



**Summer 2026
Special Events & Festivals
Grant Webinar**

2025 Economic Impact of Visitors in Virginia

46.6 MILLION
OVERNIGHT & INTERNATIONAL VISITORS
A SECOND STRAIGHT RECORD YEAR

\$36.2 BILLION
IN VISITOR SPENDING
A FOURTH STRAIGHT RECORD YEAR, UP 3.1%

ALL BENEFITING VIRGINIA

**\$1,020* IN TAXES
PER HOUSEHOLD**
PAID BY VISITORS & NOT RESIDENTS

**231,880
JOBS**
FOR VIRGINIANS

SOURCES: TOURISM ECONOMICS & LONGWOODS INTERNATIONAL
*REFLECTS TOTAL TAX IMPACT (DIRECT, INDIRECT, AND INDUCED); ALL OTHER FIGURES ARE DIRECT BASIS.

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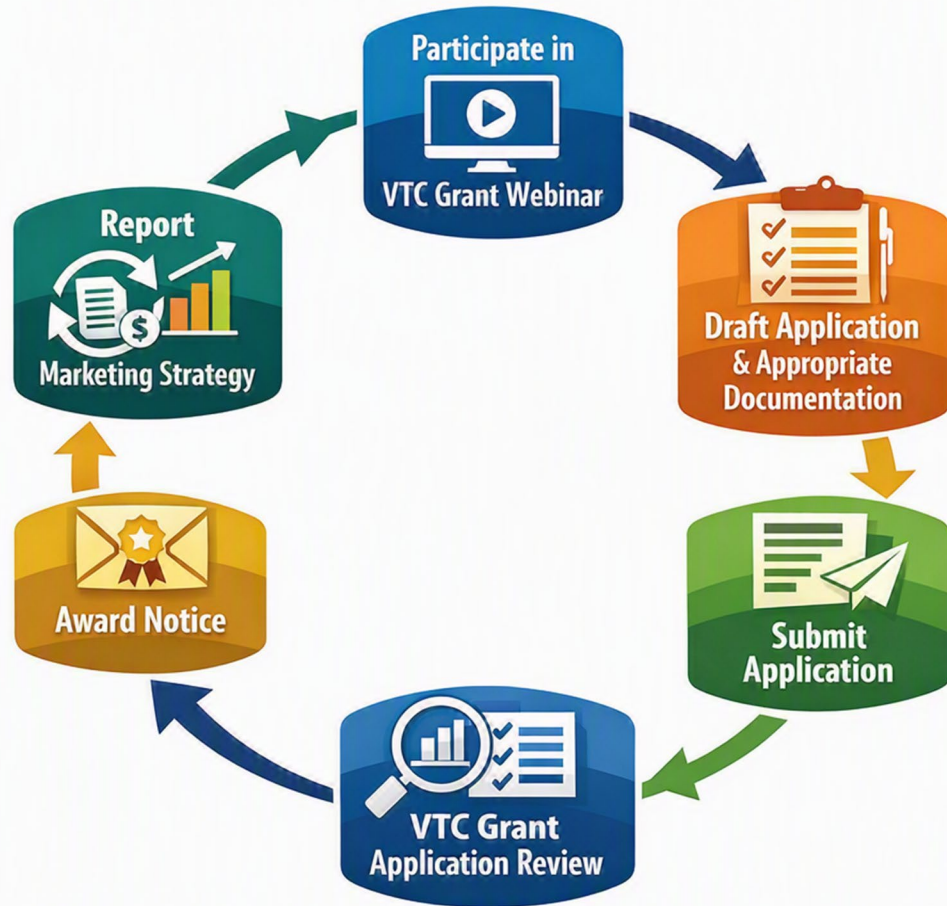
PAID BY VISITORS & NOT RESIDENTS

FOR VIRGINIANS



VTC Application & Review Process

This outlines the Virginia Tourism grant review process from start to finish and is designed to guide applicants clearly through each step. Our goal is to provide a **transparent and supportive experience** that ensures applicants understand requirements, timelines, and expectations. By prioritizing clear communication and assistance, we aim to deliver the highest level of customer service throughout this process.





Special Events & Festival Grant Program (SEF)

The **Special Events & Festivals Grant Program (SEF)** leverages existing funds and requires a targeted and research-based marketing plan designed to drive tourism to Virginia. This **reimbursable grant program** focuses on **marketing and production** for Virginia based special events and festivals.

