GO Virginia Region 6
Rivers Region Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

GO Virginia Region 6
Regional Entrepreneurial Initiative (REI)
Action Plan

Thrive by Water

Innovating Region 6's Entrepreneurial Spirit

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Submitted by

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Executive Summary

GO Virginia Region 6—spanning the Fredericksburg area, the Middle Peninsula, and the Northern Neck—sits at the intersection of world class research assets, a water connected economic landscape, and a growing base of entrepreneurial activity. Yet despite strong ingredients for innovation, the region's entrepreneurial ecosystem operates unevenly across its subregions, with limited navigation support, inconsistent commercialization pathways, and challenges in accessing early stage capital. The Region 6 Regional Entrepreneurial Initiative (REI) Action Plan addresses these gaps through a coordinated, region wide strategy designed to strengthen founder support, accelerate commercialization, increase high growth business opportunities, and expand access to capital.

A Vision Anchored in "Thrive by Water"

The plan is grounded in the regional identity of *Thrive by Water*—a recognition that waterways shape the geography, culture, industries, and economic potential of Region 6. Bounded by the Potomac, Rappahannock, and York Rivers, the region's water-connected assets, such as the Naval Surface Warfare Center Dahlgren Division (NSWCDD) and its strategic use of the Potomac River Test Range, Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) located in Gloucester Point, the Blue Catfish Initiative, aquaculture clusters, and maritime manufacturing, create unique opportunities for innovation. At the same time, these water-defined geographies pose challenges for connectivity, access, and collaboration. The REI Action Plan positions Region 6 to convert its natural and research-based advantages into high-growth business creation, supported by region-wide ecosystem infrastructure that reaches every community, regardless of shoreline or distance.

Three Regional Priorities

The strategy is guided by three long horizon regional priorities:

1. **Strengthen Entrepreneur Support & Founder Discovery**
   Build a unified, region wide support system that makes it easy for entrepreneurs to find help, navigate resources, and connect with peers and mentors.
2. **Advance Technology Commercialization & High Growth Development**
   Leverage the Naval Surface Warfare Center Dahlgren Division (NSWCDD), VIMS, aquaculture, coastal resilience expertise, and other regional research strengths to drive commercialization and high growth business formation.
3. **Expand Capital Access & Regional Network Connections**
   Increase the availability of early-stage capital across all subregions through a coordinated angel network, micro-seed investments, and founder-investor readiness support.

These priorities form the backbone of the action plan and shape the recommendations and projects that follow.

Four Major Recommendations

The REI Plan includes four mutually reinforcing recommendations:

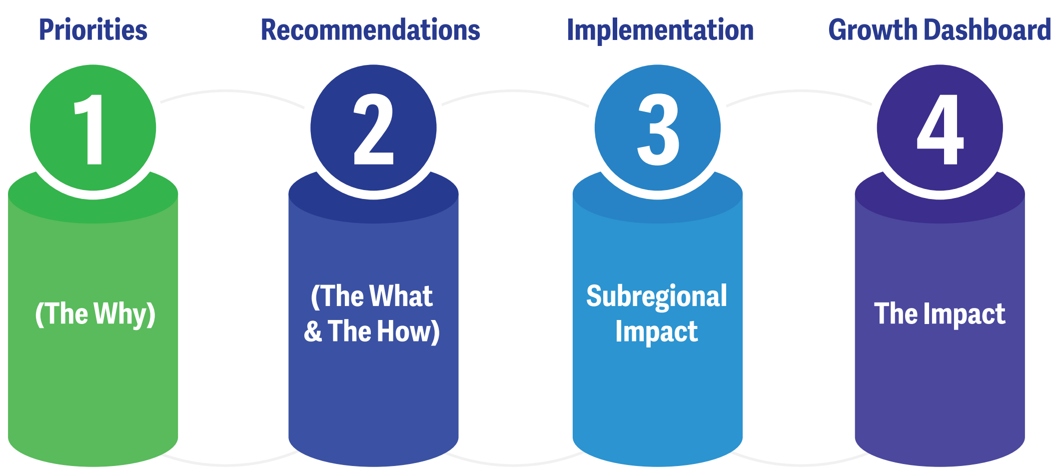
- **Recommendation 1:** Fredericksburg Subregion High Growth Business Development
  Strengthens dual-use commercialization opportunities anchored by the NSWCDD and the Potomac Tech Bridge.
- **Recommendation 2:** Middle Peninsula Subregion High Growth Business Development
  Builds commercialization pathways for environmental, coastal resilience, and aquaculture innovations anchored by VIMS and water based industries.

