

V-TOP Employer-Engagement Transition Update for V-TOP Collaboratives/Coordinators, VEDP Staff, Partners, and Institutions

9.9.25

The purpose of the [Virginia Talent & Opportunity Partnership \(V-TOP\)](#) (Innovative Internship Fund and Program) remains the same - to expand paid and credit-bearing student internships and other work-based learning opportunities in collaboration with Virginia employers. The V-TOP program will be led jointly by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) and the Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP).

What is driving the change?

- In accordance with budget directives from the General Assembly, specifically outlined in Chapter 725, [Item 113.I](#), and [132.C](#), of the 2025 Acts of Assembly, the employer-focused activities that further the goal of providing all postsecondary students in Virginia with one or more paid internships during their undergraduate course of study are transferred to VEDP.

What has happened so far?

- VEDP and SCHEV have signed an MOU that outlines the partnership between the two organizations. VEDP and SCHEV have been meeting weekly since July.
- VEDP and SCHEV are working on a comprehensive plan for the full transition and responsibilities of each entity, which will be finalized by October 1.
- VEDP meets weekly with the Strada Education Foundation, which is advising on best practices related to employer engagement, metrics, and technology solutions.
- VEDP and SCHEV convened a V-TOP stakeholder group in early August for insight and feedback on the program. The group includes representatives from the Governor's administration, House Appropriations and Senate Finance staff, higher education, industry, and workforce and economic development community.
- The Virginia Office of Education Economics (VOEE) is charged in the budget language with reporting program participation and progress toward statewide goals identified by SCHEV and VEDP. VOEE has reviewed prior SCHEV reports related to data and definitions and convened stakeholders to discuss ideas for employer-, student-, and institution-focused goals and metrics.

What is SCHEV's ongoing role?

V-TOP includes institutional grants and a statewide initiative to enhance the readiness of students, employers, and higher education institutions for internships and other work-based learning opportunities.

What will SCHEV lead?

Institutional Grants

- Award grants to support initiatives that establish or enhance an on-campus internship center or similar one-stop service to assist students and employers with intern engagement and that are expected to produce a demonstrated increase in student participation in paid internship programs and work-based learning opportunities

Sector and Regional Strategies

- Explore strategies in Virginia and elsewhere on successful institutional, regional, statewide, or sector-based internship programs

Support Career Readiness

- Develop internship readiness educational resources, delivery methods, and outreach and awareness activities for students and institutional career development personnel

Data Collection and Reporting

- Gather and report consistent data across institutions regarding current institutional practices, scale, and outcomes
- Support institutions in establishing goals and tracking progress measures aligned with the metrics established by SCHEV and VEDP

Institution-led Regional Partners

In Fall 2025, for each of the nine GO Virginia regions, SCHEV will award a grant to either a public two-year, public four-year, or TAG-eligible private institution to fund its leadership of a regional partnership of institutions of higher education, which will be focused on enhancing career awareness, exploration, and preparation for all students. Beginning November 4, 2025, this new grant program will replace the V-TOP regional collaborative grants, providing a more streamlined and structured approach to involve institutions and students in work-based learning activities. These initiatives will integrate regional resources that align with V-TOP's enhanced work-based learning programs. Supported activities will include project-based opportunities, micro-internships, transformed work-study and on-campus work opportunities to internship-like experiences, and resources to support student and institutional career readiness.

As part of V-TOP's statutory objectives, institution-led partners will promote career readiness modules and resources to students, faculty, and staff. They will also provide resources such as professional development scholarships and mentorship training. These efforts will ensure that students are prepared for

practical, paid experience such as internships and are equipped for their first careers. In addition, institutions will have access to available resources and opportunities to prepare students for future work-based learning experiences.

The roles of the institution-led partners include:

- **Supporting regional career awareness.** Partners will develop and implement strategies to increase student awareness of available career pathways in the region. This approach includes organizing career days, industry summits, and regional expos. By participating in these activities, students will identify their interests, evaluate their strengths, and make informed decisions about their future careers.
- **Enhancing career exploration activities within the region.** Partners will assist institutions in integrating career readiness resources on campus for students, faculty, and staff. This initiative includes promoting readiness modules for students, faculty, and staff, providing professional development scholarships for graduate students, faculty, and staff, and offering mentorship training within their programs. Regional partners will promote engagement by maintaining regular communication, conducting outreach, and coordinating work-based learning (WBL) activities with institutions in the region. These efforts will equip students with the skills and preparation needed to engage effectively with future employers and pursue internships and career opportunities. At the same time, institutions will gain access to tools and resources that strengthen their ability to prepare and deliver high-quality work-based learning experiences for all students in the region.
- **Supporting institutions with career preparation.** Through collaboration with institutions, partners will promote and expand access to resources that align with V-TOP's enhanced work-based learning initiatives. These initiatives include implementing project-based activities, micro-internships, enhanced work-study, and on-campus jobs to provide more internship-like experiences. Such experiences offer students meaningful, practical opportunities that strengthen their career readiness skills, which employers highly value.
- **Guiding employers to appropriate resources for career experience.** Partners will refer employers interested in creating or expanding internship programs to VEDP intermediaries. This guidance will enable employers to access matching grants and support, as well as develop or promote internship opportunities for students.