- Events occurring between January 1, 2027-December 31, 2027
- SEF Application Opens: September 22 | 9:00 a.m. ET
- SEF Application Closes: October 29, 2026 | 5:00 p.m. ET
- Three Award Tiers:
 - Tier 1 - \$5,000 (500-4,999 attendees)
 - Tier 2 - \$10,000 (5,000-19,999 attendees)
 - Tier 3 - \$20,000 (20,000+ attendees)
- Match: 50% cash or in-kind match

Required Application Materials

The following application materials are required for an application to be considered eligible. Because VTC grant programs are highly competitive, **inclusion of all required materials is essential for eligibility**. Applications that do not contain all required items at the time of submission will be deemed ineligible and will not be considered for funding.

- EIN # (one application permitted per EIN #)
- Signed Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) Letter of Support
- Signed Lodging Partner Letter of Support
- Proof of Prior Event Attendance (minimum of 500 attendees)
- Hub & Spoke Itinerary
- Target Markets & Target Audiences
- Data & Research
- Marketing Plan





Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants for the SEF program are organizations whose mission aligns with Virginia Tourism's goals of attracting visitors to Virginia for their special event or festival. Eligible applicants **must demonstrate clear strategy and impact**, along with the capacity and financial responsibility to successfully execute the proposed project. Based on The Code of Virginia (§ 2.2-2320.2) eligible applicants include the following:

- Virginia Localities
- Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs)
- Nonprofit Organizations
- Tourism-related Businesses
 - Brick-and-mortar locations in Virginia that are open, operating, and have appropriate local licensing
- Chambers of Commerce

Event Eligibility

The Special Events & Festivals program supports events and festivals that attract visitors, generate economic impact, and strengthen Virginia's tourism economy. The program provides funding to help eligible organizations enhance the **marketing and production of established tourism events**, with an emphasis on increasing visitation, encouraging overnight stays, and generating visitor spending in communities across the Commonwealth. Eligible events and festivals must meet the following criteria:

- Event must occur between January 1, 2027-December 31, 2027
- Must have occurred in two or more years since 2022
- Must be a minimum of two consecutive days
- Must have a minimum of 500 event attendees
- Must increase overnight event visitation & visitor spending
- Must have event liability insurance
 - **Virginia Tourism Authority* must be listed as “additional insured” on the applicable policy





Ineligible Events

Events that do not meet the event eligibility requirement can apply for the Marketing Leverage Program (MLP).; however, production expenses are not eligible, only marketing related expenses are eligible for the MLP grant program. The following events and festivals **are not eligible** for VTC grant funding:

- Non-tourism related events/festivals
- Cannabis related events/festivals
- Political events/festivals
- Private events (i.e., family reunions, weddings, birthday parties, and members only events)



Hub & Spoke Itinerary

Eligible partners serve as key spokes within an itinerary. These include attractions, accommodations, dining, and experiences. Their **collaboration is essential** to creating a cohesive, compelling marketing strategy that enhances the overall visitor experience and drives engagement and visitation.

- Lodging Partner (letter of support required)
- Identify Spoke Partners
 - Must be open and an operational brick-and-mortar tourism-oriented business/organization in Virginia
 - Licensed food trucks that are authorized to operate in Virginia are eligible
 - Land attractions, including state and national parks, are permissible spoke partners (e.g., Shenandoah National Park, Clinch River State Park, Blue Ridge Parkway, etc.)
- Identify how you and your partners work together to achieve your goals
- Identify what marketing message will help you and your partners achieve your visitation/visitor spending goals



Hub & Spoke Itinerary Example



Lodging Partner

**If the applicant is the lodging partner, please put the name of your property and include a lodging letter of support.*



Partner #2

Lodging, Activity, Attraction, Restaurant, Craft Beverage/Wine, Museum, Boutique Retail, Outdoor Recreation



Spoke #3

Lodging, Activity, Attraction, Restaurant, Craft Beverage/Wine, Museum, Boutique Retail, Outdoor Recreation



Spoke #4

Lodging, Activity, Attraction, Restaurant, Craft Beverage/Wine, Museum, Boutique Retail, Outdoor Recreation



Spoke #5

Lodging, Activity, Attraction, Restaurant, Craft Beverage/Wine, Museum, Boutique Retail, Outdoor Recreation



Spoke #6

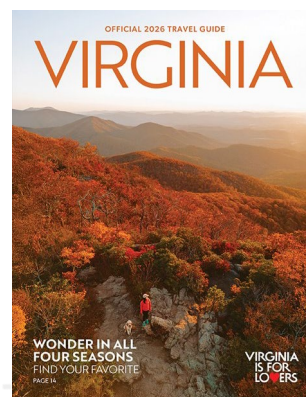
Lodging, Activity, Attraction, Restaurant, Craft Beverage/Wine, Museum, Boutique Retail, Outdoor Recreation

Eligible VTC & Match Marketing Plan Expenses

Eligible expenses for the SEF grant program include **costs directly related to marketing out of state and out of region**. All contracted marketing services must **provide a contract** to be eligible for reimbursement and match.

