![Virginia Board for People with Disabilities logo]

Creating Inclusive Communities

Target Area:

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)

2026 Competitive Grant Program
Request for Proposals (RFP)

(Awards to begin July 15, 2026)

Virginia Board for People with Disabilities
Request for Proposals
Creating Inclusive Communities Grant Program

The Virginia Board for People with Disabilities (the Board) is the Commonwealth's Developmental Disabilities (DD) Council. The Board's mission is to **advance opportunities for independence, personal decision-making and full participation in community life for individuals** with developmental and other disabilities. The Board's grant and contractual investments are designed to advance its mission and support the tenets of full inclusion by working with organizations at the local, state, and national levels to achieve our goals.

Overview and Purpose

Through this RFP, the Board seeks to support local, regional, or statewide efforts that further the recommendations in the Board's FFY [2025 assessment of access to pre-employment transition services through the special education transition process](#). Projects should be designed to achieve capacity building and/or systems change. Projects should also be culturally and linguistically competent. See the "Definitions" section later in this RFP for information on how the Board defines these terms. To view past grants, go to: [Grants Highlights](#). The Board encourages innovative proposals, based on promising or best practices.

Projects That Will Be Considered for Funding

Applications must address the below target area. [View the Board's State Plan](#) for more information about target areas. The Board is asking applicants to develop a grant project that meets the specified State Plan activity, using your expertise and creativity that will achieve the Board's desired outcomes.

Target Area	Description
Employment – Barrier Reduction	**State Plan Activity:** To support the implementation of community-based initiatives that further the recommendations in the Board's FFY 2025 assessment of access to pre-employment transition services through the special education transition process. **State Plan Objective:** By October 2026, the Board will support culturally and linguistically competent initiatives that reduce barriers to Virginians with developmental disabilities obtaining competitive, integrated employment. **State Plan Goal:** By October 2026, more Virginians with developmental disabilities, reflecting the state's geographic and cultural diversity, will have (1) increased ability to participate and learn in an inclusive school environment; and (2) increased ability to prepare for, and obtain, competitive, integrated employment and other career goals and opportunities.

Background: The current employment environment remains challenging for individuals with disabilities, who continue to experience significantly lower employment rates compared to their peers without disabilities. In 2024, 22.7% of individuals with a disability were employed compared with 65.5% of those without a disability (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024). Barriers such as limited access to services, low expectations, inadequate support structures and confusion about how employment impacts public benefits persist. Addressing the barriers to accessing employment services during high school and beyond is necessary to improve employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) and related employment support play a critical role in addressing these disparities by preparing students with disabilities to enter the workforce. Pre-ETS helps youth explore career interests, build essential job skills and develop the confidence needed to pursue meaningful, competitive employment. Ensuring timely, individualized access to Pre-ETS is crucial for improving long-term outcomes and supporting the full inclusion of individuals with disabilities in the workforce.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), signed in 2014, requires vocational rehabilitation agencies to set aside at least 15% of federal funds to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). Pre-ETS are the earliest set of services available for students with disabilities who are eligible or potentially eligible for vocational rehabilitation services. Pre-ETS are short-term in nature and designed to help students identify career interests.

Preferred Activities: The Board is interested in projects that further the recommendations in the Board's FFY [2025 assessment of access to pre-employment transition services through the special education transition process](). The ultimate goal is to increase the ability of students with developmental and other disabilities to prepare for, and obtain, competitive, integrated employment and other career goals and opportunities. Projects should be sustainable after Board funding ends.

Examples of potential activities are listed below. Other avenues will be considered if they meet the Board's desired outcomes. All project activities will be conducted in consultation with staff to the Board and subject to periodic approvals based on the needs of the organization.

1. **Example:** Schools and/or educational foundations could develop enterprises, led by students with Developmental Disabilities (DD), to provide meaningful, hands-on work experience to enhance employment readiness, self-confidence and job skills. The Board strongly encourages identifying creative, high-quality, work-based learning experiences that are outside of the box, in collaboration with relevant partners. Examples of student-led enterprises that have been implemented in the past include but are not limited to the following:

   - Coffee carts
   - Cafes
   - School stores
   - Copying services or other administrative tasks for teachers
   - Internships appropriate for a school setting

   Schools offer a truly unique environment with many different types of jobs that could be perfect for a job shadow experience.