- **Recommendation 3:** Northern Neck Subregion High Growth Business Development
  Scales seafood, aquaculture, and water connected industries through product development, commercialization, and strategic workforce alignment.
- **Recommendation 4:** Regional Project Portfolio (4a–4d)
  A coordinated set of region wide initiatives providing essential infrastructure:
    - **4a:** Entrepreneur Support Hub Network, Advisory Councils & Communications
    - **4b:** Dahlgren/VIMS Commercialization Pipeline
    - **4c:** Angel Network & Micro-Seed Fund
    - **4d:** Maker, Inventor & Product Entrepreneurship Initiative

Recommendations 1–3 define ***what*** each subregion must achieve.
Recommendation 4 defines ***how*** the region enables and supports them.

A Four Tier Strategy Architecture

The plan's Visual Strategy Map showcases the entire framework across four tiers:



This structure demonstrates how regional vision becomes local execution—and how execution becomes quantifiable economic impact.

Expected Outcomes

The Region 6 REI Plan aims to significantly strengthen entrepreneurial capacity and economic mobility across the region. Anticipated impacts include:

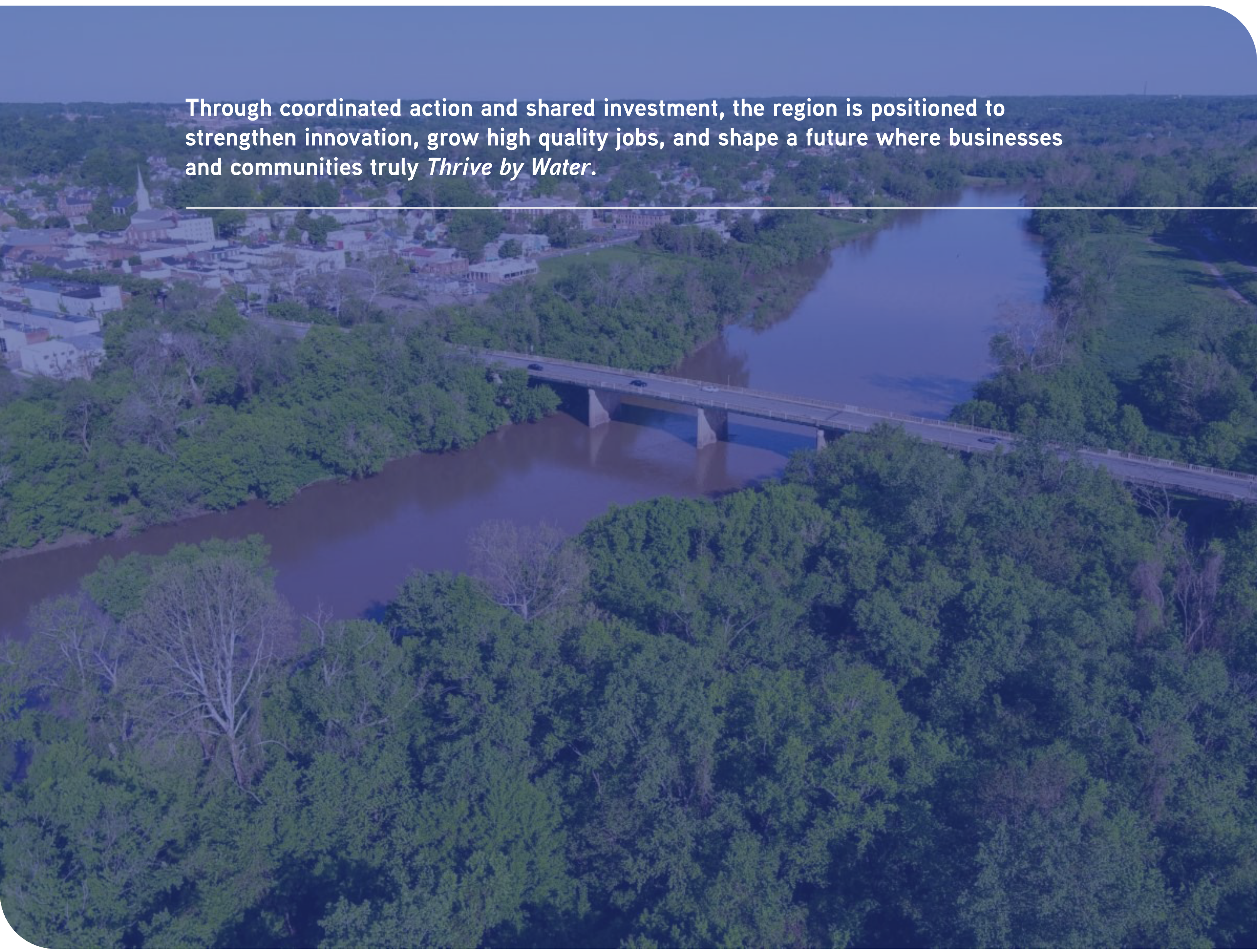
- Increased Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR)/Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) submissions and awards
- New high growth business formation across all three subregions
- Expanded commercialization of federal and marine science research
- Improved capital access through a region wide angel network
- Greater founder satisfaction and resource navigation
- Geographically and strategically placed entrepreneurial infrastructure including incubators, accelerators, meeting spaces, test beds, and other similar facilities
- Increased jobs, income, and start-ups
- Stronger storytelling and visibility for regional entrepreneurs and investors
- Enhanced collaboration across rural, coastal, and urban communities

