



Spring 2026 Marketing Leverage Program (MLP)

Terms & Conditions

Applicants must attest to these terms and conditions at the time of application. For information on how to apply to this program, please refer to the Spring 2026 Marketing Leverage Program Instructions, Sample Application, and Webinar recording found at > <https://www.vatc.org/grants/leverageprogram>

General Information

Funding available in this grant program: **Approx \$1M**

of proposals to be funded this round: **60**

Application Window: Opens Tuesday, February 10, 2026, and closes Thursday, March 19, 2026, at 5 p.m.

(NO EXTENSIONS)

- **This is an extremely competitive program. Please review all supporting documents before applying.**
- **Due to limited funding, we have updated eligibility in certain programs or limited programs from receiving funding in multiple grant rounds.**
 - **Updated Eligibility:** Officially recognized Destination Marketing Organizations that appear on this list (www.vatc.org/dmolist) may apply for either the Marketing Leverage Program OR the DMO Program. We are working on a mid-year program for DMOs to continue to support DMOs with multiple programs.
 - **Updated Eligibility:** Calendar Year 2026 events that received a VTC Special Events & Festivals Program award in late 2025 may apply for the Marketing Leverage Program for the exact same event. But if awarded in the Marketing Leverage Program for the exact same event, they will forfeit the VTC Special Events & Festivals program award and ONLY be awarded the Marketing Leverage Program award. Applicants may apply to the Marketing Leverage Program for a different event and retain their VTC Special Events & Festivals Program award for the other 2026 event.
 - **Updated Eligibility:** Applicants who receive a 2026 Marketing Leverage Program award are not eligible for the Microbusiness Marketing Leverage Program opening in June 2026.

Two Award Tiers

Applicants may request less than the maximum awards tiers it is recommended to only request an award amount that matches their ability to provide cash match on eligible marketing expenses and only the funds they need for a targeted marketing campaign.

- Applicants can request up to **\$20,000** if they list a minimum of 1:1 Cash Match. The applicant spends up to \$40,000 on eligible marketing expenses and VTC reimburses up to \$20,000 of that \$40,000 in total eligible marketing spending. Proof of payment, proof of advertising and copy of the invoices are required for all expenses, including match.
- Applicants can request from **\$20,001 to \$30,000** if they list a minimum of 2:1 Cash Match. The maximum award is this tier is **\$30,000**. **The applicant spends up to \$90,000 in eligible marketing expenses and VTC reimburses up to \$30,000 of that \$90,000 in total eligible marketing spending.** Proof of payment, proof of advertising and copy of the invoices are required for all expenses.

These funds are not intended to replace your normal marketing budget but are intended to extend your marketing. These funds must be used for new marketing, such as targeting new markets, targeting new demographics, marketing on new channels, and marketing a new campaign. All marketing must drive visitors to destinations in Virginia.

Reimbursement-Based Grant

- Funds are not awarded up-front. Award notifications will be made in early May. Once awarded, your award amount is held in a grant account with VTC, and you may spend down your funds via reimbursement by submitting your invoices, proof of advertising, and proof of payment for review. Once reimbursement is approved, your funds will be paid to you.
- To help you manage cash flow, **VTC allows for two reimbursements during your program award period.** Reimbursement #1 will only be processed if there is an Interim Report with progress toward program outcomes included. Reimbursement #2 will only be processed if the required Final Report with final performance outcomes is included. Final Reports are due **no later than December 31, 2027.**
- Failure to submit reimbursements by the program reporting deadline will result in forfeiture of award and the funds will be released back to VTC's grant pool.

Only online applications entered through our website will be accepted. The application for this program can be found at this link ONLY when the grant officially opens on February 10, 2026, at 9 a.m.: <https://vatc.org/grants/>

Applicant and Partner/Spoke Eligibility

Applicants to the Marketing Leverage Program

- Your tourism-oriented business/organization must be open to the public and operational at the time of application and have an officially registered Federal Employer Identification Number (FEIN).
- If you are a sole proprietor, you may use the sole proprietor's Social Security Number (SSN)
- Your business/organization must have a brick-and-mortar location in Virginia that is open, operating, has appropriate local licensing, and appeals to, and is open to tourists and visitors. Online storefronts and organizations are not eligible for this program. However, food trucks that are licensed to operate within a Virginia locality are eligible.
- If your organization is one that promotes tourism-oriented brick and mortar businesses in Virginia and events in Virginia, such as a Chamber of Commerce, craft beverage trail, event management company, etc., you ARE eligible, but the organization's AND/OR event's address must be in Virginia.
- CANNOT be a federal or state agency. CANNOT be a personal health and wellness business, such as nail salons, gyms, massage parlors, and yoga studios. If the business is a separate business in a lodging resort, as a tourism attraction, they ARE ELIGIBLE to apply.
- CANNOT be a vendor of services, such as an advertising agency, PR firm, printing agency, television channel, web developer, influencer, marketing consultant, etc.
- MUST show a significant and positive economic impact on the business and surrounding community, as the goal of this program is to increase out-of-region visitation and increase visitor spending.