Additional coordinated institution-led programming includes:

- Defining and implementing a regional vision and strategy aligned with V-TOP's mission and regional workforce needs
- Participating in statewide industry-specific research focused on understanding regional talent pipelines, industry demands, and workforce alignment to help inform institutions of career preparation and engagement

- Coordinating and convening stakeholder groups to help guide the strategy, share best practices, and provide feedback on regional internship and work-based learning initiatives

What is VEDP's role?

Virginia aspires to become America's top state for talent: known for its world-class workforce and thriving economy, reversing net out-migration of recent graduates, and providing excellent career opportunities across all regions. VEDP recognizes that internships and the resulting pathways to full-time employment are key to retaining, attracting, and developing talent in Virginia.

VEDP's objectives include:

- Increasing the number of paid internships available through business engagement and support across Virginia
- Lowering barriers for small- and medium-sized businesses to host interns through technical assistance and financial support
- Strengthening partnerships between higher education and industry
- Providing streamlined access to the matching grant program
- Enhancing employer success through coordinated outreach, training, and support

What will VEDP lead?

Matching Grant Program

- Administer a matching grant program for Virginia employers that hire undergraduate student interns
 - Limited to for-profit businesses and non-profit organizations with physical operations in Virginia and 150 or fewer Virginia-based employees
 - Includes training requirement (under development), reasonable mentoring, and reporting obligations
 - Limited to a maximum of one-half of wages, not to exceed \$7,500 per internship

Regional Engagement

- Promote the value of internships to Virginia companies through a regional approach, collaborating with VEDP division that engage regularly with businesses as well as industry associations, chambers, and economic development, workforce, and higher education partners
- To provide focused support for growing internship opportunities, VEDP will hire regional V-TOP staff whose responsibilities will include:
 - **Business outreach and engagement** in collaboration with VEDP staff and partners. Methods will include informational sessions, presentations at business gatherings, and one-on-one meetings with companies. As use of

the V-TOP program grows, VEDP also intends to hire staff to serve as a state-level concierge service for large corporations that wish to hire interns in multiple regions.

- **Internship program development and grant support** for businesses. VEDP staff will advise businesses on designing and implementing high quality internships and provide relevant tools and training. Staff will also guide businesses through the V-TOP matching grant program, including conducting the training required for the grant, assisting with applications, and submitting requests for reimbursement.
- **Partner engagement and promotion.** Staff will build strong partnerships with higher education, workforce, and industry organizations in the region to actively promote the program through various channels, including events, presentations, and partner collaboration.
- **Data tracking, reporting, and evaluation.** Staff will track outreach, engagement, and internship placements in data systems for easy reporting on key metrics and regional impact.

Outreach and Marketing

- Conduct initial outreach and marketing to increase employer participation in paid internship and other work-based learning programs
- Develop and implement a statewide marketing campaign to encourage, assist, and recognize employers that increase employment of undergraduate student interns
- Will include tailored messaging, paid and earned media, an employer recognition program, and integration into Top State for Talent retention and attraction strategy

Internship Matching Platform

- With input from stakeholders including Strada, SCHEV, and Virginia Works, secure a technology platform to connect Virginia postsecondary students interested in internship opportunities with Virginia companies
- Recognizing that many Virginia institutions, students, and employers already utilize various technology platforms, VEDP is seeking a solution that can provide a comprehensive, standalone product or function as an effective aggregator and integrator of internship opportunities and data from existing platforms across the state
- The platform will be available for use in November.

Data Collection and Reporting

- Measure and report program participation and progress toward identified goals in this plan through the Virginia Office of Education Economics (VOEE)

What will happen with the statewide staffing agency?

- iQuasar will continue to provide staffing services to employers and students until its contract with SCHEV ends on 11/30/2025.
- To ensure a seamless transition, existing employers and students who are currently using the staffing agency will be notified of VEDP's new process prior to the end of iQuasar's contract period.
- Companies interested in the matching grant will no longer be required to use a staffing agency.

What is the process for business to access the matching grants?

- Companies interested in accessing the matching grant will follow the current process for internships lasting through 11/30.
- VEDP is developing its new process which will include:
 - A new training for companies interested in accessing the matching grant
 - A pre-internship application for V-TOP funding to be submitted to VEDP
 - An easy reimbursement process for up to \$7,500 per internship per fiscal year with a maximum of 10 internships per company per fiscal year
- VEDP will be ready to administer the matching grant before the end of iQuasar's contract.

How will changes be communicated to stakeholders?

- A SCHEV-VEDP informational webinar will be held in October to update stakeholders and address questions about the transition.
- A public FAQ page will be available on the V-TOP website.