Implementation and Accountability

The implementation framework includes clear roles for the Region 6 Council, project leads, and local partners. A region-wide reporting cycle, a shared Key Performance Indicators (KPI) dashboard, and a governance structure will ensure transparency, performance management, and continuous improvement. A multi source funding strategy—including state, federal, philanthropic, and private capital—supports scalability and long term sustainability.

Closing Summary

Together, this REI Action Plan provides a unified regional strategy that leverages the unique strengths of the Fredericksburg, Middle Peninsula, and Northern Neck subregions. It builds the foundational infrastructure—commercialization pathways, support hubs, capital networks, and other entrepreneurial ecosystem components—required to enable entrepreneurs to succeed anywhere in Region 6.



Through coordinated action and shared investment, the region is positioned to strengthen innovation, grow high quality jobs, and shape a future where businesses and communities truly *Thrive by Water*.

Regional Background & Context

Geography & Subregional Overview:

GO Virginia Region 6 encompasses three planning districts: the George Washington Regional Commission, the Middle Peninsula, and the Northern Neck.

The **George Washington Regional Commission** includes the jurisdictions of Fredericksburg and the counties of Caroline, King George, Spotsylvania, and Stafford. Positioned along the Interstate-95 corridor between Northern Virginia and Richmond, this district is the fifth largest and fastest-growing of the 21 planning districts in Virginia. The region benefits from a highly skilled workforce and proximity to major federal and defense employers. Its economy includes expanding sectors in advanced manufacturing, logistics, professional services, and technology. These assets create significant opportunities to strengthen an entrepreneurial ecosystem that supports startups, small businesses, and innovation-driven enterprises.

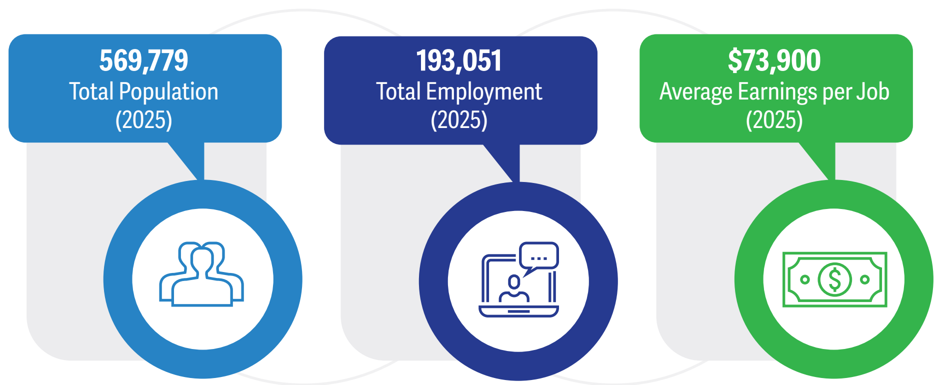
The **Middle Peninsula Planning District Commission** represents the counties of Essex, Gloucester, King and Queen, King William, Mathews, and Middlesex. The region's economy is characterized by a mix of maritime industries, aquaculture, tourism, agriculture, and small-scale manufacturing. Many communities are rural and coastal, with strong traditions of small business ownership and locally rooted enterprises. Expanding entrepreneurial support systems – such as technical assistance, access to capital, and innovation networks – can help diversify the economy and support new ventures that build on the region's natural resources and workforce.