Partners/Spokes...

- Must be tourism-oriented businesses/attractions that are open, operating, and have appropriate locality licensing.
- Must be names of business and not categories.
- CANNOT be sponsors of events that are not tourism-oriented, i.e., local bank, local gym, local beverage distributor. We encourage these types of sponsors, but for this program we want to learn more about your tourism potential and tourism-oriented partners.
- CANNOT be a personal health and wellness business, such as nail salons, gyms, massage parlors, and yoga studios unless they are in a lodging resort which is a tourist attraction.
- ARE allowed to be a state or federal entity, such as a state or national park.
- CANNOT be a vendor of services, such as an advertising agency, PR firm, printing agency, television channel, web developer, influencer, marketing consultant, etc.
- CANNOT be THC/Cannabis-oriented businesses.

If you or your listed partners/spokes do not meet the above criteria, your program will not be awarded the grant funds. VTC reserves the right to determine applicant and partner eligibility. Please reach out to the VTC Grants team with any questions on eligibility at VTCMLPGrant@virginia.org.

Partner/Spoke Involvement Requirements

Using VTC's Hub & Spoke Itinerary model, the partners/spokes you list in your application must contribute to your program initiative through marketing collaborations. Please refer to the application instructions for more details on the Hub & Spoke model. These contributions/collaborations must be documented in the application narrative and will be evaluated.

An example of marketing collaborations could be cooperative marketing, distribution of brochures in partner/spoke locations, hotel/lodging/attraction packages, creative cross-marketing with table tents in restaurants or other establishments, etc. Please be creative, clear, and concise with your marketing partnerships.

Required Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) Letter of Support

- To apply for this program, you must have a letter of support from your local or regional DMO that clearly states their support for your program. You can find a list of DMOs on www.vatc.org/dmolist.
- If you do not have a local or regional DMO serving your area, you must obtain a letter of support from your locality leader (such as your town manager, city manager, or county manager).

Required lodging partner and Letter of Support from the lodging partner.

- To apply for this program, you must list a lodging business as a partner in your application. This can be a hotel, bed & breakfast, resort, campground, or state park.
- You need a letter of support from this lodging partner. Driving overnight visitation is a key component of these programs.
- ***If you, as the applicant, are a lodging business, you will need to list yourself as the lodging partner and simply upload a document stating you are the lodging partner.***

Application Proposal Requirements

Your marketing proposal must meet the following requirements to be considered for an award:

- Applicants can only submit ONE application proposal per FEIN.
- ***Marketing proposal must have an end date no later than [October 31st, 2027](#).***
- This is a competitive grant program, with programs awarded by the strength and score of their applications. Applicants must develop new marketing initiatives for their event or expand upon previously generated initiatives. Applications must explain and justify how the proposal's target markets, demographics, and marketing channels will drive overnight and out of region visitation to their locality. Proposals that lack adequate justification of the choices outlined in the application may be subject to a reduced award or not receive funding. Applicants are encouraged to use their own data/research, their local DMO research, and/or data/research provided by VTC in the application. VTC's research portal can be found here: <https://www.vatc.org/research/>
- The program has a ***look back period*** and expenses may be dated back to no earlier than ***December 1st, 2025***.

- If you need to make any substantial changes to your marketing proposal after the time you are awarded the grant, you must submit a VTC Plan Revision form to the VTC Grants Team and have it approved. Revision forms can be found at www.vatc.org/grants.
- **NEW in 2026!** Do not list vendors/channels in your marketing plan. List only marketing type categories (social media, print, agency services, digital, etc.) You can move funds within a marketing category without a revision plan. However, if you plan to move funds from one category to another, such as social media marketing to print marketing or from one target market to another target market, you will need to submit a revision plan.
- Interim and final reports are required to be submitted with your interim reimbursement and your final reimbursement after the completion of your initiative. **YOU WILL NOT RECEIVE YOUR FINAL REIMBURSEMENT UNTIL YOUR FINAL REPORT IS SUBMITTED.** We recommend that you submit your Final Report along with your Final Reimbursement. Final Reimbursements and Reports are due no later than December 31, 2027.
- Please note: Successful applicants who receive an award through the Marketing Leverage Program may receive a reduced award total IF they are awarded funds in a different VTC grant program.