- Social Media Advertising
- Digital Media Advertising
- Radio Advertising
- Podcast Advertising
- Print & Digital Newspaper Advertising
- Print & Digital Magazine Advertising
- Print & Distribution of Brochures, Rack Cards, & Flyers
- Window Clings (50+ miles or more away from location)
- Contracting a Photographer/Videographer
- Contracting a Marketing Consultant
- Contracting a Creative Agency
- Contracting an Influencer
- Website/App Development/Updates
- Expenses related to participating in the VTC Partnership Marketing & Advertising Program (PMAP)
- Outdoor billboard (50+ miles away from location)
- Tradeshow Booth Rentals
- VIFL Promotional Items (maximum of 10% VTC award)
- ASCAP/BMI Fees (maximum of 10% of VTC award)
- Event Liability Insurance (maximum of 10% VTC award)
- Mobile Vehicle Wrap Advertising (must be managed by a third-party marketing agency and vehicle is driven 50+ miles away from the applicant's destination)





VTC Marketing Opportunities

VTC offers a variety of both paid and complimentary marketing opportunities for industry partners to utilize in **strengthening and evolving** their marketing strategies.

- [Virginia Welcome Centers & Safety Rest Areas](#)
- [Virginia Travel Guide](#)
- [Virginia.org](#)
- [VIFL Wholesale](#)
- [Get listed on Virginia.org](#) (it's free)



Eligible VTC & Match Production Plan Expenses

Eligible expenses for the SEF grant program include **costs directly related to production expenses**. No more than **50%** of the VTC Marketing Plan and the Matching Marketing Plan can be used for production costs. All production expenses must be accompanied by a **vendor contract** to be eligible for reimbursement and match.

- Artist/Performer Fees
- Temporary Stage Rentals
- Rental of Event Space or Parking Lots
- Temporary Fence Rentals
- Tent Rentals
- Table/Chair Rentals
- Contracted Audio/Video Services
- Contracted Sound Engineering Services
- Contracted Lighting Services





Eligible In-kind Match

Eligible in-kind match for the SEF include **costs directly related to marketing** out of state and out of region during the grant period. Instructions on how to value earned and owned media are in the Terms & Conditions.

- Paid Media (e.g., paid ads on Meta, paid Google Ads, etc.)
- Owned Media (e.g., business's official website, newsletter, blog, etc.)
- Earned Media (e.g., travel article or feature written about a business/destination by a journalist, news stories, blogger reviews, etc.)



In-kind Match Values & Requirements

Accurate documentation of in-kind match contributions is essential to demonstrate that required match commitments have been met and that all reported values are verifiable. Proper records such as publication dates, proof of placement, and screenshots of followers, engagement, and posts ensure transparency and compliance with grant requirements. **Adequate documentation of in-kind match is required for reimbursement.** Undocumented or insufficiently documented in-kind contributions may be deemed ineligible and could result in reduced or denied reimbursement.

ELIGIBLE IN-KIND MATCH RATES

MEDIA TYPE	COMPENSATION	REQUIREMENTS
 PRINT EDITORIAL	\$250 per quarter page \$350 per third page \$500 per half page \$1,000 per full page	 Publication date must be within program dates.
 ONLINE EDITORIAL	\$500 per quarter page \$1,000 per half page \$2,000 per full page	 Must still be online.
 SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWERS	10¢ each	 Screenshot of follower/insights must be during program allowable dates.
 OWNED WEBSITE CLICKS	10¢ each	 Screenshot must be during program allowable dates.
 ONLINE LISTING	\$200 each	 Must still be online.
 SOCIAL MEDIA LIKES/SHARES PER POST	10¢ each	 Screenshot showing likes/shares must be during program allowable dates.
 PRINT LISTING	\$100 each	 Publication date must be within program dates.

Budget

A well-developed budget is critical to ensuring that all necessary items and resources are strategically allocated and purchased to successfully execute a marketing strategy that meets industry demand. By clearly outlining expenses, it helps organizations **prioritize programming and marketing** that enhance the visitor experience. Additionally, a thoughtful budget ensures **accountability and efficient use of funds**, ultimately supporting sustainable growth and making the destination more competitive and attractive to visitors.