The **Northern Neck Planning District Commission** serves the counties of Lancaster, Northumberland, Richmond, and Westmoreland. Located between the Potomac and Rappahannock Rivers, the region has a distinctive economic base shaped by water-dependent industries, agriculture, tourism, and heritage assets. Small businesses and entrepreneurial ventures play a central role in sustaining local economies across rural communities. Strengthening the regional entrepreneurial ecosystem can help foster business formation, support innovation in maritime and tourism sectors, and expand opportunities for local workforce participation.

The identity of **GO Virginia Region 6** is shaped by its proximity to major rivers and the Chesapeake Bay. These waterways support maritime industries, tourism, recreation, and agriculture, and each planning district leverages its waterfront resources in unique ways. Ultimately, the region's proximity to water drives economic activity, supports high growth business development, sustains small businesses, and fosters entrepreneurial ventures tied to both traditional and emerging industries.

Economic Base:

GO Virginia Region 6 has a diverse economic base that includes long-standing, heritage industries and emerging sectors alike. The region hosts a mix of manufacturing, agriculture, tourism, and service-oriented businesses alongside growing clusters in technology, professional services, and healthcare. Its economy is shaped by both urban centers and rural communities, creating a dynamic environment where established businesses and startups coexist. This diversity provides a strong foundation for fostering innovation, supporting business growth, and strengthening the regional workforce.



The region's top private industries, as measured by Gross Regional Product (GRP), include retail trade, professional and technical services, health care, finance and insurance, and construction. These high-performing sectors reflect both the region's consumer base and its growing professional and knowledge-driven economy. Their strength highlights opportunities to build targeted entrepreneurial support, attract complementary businesses, and create high-quality jobs. Leveraging these industries can serve as a foundation for expanding the region's economic and workforce development initiatives.

