                 |
| Scott     | Norton                |
| Smyth     |                       |
| Tazewell  |                       |

**SOUTHERN AREA**

**Counties:**

- |             |               |
|-------------|---------------|
| Amelia      | Halifax       |
| Appomattox  | Henry         |
| Bedford     | Lunenburg     |
| Brunswick   | Mecklenburg   |
| Buckingham  | Nottoway      |
| Campbell    | Patrick       |
| Charlotte   | Pittsylvania  |
| Cumberland  | Prince Edward |
| Dinwiddie   | Sussex        |
| Franklin    |               |
| Greensville |               |

**Cities:**

- Danville
- Emporia
- Martinsville