**Eligible lookback period for expenses is 6-months prior to your program start date. Eligible expenses must follow VTC proof of placement guidelines.*

Use of VTC Funds	VTC Request	Use of Match Funds	Match Amount
Meta Ads	\$100	Google Ads	\$500
Billboards in Charlotte, NC for Apple Cider Festival	\$650	Owned Website Clicks (in-kind)	\$400
Rack Card Printing	\$250	Rack Card Distribution	\$80
Contracting with Digital Asset Co. for Apple Cider Festival promotional photography/ videography	\$1,000	Stage Rental (50%)	\$1,250
Virginia is for Lovers Merchandise t-shirts & hats (10%)	\$500	Spotify Ads	\$270
Artist Fees (50%)	\$2,500		
TOTAL VTC REQUEST	\$5,000	TOTAL MATCHING FUNDS	\$2,500

TOTAL PROJECT BUDGET

\$7,500



Data & Research

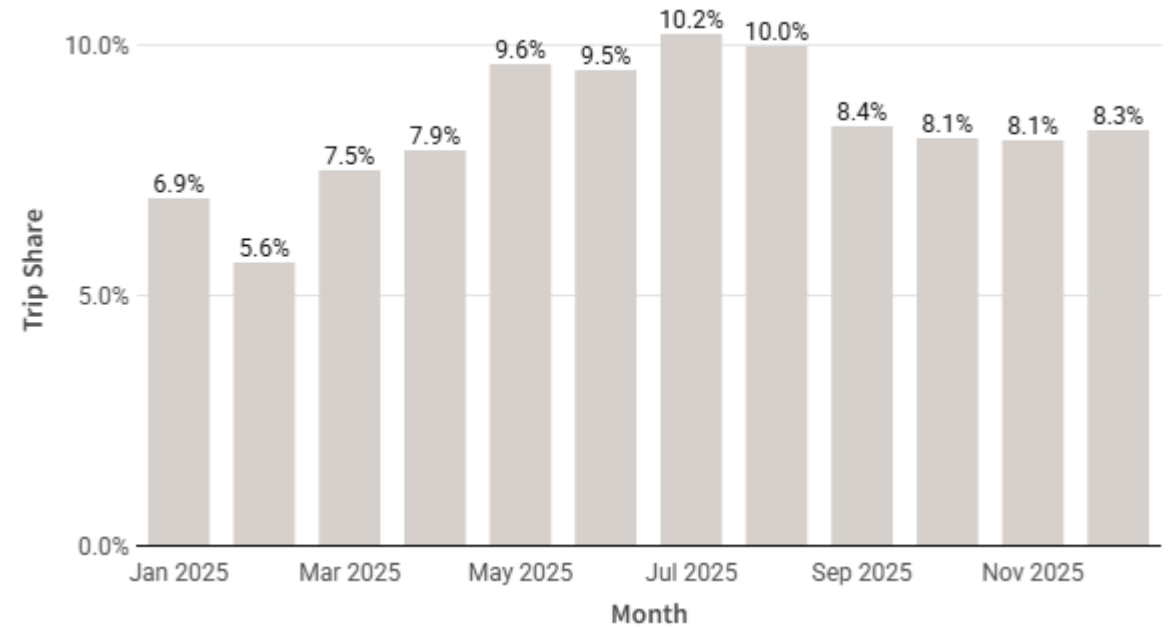
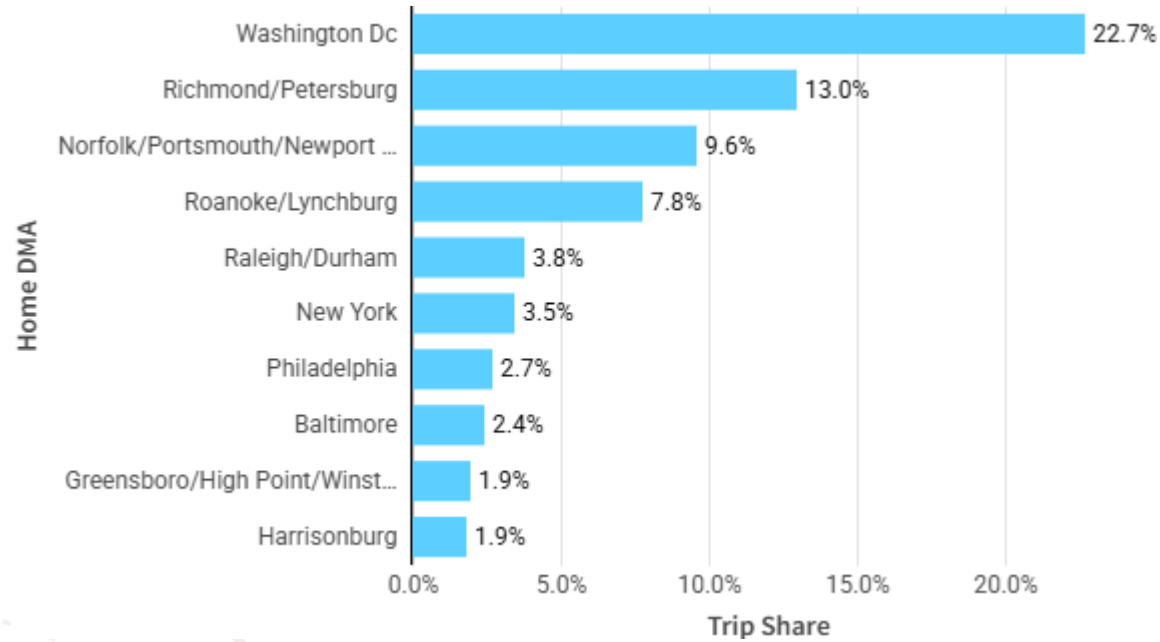
Data and research provide the foundation for an effective marketing strategy by identifying **who** your target audience is and **what** motivates their travel patterns and purchasing decisions. This helps to understand market trends, visitor behaviors, and competitive positions, allowing you to tailor messaging and experiences that resonate.