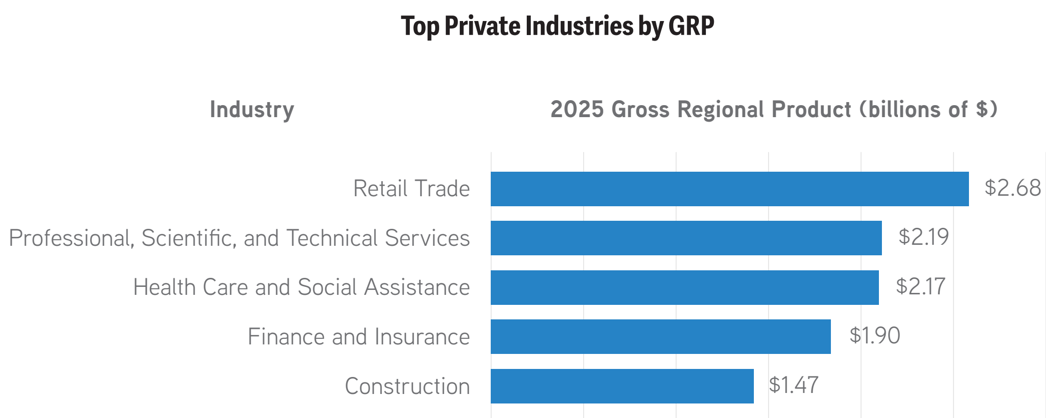
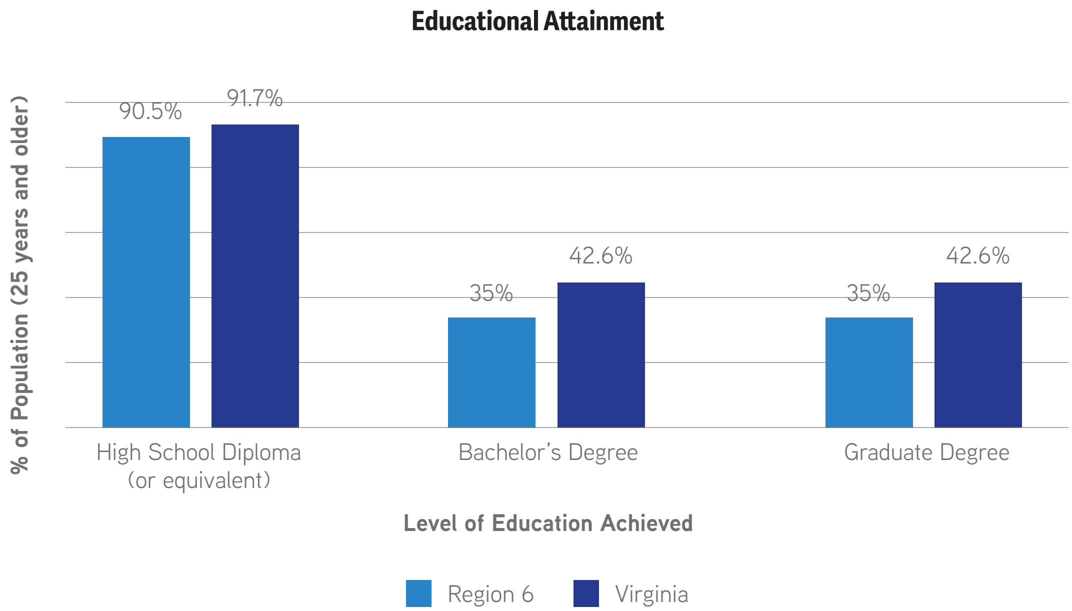


Figure 1: Top Private Industries by GRP. Source: Lightcast 2026.1

GO Virginia Region 6 has educational attainment levels generally lower than the state average, with a smaller share of residents holding postsecondary degrees. This gap represents a clear opportunity to attract new talent, expand the availability of high-quality jobs, and foster business growth across the region. By investing in workforce development, training programs, and entrepreneurial support, the region can strengthen its talent pipeline and build a highly skilled workforce prepared to support innovation-driven industries. Enhancing educational attainment will directly contribute to a more competitive and resilient regional economy.



There are several educational institutions in the region, including community colleges, four-year universities, and specialized technical programs that provide training for workers in a variety of industries. These institutions serve as critical sources of talent, research, and workforce development. The region also benefits from a strong federal and military presence, including nearby bases, federal agencies, and research facilities, which contribute to economic stability, advanced technical expertise, and opportunities for public-private partnerships. Together, these educational and federal assets create a foundation for building a skilled, innovative workforce.

Innovation & Entrepreneurship Landscape:

While several unique features of the region impact its local economies, the Naval Surface Warfare Center Dahlgren Division (NSWCDD) plays an especially important role. NSWCDD serves as a major anchor for high-tech research, engineering, and defense innovation. Its presence supports a concentration of highly skilled science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) professionals and creates opportunities for technology transfer, contracting, and collaboration with local businesses and startups. Many small and mid-sized firms in the region leverage Dahlgren's expertise and federal contracts to develop specialized products and services, particularly in cybersecurity, electronics, and advanced engineering. By fostering innovation-driven partnerships and providing access to cutting-edge technology, Dahlgren helps strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystem and positions the region as a hub for advanced technical industries.

The region's geographical location, too, impacts its industry composition in several important ways. Rivers, tributaries, and the Chesapeake Bay support industries such as commercial fishing, aquaculture, boating, and waterfront tourism. These industries capture local businesses that have long supported the region's economy and sustained local communities. Many emerging industries, too, are connected to the region's natural assets, such as maritime technology, environmental services, and recreational enterprises. The region's proximity to water undoubtedly provides many opportunities for innovation and local business growth.