Ineligible Programs:

- Non-tourism related businesses/events.
- Cannabis-related businesses/events.
- Businesses/events related to political activities.
- Private events (like family reunions, weddings, birthday parties, and “members-only” events.)

Scoring Protocol

There are limited funds available for this program. Therefore, funding will be awarded on a merit scale; only the highest scoring application proposals will be funded. Since awards are determined from these scores, your application must be complete and thorough. Actual awards may or may not equal the amount you originally requested and are based on available funds at the time of award.

Do not assume that the review team is familiar with your area, destination, business, event, or festival. You should include all requested information and be as detailed as possible.

When determining the award total for an application, Virginia Tourism Corporation may consider a variety of factors. These include the type and scope of the organization, the proposal’s audience and message, the number of applications received, the regional distribution of funds, and **MOST IMPORTANTLY**, the economic impact of the program and its ability to drive visitation/visitor revenue in the program coverage area.

Please see the score breakdown for each section below:

GOALS & PARTNERSHIPS – 25 POINTS

RESEARCH/DATA – 25 POINTS

MARKETING PLANS – 50 POINTS

BONUS SECTION – 5 POINTS

Thoroughly review the program instructions so you can maximize your points in each section. You may also refer to the sample application.

Post Award Requirements

- Save your award letter with your Grant #
- Save your grant related documentation—copies of advertising, invoices, and proofs of payment in a digital folder or USB drive.
- List your events, destination, attraction, on Virginia.org if not already listed.
- Track all performance outcomes.
- Retain copies of advertising, invoices, and proof of payment for reimbursement.
- Use Virginia is for Lovers logo, link, and/or hashtag #loveva on advertising and marketing where required.
- Submit reimbursements by required deadlines.

Eligible Expenses

ALL MARKETING/ADVERTISING SUBMITTED TO VTC FOR MATCH or REIMBURSEMENT REQUIRES THE USE OF THE “VIRGINIA IS FOR LOVERS” LOGO, LINK, AND/OR HASHTAG #LOVEVA

ELIGIBLE EXPENSE PERIOD: December 1st, 2025, through October 31st, 2027

Below are the ONLY expenses that can be used as cash match for this grant award and that can be submitted to VTC for reimbursement. Please reference the logo usage section for more information on how to incorporate the Virginia is for Lover’s brand and logo into your marketing:

- Social Media advertising, including paid boosts, reels, ad placement on channels.
- Newspaper advertising, including print and digital opportunities.
- Radio advertising, including digital steaming and broadcast channels.
- Magazine advertising, including print and digital opportunities.
- Digital Media advertising, including streaming, Public Broadcasting/streaming Service episode participation fees whether broadcast or digital streaming, participating in the U.S. Civil Rights Trail program that includes digital marketing/promotions, and other digital platform opportunities.
- Print Advertising & Distribution (Brochures & Flyers)
- Contracting a Photographer/Videographer
 - High resolution photography and b-roll may be delivered to Sarah Atkins. Please contact her at satkins@virginia.org with assets and any questions.
 - All photography and video marketing materials created using this VTC grant should include usage rights for VTC in perpetuity. You can secure those rights for Virginia Tourism corporation in one of two ways:
 - When creating your for-hire contract, include language that allows you to transfer usage rights to partners (like VTC). Not only is it a great way to maximize your marketing dollars, but it is a practice VTC has been implementing for years. This agreement allows us to share photo assets with VTC partners.
 - For an example of the language we use in our contracts, see section 3 in our [licensing terms & conditions](#). Please feel free to copy and adapt this language for your own contracts.
 - You can have the copyright owner complete our [photo & video release form](#). This MUST be completed by the copyright owner, not by the licensing entity.
 - For information on planning your photo shoot, please see our [How to Plan a Photo Shoot](#) document. Here, we break down our planning process while giving recommendations and tips on maximizing your budget, staying organized, and considering the details.
 - Note: The cost of purchasing equipment for photographic and video production is NOT an eligible expense.
 - Note: The costs of food and other props during a photo shoot are NOT eligible expenses.
- Contracting a Marketing Consultant
- Contracting a Creative Agency
- Contracting an Influencer