- On-site Data Collection Tools (e.g., attendee tracking)
- Visitor Management Software (e.g., Future Partners, PlacerAI, Datafy, etc.)
- Website Analytics
- Social Media Metrics
- Credit Card Data
- VTC's Arrivalist Data
- VTC's Point of Interest (POI) Data
- Review vatc.org/research



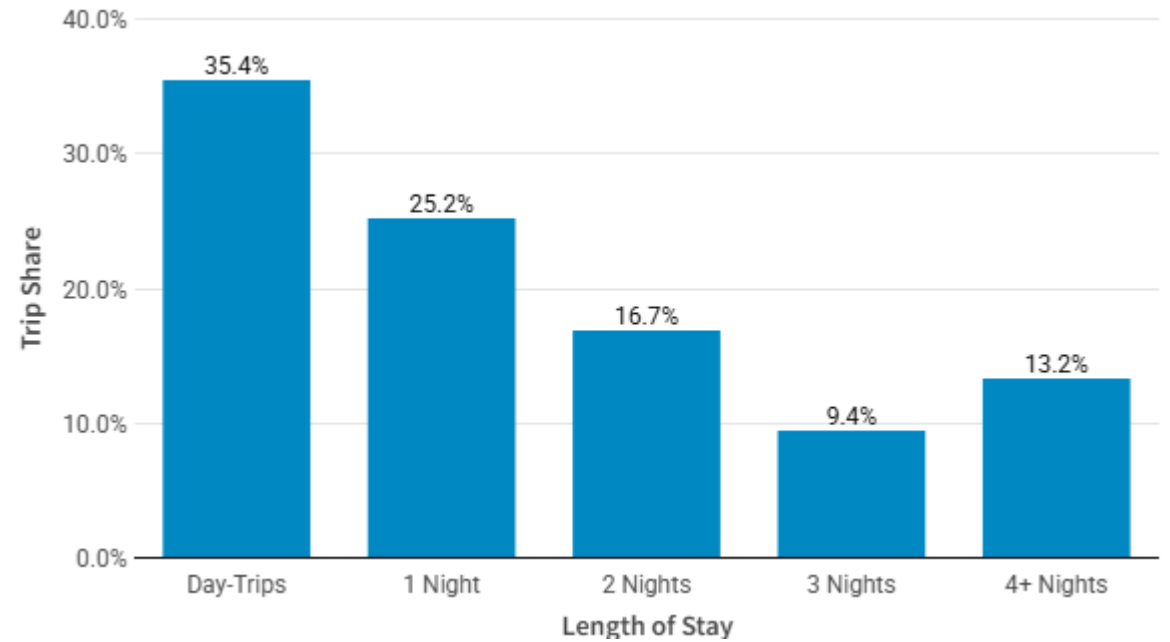
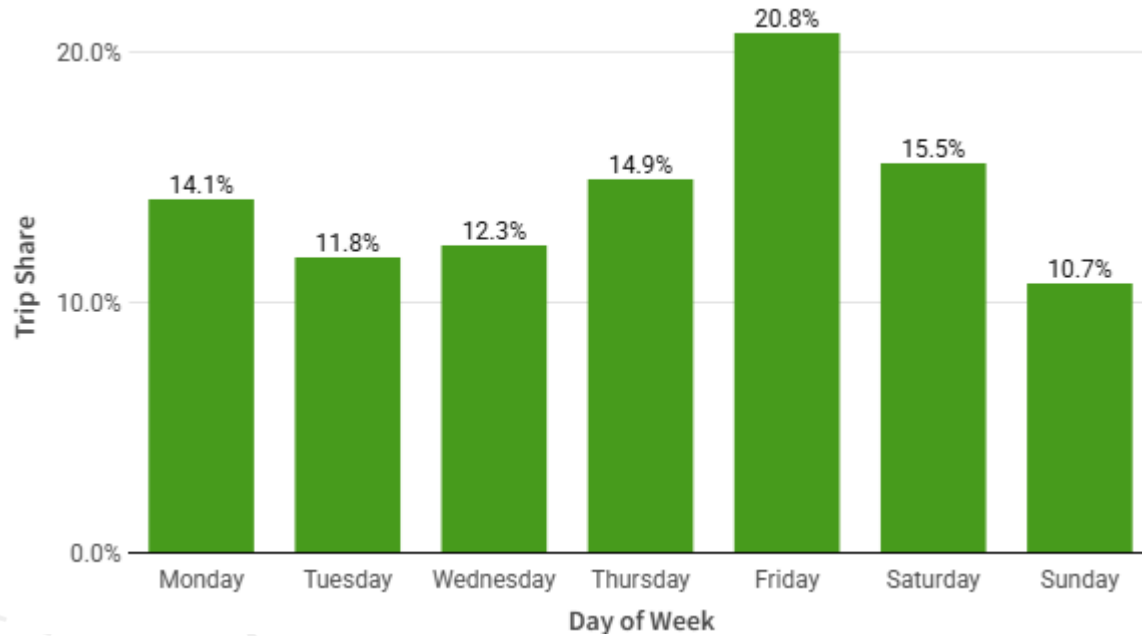
Arrivalist