Region 6 encompasses both urban centers, like Fredericksburg, and expansive rural communities across the Middle Peninsula and Northern Neck. This mix creates a dynamic economic landscape; urban areas often support professional services, healthcare, and technology businesses, while rural areas maintain strong agricultural, maritime, and small-business traditions. There is a strong need for region-wide strategies that connect talent, infrastructure, and entrepreneurial growth across industries. The Region is a sweet spot nestled between Washington, DC and Northern Virginia in the north and Richmond and Hampton Roads in the south.

Historic Engagement Themes:

In recent years, Region 6 has engaged its residents and businesses in other planning and reporting processes. The RREE 2025-2029 Strategic Plan, the Region 6 Growth & Diversification Plan, Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for each subregion, previous studies conducted (e.g. Chapman and TEConomy reports) and others have illuminated stakeholders' perceptions of the region's business ecosystem's strengths and weaknesses. Some key engagement findings of those reports include:

- **Strong natural and cultural assets:** Stakeholders repeatedly emphasized Region 6's extensive waterfront resources, historic communities, and high quality of life. These assets support tourism, maritime industries, and place based entrepreneurship and remain central to the region's economic identity.
- **Infrastructure and workforce gaps constrain growth:** Despite significant progress in broadband expansion since COVID 19, ongoing gaps in transportation, water and sewer capacity, and digital connectivity continue to affect many communities. Combined with workforce shortages and lower educational attainment levels, these challenges create barriers to business expansion, operational efficiency, and long term talent retention.
- **Opportunities to grow innovation-driven businesses:** Stakeholders identified strong potential to build innovation oriented sectors by leveraging technology transfer opportunities and emerging industries such as specialty agriculture, maritime technology, aquaculture, tourism, and remote work enabled ventures. These areas present opportunities to diversify and strengthen the region's entrepreneurial ecosystem.
- **Need for stronger regional collaboration and economic diversification:** Stakeholders consistently expressed a desire for more coordinated support across both high growth and Main Street businesses. Enhanced workforce development, stronger resource navigation, and improved regional collaboration were highlighted as key strategies to diversify the economy and attract new investment and talent.

These cross-cutting insights directly informed the design and selection of the projects and priorities within this REI Plan.

Regional insight:

Region 6's innovation potential is anchored in its geography—defense, cybersecurity, maritime, aquaculture, outdoor recreation, and tourism are all water-connected.

Ecosystem Assessment

The Region 6 entrepreneurial ecosystem reflects a diverse mix of urban, rural, coastal, and research driven economies. To design an effective regional strategy, this plan assesses the region's current landscape across its strengths, gaps, opportunities, and challenges. This assessment draws on quantitative data, stakeholder input, previous GO Virginia planning efforts, and analysis of existing ecosystem assets. Together, these elements provide a clear picture of the region's entrepreneurial capacity and the strategic actions needed to strengthen innovation, business formation, and economic resilience.

Strengths:

The region possesses several foundational strengths that support entrepreneurship and innovation:

1. **STEM Workforce:** Region 6 benefits from a significant base of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) talent supported by federal employers, defense contractors, and technical training institutions. This concentration creates a strong foundation for innovation-driven industries and advanced business growth.
2. **Federal Assets:** The Naval Surface Warfare Center Dahlgren Division (NSWCDD) anchors high-tech research, engineering expertise, and contracting opportunities. It remains one of the region's most powerful innovation engines.
3. **Strong Main Street Business Formation:** The region demonstrates consistent small business formation, particularly in Main Street and downtown corridors. This activity strengthens local economic vitality and provides a pipeline for broader entrepreneurial development.
4. **Natural Assets:** Extensive waterfronts, natural beauty, and outdoor recreation assets support tourism, quality of life, and water-dependent industries — creating opportunities for place-based entrepreneurship and blue-economy innovation.

