

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2020, the Virginia Talent Opportunity and Partnership (VTOP) took on the challenge of addressing the shortage of internships in the Commonwealth through the creation of educational tools for students and employers. ChamberRVA and Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) propose a regional collaborative to carry this momentum forward and to advance the Richmond region and Commonwealth of Virginia as premier business locations with strong talent pipelines and equitable education and employment opportunities. The collaborative will address both the employer and student sides of the talent pipeline equation by assessing and prioritizing current work-based learning programming throughout regional educational institutions and businesses. The resulting inventory and concurrent identification of employer needs will inform the development of new paid internship and work-based experiences as well as the establishment of clear delivery channels for large-scale implementation and adoption of internship readiness resources, including the VTOP Toolkit and SCHEV training modules. The collaborative will also develop a standardized program evaluation and make needed adjustments to ensure effectiveness, scalability, and success.

Participating partners will also address region-specific challenges that have impeded successful and diverse internship program growth. While many of the region's Fortune 500 and Fortune 1000 companies offer robust work-based learning programs, 30.9% of full-time hiring in the Richmond region comes from companies with 50 or fewer employees (EMSI Labor Market Data). Smaller employers generally lack the resources needed to engage with students, and many of the opportunities they offer are unpaid, putting them out of the reach of students who have financial need. As a result, there is great unevenness in the depth and breadth of workforce development initiatives among both educational institutions and employers.

The proposed collaborative will build a program in which regional educational institutions inventory existing experiential learning programs, prioritize them by effectiveness and scalability, and apply lessons learned to develop new experiences aimed at more successfully preparing students for the workforce. This partnership will also leverage the vast, collective network of employer relationships within ChamberRVA and regional institutions to distribute resources that prepare employers to serve as co-educators in the goal of preparing students for careers.

In summary, the collaborative's strategies to increase the number of paid internship opportunities and significantly improve talent recruitment include:

- Identifying, evaluating, prioritizing, and disseminating scalable programs surrounding internship readiness.
- Connecting students and employers with a focus on recruiting and placing students in paid internships and other work-based learning opportunities.
- Determining and establishing progress and success measures that allow for accurate assessment and monitoring of progress.