Virginia - CY 2025



Arrivalist

Virginia - CY 2025



Target Markets & Audiences

Target markets and audiences are essential to a marketing campaign because they ensure messaging, channels, and tactics are specifically tailored to the people most likely to **engage and convert**. This focus increases efficiency, strengthens relevance, and ultimately improves campaign performance by aligning strategy with the needs and behaviors of the intended audience.

- **Out of State Target Markets**

- Baltimore, MD
- Columbus, OH
- Atlanta, GA
- Other
- New York, NY
- Harrisburg, PA
- Charlotte, NC
- Philadelphia, PA
- Nashville, TN
- Chicago, IL
- Cleveland, OH
- Pittsburgh, PA
- Washington, DC

- **In-State Target Markets**

- Harrisonburg
- Roanoke-Salem
- Northern Virginia
- Hampton Roads
- Bristol
- Other
- Richmond
- Charlottesville

- **Target Audience**

- Friends
- Families
- Couples



Marketing & Production Plan

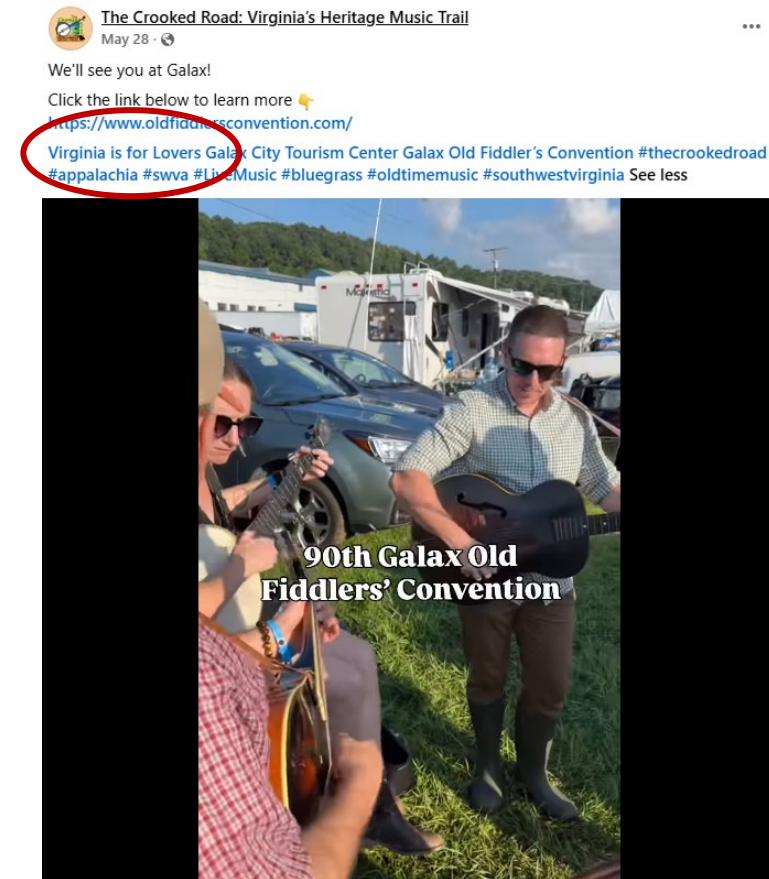
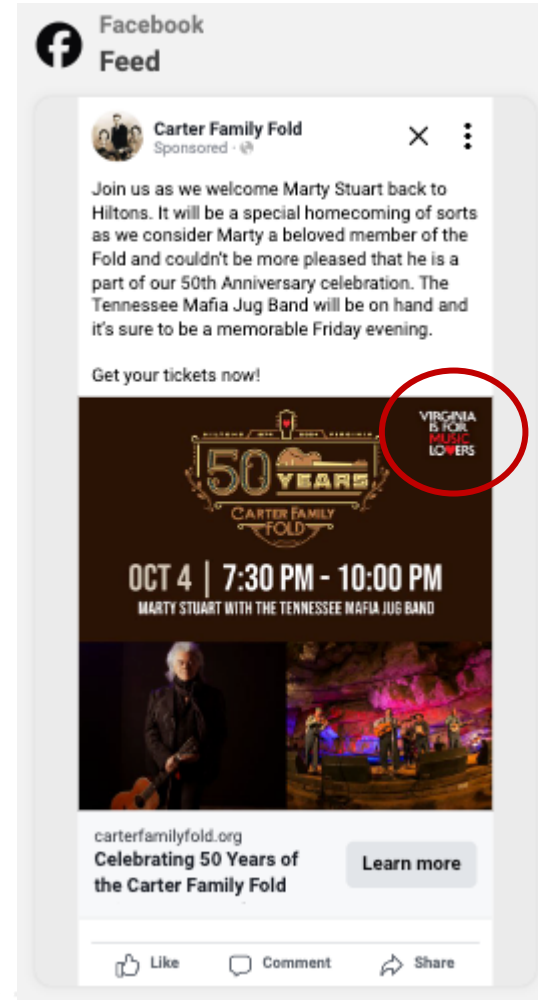
A marketing and production plan is a structured roadmap that outlines how your organization will attract, convert, and retain visitors to your event or festival. **It combines research, strategy, execution, and measurement.**