Gaps:

Despite these strengths, the region faces structural gaps that constrain entrepreneurial growth:

1. **Limited High Growth Business Base:** The region has relatively few scalable, high growth firms.
2. **Early Stage Capital Gaps:** Angel investment is limited, and early stage financing options are scarce.
3. **Weak Commercialization Pathways:** Research, talent, and technical expertise are not consistently translated into commercial activity.
4. **Limited Customer Discovery Capacity:** Founders lack structured pathways to validate markets and achieve product market fit.
5. **Insufficient Maker & Prototyping Support:** There are few accessible maker spaces, collabs, incubators, accelerators, fabrication assets, or technical prototyping resources.
6. **Weak Marketing & Storytelling:** Successes, resources, and entrepreneurial identity are not widely visible across the region.
7. **Underutilized Educational Assets:** Higher education and workforce institutions are not fully leveraged for entrepreneurship or applied learning.
8. **Insufficient Data & Performance Tracking:** Ecosystem actors lack integrated data systems to track outcomes and inform decision making.
9. **Veteran and Minority Underrepresentation in both High Growth and Main Street Business Entrepreneurship development:** Access, inclusion, and support gaps persist across the entrepreneurial pipeline.

10. **Talent Pipeline Misalignment:** Training systems are not consistently aligned with employer demand or emerging industry needs.
11. **Fragmentation & Navigation Challenges:** Ecosystem services are not coordinated, making it difficult for entrepreneurs to find the right support.
12. **No Clear Regional "Front Door":** There is no unified entry point for entrepreneurs seeking guidance, resources, or technical assistance.

Opportunities:

The region has several high-potential opportunities to build a competitive advantage:

1. **Cross Regional Partnerships:** Collaborations with GO Virginia Regions 3, 5, 7, and 9 can expand markets, expertise, and access to innovation networks.
2. **Water Linked Innovation:** Proximity to waterways creates opportunities in maritime technology, environmental science, resilience, and aquaculture.
3. **Blue Economy Development:** Growth in fisheries, seafood systems, and marine technologies can create a distinctive regional cluster.
4. **Federal & Research and Development (R&D) Technology Transfer:** NSWCDD (and access, through partnership agreements, to unused patents for potential technology transition and commercialization applications) and the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) offer commercialization potential that can drive high growth business development.
5. **Improved Programmatic Pipelines:** Creating structured entry points for founders will increase navigation efficiency and support.
6. **Coordinated Aquaculture Initiatives:** Aligning disparate programs can strengthen the region's blue economy innovation ecosystem.

Challenges:

Several broader challenges shape the ecosystem's performance:

1. **Broadband Limitations:** Although broadband access has improved in recent years—particularly since COVID 19—important gaps remain in many rural and coastal areas. These ongoing connectivity limitations reduce access to digital markets, remote work, virtual training, and online education.
2. **Capital Constraints:** Limited availability of early stage and risk capital continues to hinder startup formation and the growth of innovation driven ventures across all three subregions.
3. **Talent Development & Retention Issues:** The region continues to struggle with retaining young professionals and attracting highly skilled workers. Many residents commute outside the region for employment, reducing local talent availability for emerging and existing businesses.
4. **Regional Fragmentation:** Geographic distance, small population centers, and organizational silos make it difficult to collaborate consistently across subregions. This fragmentation limits ecosystem efficiency and reduces visibility of available resources.

Why It Matters:

Addressing these gaps positions Region 6 to convert its assets into measurable economic growth, strengthen cross-regional collaboration, and unlock fundable, high-impact opportunities that enhance the region's long-term competitiveness.

Impact:

Addressing these gaps enables actionable, fundable regional transformation.

Region 6 Ecosystem Assessment: Accelerating Entrepreneurial Growth

STRENGTHS

STEM Workforce

- Concentrated talent supported by federal and training institutions

Federal Assets

- Naval Surface Warfare Center Dahlgren anchors R&D & contracting

Main Street

- Consistent small business formation in downtown corridors

Natural Assets

- Extensive waterfronts support blue-economy innovation

GAPS

- **Limited High-Growth:** Fewer scalable firms
- **Early-Stage Capital Gaps:** Scarce seed funds
- **Weak Commercialization:** Unused research
- **Customer Discovery:** Market validation gap
- **Maker & Prototype Support:** Few maker spaces
- **Marketing & Storytelling:** Low visibility
- **Insufficient Data:** Tracking data gap
- **Minority Underrepresentation:** Inclusion gap
- **Talent Misalignment:** Skills/demand gap
- **Fragmentation:** Uncoordinated services