- Influencer fees MUST be invoiced under one all-encompassing document when being submitted for VTC reimbursement. VTC WILL NOT reimburse individual receipted expenses for influencers, like lodging, meals, receipts, transportation, etc.
- Website/Apps Development/Updates
 - Hosting & Maintenance Fees are NOT ELIGIBLE.
 - “Virginia is for Lovers” logo REQUIRED on the website.
 - Invoices for website development MUST include a scope of work and the marketing plan must include promoting the new website.
- Expenses related to participating in the VTC Welcome Center & PMAP Program
 - Participate Here: <https://welcomeva.com/>
- Virginia is for Lovers Promotional Items
 - Only 10% of your award can be used.
 - These promotional items must be purchased from Creative Color, VTC’s Contractor of Record for merchandise. Applicants can set up a wholesale account with Creative Color here: [https://vatc.org/about/merchandise/.](https://vatc.org/about/merchandise/)
- Outdoor advertising through paid billboards that are 50 miles away from the location of business/organization.
 - Billboards listed in the application MUST have the exact location stated.
- ASCAP/BMI Fees (only 10% of award may be used.)
- Tradeshow Booth Rentals
- Cost of event liability insurance (only 10% of award may be used.)
- Cost of mobile vehicle wrap advertising is managed by a third-party marketing agency where the vehicle is driven 50 miles away from the applicant’s destination.
 - (NOTE: Wrapping DMO-owned, business-owned, organization-owned, or locality-owned vehicles IS NOT eligible).
- Trail membership and signage for Civil War Trails and Road to Revolution are the only eligible signage expenses in this program. Detailed instructions for including this signage in your marketing plans can be found here:

Costs associated with design, fabrication, and installation of Virginia Civil War Trails interpretive markers and/or Road to Revolution interpretive markers ARE an eligible signage cost. Maintenance fees for Virginia Civil War Trails and/or Road to Revolution interpretive markers are NOT eligible expenses. Projects that include Virginia Civil War Trails and/or Road to Revolution interpretive markers must include a marketing component promoting the presence of the marker. Only invoices from Virginia Civil War and/or Road to Revolution Trail membership and markers will be accepted.

***** Any other marketing or event production expenses are ineligible. Grant funds cannot be used to pay for staff, police, fire, or emergency services, referees, timekeepers, vehicle rentals, temporary or permanent signage, fireworks/pyrotechnics, food, beverage, accommodations, or any other equipment rentals or event production costs.**

VIFL Logo Usage Section

Below are the ways you must incorporate the “Virginia is for Lovers” brand into your marketing to receive VTC reimbursement. Both match expenses and reimbursement expenses must follow these Virginia is for Lovers logo rules:

- Any social media posts, digital media, or website/app creation MUST include the “Virginia is for Lovers” logo or a Virginia is for Lovers sub-brand logo, link to Virginia.org AND/OR Hashtag #LoveVA to be eligible as MATCH or be approved for REIMBURSEMENT. Sub-brand examples include but are not limited to “Virginia is for History Lovers” or “Virginia is for Wine Lovers”. Logos can be requested at [https://vatc.org/marketing/advertising/vifl-logo-request/.](https://vatc.org/marketing/advertising/vifl-logo-request/)
- Any print media, like brochures, flyers, magazines, newspapers, etc., MUST include the “Virginia is for Lovers” logo or a Virginia is for Lovers sub-brand logo, link to Virginia.org AND/OR Hashtag #LoveVA to be eligible as MATCH or be approved for REIMBURSEMENT. Sub-brand examples include but are not limited to

“Virginia is for History Lovers” or “Virginia is for Wine Lovers”. Logos can be requested at <https://vatc.org/marketing/advertising/vifl-logo-request/>.

- Radio ads that are LONGER THAN 30 SECONDS must include the “Virginia is for Lovers” phrase within the advertisement. This can be included as part of the advertisement narrative, such as “*Everyone knows Virginia is for Lovers, and you’re going to love this event...*”
- Video ads (OF ANY LENGTH) MUST include the “Virginia is for Lovers” logo AND/OR phrase within the advertisement. An example of this can include a banner in the background or an actor/performer wearing Virginia is for Lovers apparel.

Open Records Policy

As a political subdivision of the Commonwealth of Virginia, Virginia Tourism Authority (DBA Virginia Tourism Corporation) must comply with open records policies per Virginia Code §2.2-3700 and therefore must provide copies of awarded grant applications when requested. If your application is requested by an individual or organization, you will be notified, and any personal and banking information will be redacted.

VTC Grants Team Contact Information

For questions regarding any of the information in this document, please reach out to the VTC Grants Team:

VTC Marketing Leverage Email: vtcmlpgrant@virginia.org

Staci Martin, Grants Director smartin@virginia.org

Shruthi Manimaran, Grants Coordinator smanimaran@virginia.org