



Spring 2026 DMO Marketing Program (DMO)

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 DMO Marketing Program Instructions, Sample Application, and Webinar recording found online > https://www.vatc.org/grants/virginia-dmo-marketing-grants](https://www.vatc.org/grants/virginia-dmo-marketing-grants)

General Information

Funding available in this grant program: Approx \$700,000

of proposals to be funded this round: 45

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

(NO EXTENSIONS)

- This is a competitive program open only to officially recognized Destination Marketing Organizations appearing on this list: www.vatc.org/dmolist. All locality legislation and DMO status applications must have been approved by December 31, 2025, to apply for this program.
- Officially recognized DMOs may request the application password from Staci Martin, Grants Director, at smartin@virginia.org.
- Due to limited funding, DMO applicants must choose between the DMO Marketing Program or the Marketing Leverage Program. Applicants may not apply for both programs. However, DMOs remain eligible for the Arrivalist State Dispersion Portal program, the Special Events & Festivals program, and the DMO Flagship program.

One Award Tier

Applicants may request less than the maximum award and it is recommended to only request an award amount that matches their ability to provide 50% in-kind match on eligible marketing expenses and only the funds they need for a targeted marketing campaign. Please note that proof of in-kind match is now required for this program. List only in-kind match that you can document via screen shot or web/social media likes/clicks, editorial links, listing links, etc.

- Applicants can request up to **\$15,000** if they list a minimum of 50% In-Kind or cash Match. If the applicant spends up to \$15,000 on eligible marketing expenses, VTC reimburses up to \$15,000 of that with proof of payment, proof of advertising and copy of the invoices. To receive the reimbursement of \$15,000, applicants must also provide documentation for \$7,500 of in-kind match via screenshots and links listed on the reimbursement form with appropriate valuations.

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/>

Partner/Spoke Eligibility

Creating marketing partnerships with tourism-oriented partners in the destination is an integral part of this program.

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 VTCDMOGrant@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 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.

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 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 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 DMO Marketing 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.
- Save documentation of your in-kind match and valuations via screenshots and links.
- 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

In-Kind Match Eligible Items:

<p>In-Kind Match Values Allowed:</p> <p><i>Print editorial: \$250/quarter page. Publication date must be within program dates.</i></p> <p><i>Print editorial: \$1,000/full page. Publication date must be within program dates.</i></p> <p><i>Online editorial: \$500/quarter page. \$2,000 per full page. Must still be online.</i></p> <p><i>Social media followers: 10 cents each. (Screenshot of follower/insights must be during program allowable dates.</i></p>	<p><i>Owned website clicks: 10 cents each (Screenshot must be during program allowable dates)</i></p> <p><i>Print listing: \$100/each. Publication date must be within program dates.</i></p> <p><i>Online listing: \$200/each. Must still be online.</i></p> <p><i>Social Media Likes/Shares per Post: 10 cents each (Screenshot showing likes/shares must be during program allowable dates.</i></p>
---	--

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/>.
- 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