2. **Example:** Develop and pilot a formal cross-agency coordination model between DARS, school divisions, CSBs, and workforce boards. Examples of activities could include but are not limited to the following:

   - Create shared referral pathways and warm handoff protocols.

   - Develop joint training for school staff and VR counselors.

   - Test braided funding approaches.

   - Develop and test a model interagency agreement template

For projects in which there will be direct benefit to individuals, at least 60% of the target population that will benefit from the grant must be persons with Developmental Disabilities (DD).

What We Will Not Fund

This RFP will <u>not</u> support the following:

- ✓ Existing projects or services that are a part of an organization's current program or budget unless the grant program will expand upon the project or service;
- ✓ Projects that would supplant or replace existing federal, state, or local dollars to conduct the project;
- ✓ Projects which have a federal, state or local mandate to be delivered by the applicant organization;
- ✓ Projects which include capital expenditures for the acquisition of land or buildings, new construction or major repair.
- ✓ Projects that take place in restrictive, isolated, or segregated settings that do not promote community integration for children or adults with disabilities.
- ✓ Projects that do not effectively demonstrate cultural and linguistic competence through established organizational policies, structures, procedures and practices.

Available Grant Funds

The Board may fund up to **$200,000** to one or more organizations for the current grant cycle. The Board may award all or a portion of available funds. The Board may choose not to award grant funds if budget limitations are encountered or if it determines that none of the grant proposals will achieve the desired systemic change. Grant periods are typically **18 – 24 months**, however, shorter or longer periods may be considered. The selected grantee(s) will be required to submit an annual renewal application for multi-year projects, in order to demonstrate project outcomes prior to receiving funds for the following year.

The selected grantee(s) is required to contribute a **minimum match** (cash or in-kind) of **25 percent of total project costs** (grant funds + match). Federal funds <u>cannot</u> be used as match. Please see the [Grants Manual](#) for information on match requirements.

Entities with a federally negotiated Indirect Cost Rate (ICR) agreement may elect to charge indirect costs to the project and a copy of the ICR agreement <u>must</u> be included with the application. Board staff will review the ICR agreement to determine the most appropriate cost rate. Entities that do not have a negotiated cost rate agreement may elect to charge a de minimis rate of 10 percent of modified total direct costs (MTDC definition can be found in the Grants Manual). In light of the Board's limited funds availability, **applicants are <u>strongly</u> encouraged to use indirect costs towards the minimum match requirement.**

Application Submission Process

The review of proposals will be completed as listed in the below table. Eligible applicants may submit a Proposal application which will be reviewed and scored by the Board's Grant Review Team (GRT). Final awards will be made after the review of all proposal applications. Key dates are listed below.

Application Activities	Key Dates
Technical Assistance for Proposal submission	March 27, 2026
Proposal applications due	**April 17, 2026, *by 4 p.m. ET***
Notification of funding decisions	June 10, 2026
Earliest possible project start date	**July 15, 2026**

The Board only accepts grant applications submitted electronically through the performance management and government resource planning site called DD Suite.

In order to submit a Proposal Application, applicants must first register with DD Suite to create an account. Please allow sufficient time to complete your account registration. If you experience any difficulties with registration, please see the DD Suite technical assistance page.

Proposal Applications must be **received electronically** in the **DD Suite** system by **4 p.m. ET** on or before the due date listed in the above table. **Late submissions will not be accepted for any reason.**

All **submission requirements** can be found in the [Grants Manual](#). Be sure to review the Grants Manual prior to submission of a proposal. In addition, all required reports and other documents should be submitted to the Board in Microsoft Word format.

Proposal applications should contain clear and concise information on the following:
☐ **Coversheet**
☐ **Abstract**
☐ **Budget**
☐ **Budget Justification Narrative**
☐ **Budget Form**
☐ **Quarterly Activity Timeline & Expenditure Projections**
☐ **Narrative (max 20 double-spaced pages)**
☐ **Applicant Profile**
☐ **Cultural and Linguistic Competence**
☐ **Target Population**
☐ **Involvement of Individuals with DD & Families in Project Development,**
☐ **Collaboration**
☐ **Systems Change & Capacity Building**
☐ **Sustainability**
☐ **Work Plan: Project Goal, Objectives, Activities, Outputs, Outcomes, and Stories**
☐ **Strength of Evidence***
☐ **Evaluation Plan**

Strength of Evidence: Describe in detail the evidence-based model/approach you have chosen and why it was selected for your project, i.e., what is the evidence that supports your approach.

