

Virginia Technology Councils' 2022 Policy Agenda

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ADVANCING TECHNOLOGY AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP



Overview

Virginia has made great strides in recent years on issues of importance to the technology industry. That includes integrating computer science education into the K-12 curriculum, significantly boosting annual degrees in computer science and information technology at our institutions of higher education, record levels of investment in broadband deployment, and revitalizing our focus on innovation and entrepreneurship at the Virginia Innovation Partnership Authority.

The Commonwealth is again positioned to continue its leadership in innovation and technology. The incoming administration has great opportunity to build on burgeoning sectors including unmanned systems, autonomous vehicles, electric vehicles, clean energy technologies, advanced manufacturing and modern pharmaceuticals. Strengthening our workforce, recruiting the required investor capital, and improving research commercialization at our universities can all help to accelerate our growth in these areas and return Virginia to a position of leadership in creating and growing successful businesses.

Virginia's technology community recommends Governor-elect Youngkin and the General Assembly embrace the following priorities to solidify our position as the best state in the country to do business and strengthen our position for the best place to start a new business, particularly in technology.

Education & Workforce Development

In order for Virginia's businesses to grow and thrive, they need well-trained and highly skilled employees. In the technology industry, Virginia continues to experience a shortage of trained workers. Technology businesses want to locate in areas with an abundant workforce, and technologists want to locate where there are numerous job opportunities in their field.

We support the following efforts to increase our workforce:

- Strengthen computer science education in K-12 schools across the Commonwealth to ensure that all students have access, regardless of where they live. This should include ensuring training and logistical support to all school divisions in compliance with the Virginia K-12 computer science Standards of Learning.
- Computer science education in K-12 should be aligned with higher education, apprenticeships/internships, and workforce certification opportunities.
- If new charter schools are created, dedicate a portion to technology-based specialties to support education in computer science, cybersecurity, and other high demand fields.
- Maintain opportunities for low-income students to pursue community college degrees at no cost in high demand fields such as computer science and information technology.
- Strengthen apprenticeship programs, work experience internships, and other innovative approaches to education where students can earn income while learning. Dedicate resources to a comprehensive system or clearinghouse for inventorying intern/apprentice/extern and other work-based learning opportunities, and for connecting schools, teachers and students to these opportunities.
- Build on recent progress at Virginia's four-year institutions to increase the number of computer science and information technology degrees produced annually, and work with the State Council for Higher Education in Virginia to empower higher education to keep up with the evolving workforce needs in technology.
- Fully fund the Virginia Talent Accelerator Program at VEDP which will allow the agency to train approximately 5,000 employees per year for new jobs being created locally. The program has helped attract numerous new technology companies to Virginia in recent years.

- Develop foundational education standards for high-growth technology fields, with an emphasis on computer science, engineering, cyber security, robotics, data science and related degree fields, including STEM-pathways degrees that can be integrated into all subjects K-12. It should be noted that high-growth technology fields are defined as technology fields at the cutting edge or disruptive to legacy technology fields of study.
- Align high school high-growth technology field curriculum to that of university taught computer science, engineering, security, robotics, and data science degrees to better prepare students for success in higher education and to have a positive impact in the Virginia workforce.
- Grow the availability of “no or low-cost” high quality in-service teacher training in high-growth technology subjects and incentivize teachers to receive the training. Training should be developed in coordination with representation from state agencies, K-12, community colleges and universities.
- Create visibility for career pathways in high-growth technology fields across the Commonwealth with the goal of increasing career ready talent and the pipeline for all career types in high-growth technology fields.
- Overlay economic development and technology districts with projected educational districts to create powerful growth districts in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The model should be repeatable for tech expansion within the Commonwealth. These districts should align with the STEM Hub network which is already a part of the state’s adopted STEM Plan.
- Define what qualifies as a STEM school and/or a high-growth technology field school so that parents and students have assurance that education at these schools aligns with a rubric and uniform standard.

Innovation and Economic Development

Virginia has made great strides in laying the foundation for long term growth of our technology industry including restructuring our state level programs and creating the Virginia Innovation Partnership Authority. Additionally, significant investments in education and workforce development continue to increase our potential for growth.

We support the following efforts to strengthen our efforts to grow and recruit Virginia-based IT businesses:

- Strengthen funding for the Virginia Innovation Partnership Authority to promote entrepreneurship, capital support for early-stage high-growth companies, and commercialization of Virginia higher education research.
- Provide funding for the Regional Innovation Fund (RIF) to help businesses grow and thrive by building critical ecosystems in all regions of the commonwealth, and provide support in areas where other programs are unable to help. The RIF was initially created through the VIPA legislation and was partially-funded in prior sessions, but it has not yet been capitalized. Expand and diversify key technology sectors including Unmanned Systems, Cybersecurity, Smart Communities, Extended/Virtual/Augmented Reality, Biomedical, Clean Energy Technologies, and Electric Vehicles. The Commonwealth is home to several key existing and emerging technologies and our agencies and resources should be utilized to help these sectors expand and diversify.
- Improve Virginia’s competitive position as a global leader in the data center market by modernizing the existing data center investment incentives. As our communities rely more heavily on work from home and virtual education, data centers make it all possible.
- Support efforts to incentivize venture capital investors to locate in Virginia and to invest in Virginia businesses.
- Re-authorize local governments to create Technology and Innovation districts within their locality to incentivize startups and growing businesses to locate in a particular area and support the growth of their own entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Broadband Access

Universal access to affordable broadband is essential to every Virginian in order to compete in today's global economy, and the COVID-19 pandemic has made high speed internet even more critical.

We support the following for increasing access to high speed internet:

- Preserve recently allocated state and federal funds to broadband deployment.
- Ensure those resources are used efficiently and effectively to reach as many unserved Virginians as possible in sustainable models.
- Reduce unnecessary red tape and barriers that make deployment more difficult.
- Support digital equity programs which compliment the FCC's Affordable Connectivity Program and aim to achieve affordable broadband options for low income households.

IT Procurement

The Commonwealth is home to a vibrant industry of technology companies employing thousands of Virginians. Many of these technology companies offer high-value, innovative solutions increasing access to and improving the efficiency of our state government.

We support:

- Policies to ensure that the Commonwealth's procurement process is open, transparent and promote a culture of creativity and competition.
- Modernizing agency technologies to improve on the delivery of government services to our citizens.
- Streamline IT procurement processes to better meet the needs of the citizens and the agencies of the Commonwealth.
- Keeping burdensome regulations to a minimum, especially as additional costs ultimately get passed back to the Commonwealth in the form of higher priced procurement.