- Identify Target Market (Out of State & In-State)
- Identify Target Audience
- Clear & Measurable Marketing Objectives
- Marketing Strategy (e.g., digital campaigns, feeder markets, seasonal travel trends, unique experiences, etc.)
- Deliverables (e.g., # of tickets sold, followers, etc.)
- Budget (e.g., total project cost, spend categories)
- Timeline (e.g., campaign start and end dates, grant reporting and closeout)
- Measurement & ROI (e.g., booking data, revenue increases, email engagement, etc.)



VIFL Proof of Placement

Proof of *Virginia is for Lovers* logo placement is **required for reimbursement** under the VTC Terms & Conditions. This verifies that the grant requirements for recognition and visibility have been met. Providing documentation of this placement ensures accountability, demonstrates compliance with the Terms & Conditions, and confirms that promotional obligations were fulfilled, making a project eligible for reimbursement.





New Processes & Procedures

Below are several new processes and procedures that apply to VTC grant programs, including **mandatory awardee webinars**.

- Microsoft SharePoint Grantee Folders
- Mandatory Reports & Reimbursement Forms
 - Vendor/Third Party Contracts
 - Proof of Liability Insurance with *Virginia Tourism Authority* listed as “additional insured”
 - SEF Awardee Webinar – January 12, 2027 | 10:00 a.m.
- 2027 VTC Grant Programs announced at [VA1 Governor’s Tourism Summit](#)

**Dates are subject to change.*



Preparing to Apply

It is **strongly encouraged** that interested applicants complete and submit applications early as 75% of proposals are submitted in the final hours of the application deadline. Questions or concerns regarding the portal and application process should be directed to the VTC grants team.

Upon award notice, a formal processes and procedures session will occur to review **key requirements** and expectations with all grantees.

- Visit vatc.org to review grant program materials & reports
- Review SEF Terms & Conditions
- Draft Application in Word Document Template
- Develop Strategic Hub & Spoke Model
- Attain Signed Lodging Partner Letter of Support
- Attain Signed DMO Letter of Support
- Attain Liability Insurance with *Virginia Tourism Authority* as “additional insured”
- Prepare VIFL Proof of Placement
- Prepare W-9



Reminders

These are opportunities you can review and opt into as you continue enhancing your **marketing strategy** to prepare your grant application and continue collaborating with our VTC team.