Review and Scoring of Applications

Each *Proposal* will be date and time stamped upon electronic receipt. Late proposals will not be reviewed. After a review for technical completeness, the GRT will review all proposals. Within the dollar amount available, the highest scoring proposals will be recommended to the Board for funding. Cut off scores are at the discretion of the GRT. A project Work Plan (see page 21 in the Grants Manual for required elements) must be developed and clearly demonstrate how the proposed activities align with the Board's Goals and Objectives.

Full Proposal Scoring
Applicant Profile………5 pts
Alignment with the Board's Goals and Objectives**…………………………………………………………………10 pts
Cultural and Linguistic Competence………………………………………………………………………………………5 pts
Target Population………5 pts
Involvement of Individuals with DD and Families in Project Development, Implementation and Evaluation…………………………………………………………………………………6 pts
Collaboration………6 pts
Systems Change & Capacity Building……………………………………………………………………………………5 pts
Sustainability……..8 pts
Work Plan: Project Goal, Objectives, Activities, Outputs, Outcomes, and Stories ……………………………………………………25 pts
Strength of Evidence………………………………………………………………………………………………………7 pts
Evaluation Plan……8 pts
Budget……10 pts
Bonus Points (projects with statewide reach)………………………………………………………………………5 pts
Total Possible Points………………………………………………………………………………………………105 pts

**Alignment with the Board's State Plan Goals and Objectives – In order to achieve the intended outcome(s), it is crucial for an intended grant project to align with the Goals and Objectives from the Board's 5-Year State Plan. Proposals which do not clearly align may not be recommended for funding by the Board's Grant Review Team (GRT).

Evaluation Requirements

Applicants **must** identify outputs **and** outcomes that the applicant will report on for each proposed work plan activity, to the extent possible. For information on the difference between outputs and outcomes, see the Grants Manual and tip sheets on the Board's grants webpage. Applicants must identify quantifiable targets for each output and outcome to the extent possible (e.g., 20 people with disabilities trained, at least 15 of whom have a developmental disability; 80% of project participants report increased knowledge).

Applicants must also demonstrate to the Board that they have the organizational capacity to collect and report the required data. If the applicant's evaluation capacity is limited, the applicant should consider allocating up to 10-15% of their proposed budget to external evaluation support. Board staff can provide general guidance about what needs to be collected, and potential collection methods, but do not have the resources to provide substantial support with designing and administering evaluation tools. For information on best practices in survey design that could help with data collection, see the tip sheets on the Board's grants webpage.

Applicants must also collect demographic data for project participants with developmental disabilities and their family members, to the extent possible. The required demographic data currently includes race/ethnicity, geographical location, and gender (see table below), but is subject to change based on federal guidance. Demographic information for other project participants is also welcome but not required. The Board's grants webpage has a tip sheet on how to collect the required demographic information.

Race/Ethnicity
American Indian or Alaska Native
Asian
Black or African American
Hispanic/Latino or Latina
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
White
Two or more races
Other race or ethnicity
Do not know or do not want to answer the question
I prefer to describe myself
Geographic Location
Rural
Urban
Do not know or do not want to answer the question
Gender
Female
Male
Other
Do not know or do not want to answer the question
I prefer to describe myself

For successful applicants, Board staff will use the applicant's proposal and federal guidance to identify federal performance measures and other required impact data that the applicant must report on. The federal performance measures highlight select outputs and outcomes that are of interest to the Board's federal funders. Board staff reserve the right to require successful applicants to collect data that is not included in the grantee's original proposal but that Board staff deem necessary to demonstrate project impact, based on federal guidance.

Reporting Requirements

All grantees will be required to submit **quarterly and final programmatic and financial progress** reports. Grantees also will be expected to track and share aggregated data about their projects and participants. Reporting deadlines and requirements will be included in the award letter and contract. In some circumstances, the Board may require monthly programmatic and/or financial reporting. In addition, some grantees may be required to

provide post grant reporting and more frequent reports may be required in certain circumstances.

The Board requires that the selected grantee provide (in the quarterly program reports, final report, or at other times as requested) **stories about people with developmental and other disabilities and their families whose lives have improved as a result of grant activities**. Examples of the types of stories (who, what, when, where and why) the Board is looking for may include: how someone became more independent because they obtained employment, housing, or transportation; how someone became more connected to their community as a result of opportunities provided through the grant; or how someone was able to remain in the community vs. being institutionalized. The privacy of program participants must be protected at all times.

Definitions

Cultural competence: The National Center for Cultural Competence (NCCC) at Georgetown University defines **culture** as "…a system of collectively held values, beliefs, and practices of a group which guides thinking and actions in patterned ways." The Board considers **cultural competence** to include the following: the organization has defined values, principles and policies that demonstrate that (1) diversity and differences are valued; (2) the organization is able to work effectively across cultures and adapt to the cultural context of the communities being served; (3) the organization recognizes the importance of cultural sensitivity towards the target audience; and (4) it is able to incorporate these values, principles and policies in each aspect of policy-making, administration, practice, service delivery and systematically involve consumers, families and community members.

Linguistic competence: The NCCC defines **linguistic competence** as "…the capacity of an organization and its personnel to communicate effectively, and convey information in a manner that is easily understood by diverse groups including persons of limited English proficiency, those who have low literacy skills or are not literate, individuals experiencing disabilities, and those who are deaf or hard of hearing. Linguistic competence requires organizational and provider capacity to respond effectively to the health and mental health literacy needs of populations served. The organization must have policies, structures, practices, procedures, and dedicated resources to support this capacity."[1]

Developmental disability: Developmental disability (DD), as defined in federal law, is a severe, chronic, often lifelong disability that causes substantial limitations in several major life activities such as: self-care, receptive and expressive language, learning, mobility, self-direction, the capacity for independent living, and economic self-sufficiency. It is attributable to a mental, emotional, sensory, and/or physical impairment that is apparent before the age of twenty-two. People with developmental disabilities often need a combination of special services, support, and other assistance that is likely to continue indefinitely.

[1]The Cultural and Linguistic Competence Assessment for Disability Organizations (CLCADO), National Center for Cultural Competence, Georgetown University https://nccc.georgetown.edu/assessments/clcado.php

Capacity building: Expand and/or improve the ability of individuals with developmental disabilities, families, supports, services and/or systems to promote, support and enhance self-determination, independence, productivity and inclusion in community life.

Systems change: Transform fragmented approaches into a coordinated and effective system which ensures that individuals with DD and their families participate in the design of, and have access to, needed community services, individualized supports, and other assistance that promote self-determination, independence, productivity, and integration and inclusion in all facets of community life.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who can apply for funding from the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities' Competitive Grant Program?

Eligible organizations include state or other public agencies, including universities, non-profit organizations or for-profit organizations. The Board encourages braided funding and partnerships. Please be sure to clearly describe the planned role and responsibilities of each partner at all stages of the project. Only one organization can receive the grant and will be contractually responsible for grant administration, reporting and delivery of the project.

Where does VBPD receive its funding?

Board grants are 100% federally funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Community Living (ACL), Office of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (OIDD).

Can an organization submit more than one application in response to this RFP?

No.

Are Board grantees required to have an active UEI number in order to be a recipient of federal funds?

Yes. An active **Unique Entity Identifie**r (UEI) number is required in order to receive federal funds. On April 4, 2022, the federal government stopped using Dun & Bradstreet Numbering System (DUNS) numbers. If the grantee does not have the new, non-proprietary identifier called the Unique Entity Identifier (UEI), or the Entity ID, please request one from the System for Award Management (SAM.gov).

Are there community types you're interested in?

We are particularly interested in projects that benefit individuals with developmental disabilities who are part of underserved, low-income and/or culturally diverse communities.

If I currently have an active grant from the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities, can I submit an application?

Yes.

How are grantees reimbursed for project expenses?

All grant payments are processed on a cost reimbursable basis.