- [Update event/festival listing on virginia.org](#)
- [Utilize VIFL logo on website, social, & other marketing materials](#)
- [Sign up for VTC grant updates](#)
- [Sign up for The Pulse](#)
- [Complete VTC Partner Content Collaboration Form](#)
- [Review Virginia's Statewide Strategic Tourism Plan 2026-2029](#)
- [Register for 2026 VA1 Governor's Tourism Summit](#)
 - November 18-20, 2026
 - Kalahari Resorts & Conventions | Spotsylvania, VA
- Connect with your Destination Development Manager



Destination Development Team

* Color blocks indicate staff serving those map areas

Destination Development Administration

□ Katie Conner – Director, Destination Development
540.676.4953 | kconner@virginia.org

Destination Development Managers

Michelle Workman 276.722.0238 | mworkman@virginia.org

John Matthews 276.967.9020 | jmatthews@virginia.org

 Vacant

 Kelli Weaver 540.679.6697 | kweaver@virginia.org

Jennifer Kohms 804.807.1911 | jkohms@virginia.org

Laura Messer 804.278.7651 | lmesser@virginia.org

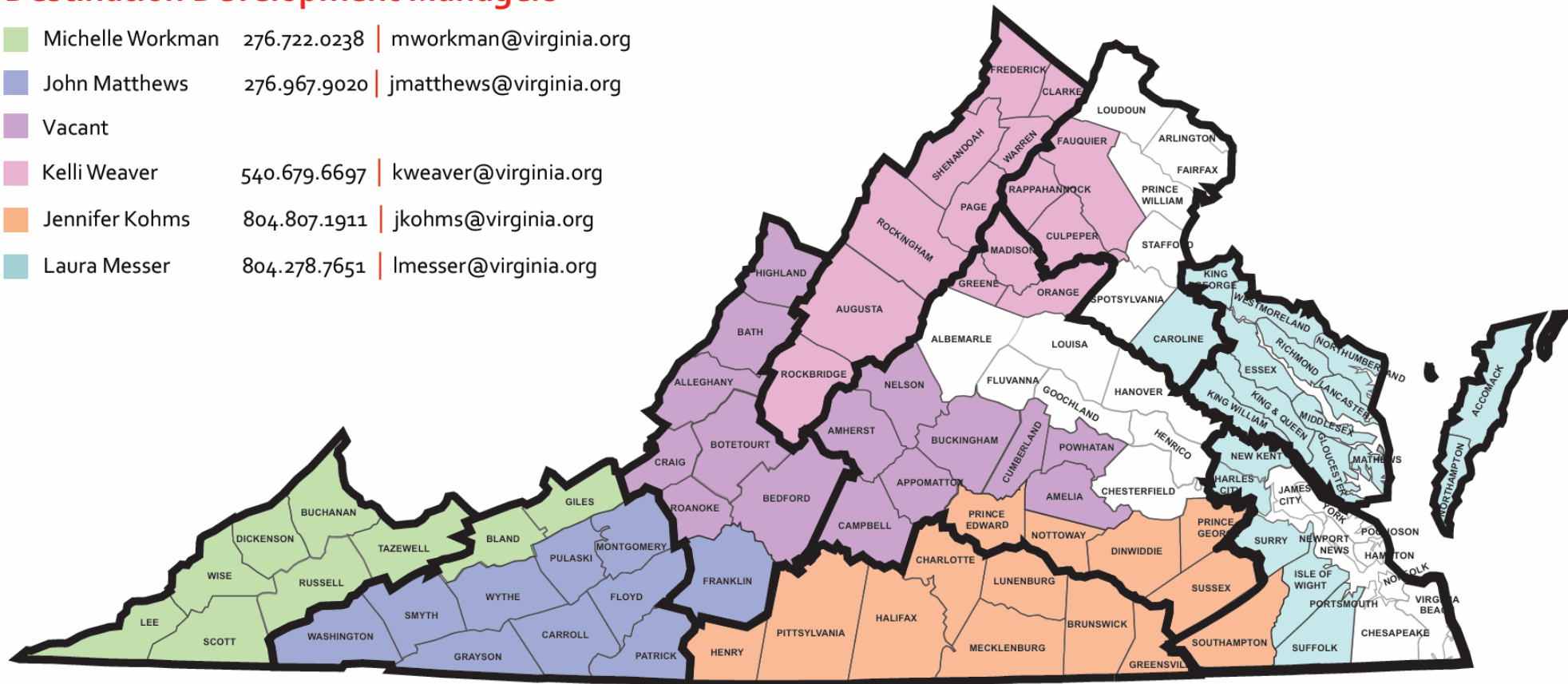
VIRGINIA IS FOR LOVERS

Virginia Tourism Corporation

Contact VTC's **Destination Development Staff** in your area for strategic planning, marketing leveraging and other community development assistance and resources

Website VATC.org/partnershipmarketing/tdmanagers

■ Border = Tourism Regions



contact information



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