CURRENT STATE

Diverse mix of urban, rural, coastal, research

OPPORTUNITIES

- **Cross Regional Partnerships:** Collaborations with GO Virginia Regions 3, 5, 7 & 9
- **Water-Linked Innovation:** Maritime tech, environmental science
- **Blue Economy Development:** Growth in seafood systems & marine tech clusters
- **Fed & R&D Tech Transfer:** Dahlgren & VIMS drive high-growth business formation
- **Programmatic Pipelines:** Structured entry points for founders increase navitgation
- **Coordinated Aquaculture:** Aligning disparate blue economy programs

CHALLENGES

Broadband

- Connectivity constraints hinder digital markets

Capital Constraints

- Limited risk capital availability for growth

Talent Issues

- Difficulty retaining young and skilled workers

Fragmentation

- Distance and silos reduce regional collaboration

ANALYSIS DRIVERS

Quantitative Data, Input, GO Virginia Planning, Existing Assets

WHY IT MATTERS

Converting assets to measurable growth, strengthening cross regional collaboration, and unlocking high impact opportunities

Visual Strategy Map

How the Plan Fits Together

This strategy map provides a concise, four tier view of how the Region 6 REI Action Plan moves from vision to measurable economic impact. Each tier represents a different layer of strategy:

TIER 1
Priorities (The Why):
Founder Discovery, Commercialization, and Capital Access establish the core drivers of entrepreneurial growth in Region 6.

TIER 2
Recommendations (The What and The How):
Recommendations 1–3 describe what each subregion aims to achieve through high growth business development, while Recommendation 4 outlines how the region provides shared infrastructure through Projects 4a–4d.

TIER 3
Subregional Implementation & Impact:
This tier highlights where work occurs across Fredericksburg (Planning District (PD) 16), the Middle Peninsula (PD 18), and the Northern Neck (PD 17), translating strategies into action.

TIER 4
The Growth Dashboard (The Impact):
The final tier shows how success will be measured, including Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) wins, job creation, firm formation, income growth, high-growth business creation, and commercialization outcomes.

Together, these tiers provide a clear snapshot of how vision, strategy, regional infrastructure, and local implementation connect across the Region 6 entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Strategic Growth Infographic: From Vision to Impact

PRIORITIES (The Why)

Founder Discovery:
1. Entrepreneur support founder discovery

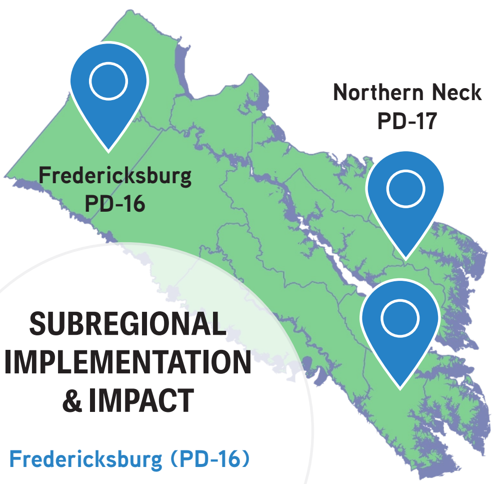
Commercialization:
2. High-growth development

Capital Access:
3. Connecting to regional funding

RECOMMENDATIONS (The Strategy Split)

1. Fredericksburg HGB | 2. Middle Peninsula HGB | 3. Northern Neck HGB
4. Regional Portfolio: (4a) Hub Network | (4b) Dahlgren/VIMS Pipeline | (4c) Angel + Micro-Seed (4d) Maker/Product

THE HUBS: Regional Location-Specific Goals (Recs 1-3)



SUBREGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION & IMPACT

Fredericksburg (PD-16)
Middle Peninsula (PD-18)
Northern Neck (PD-17)

THE PORTFOLIO: Strategic Project Toolbox (4a-4d)

Hub Network (4a)

Angel & Micro-Seed (4c)

Dahlgren/VIMS Pipeline (4b)

Maker & Product Dev (4d)

THE GROWTH DASHBOARD (The Impact)

1. SBIR Wins
2. Job Creation
3. Firm Formation
4. Income Growth
5. HGB Creation
6. Commercialization

Regional Priorities & Strategies

The following section outlines the three regional priorities that guide all elements of the Region 6 REI Plan. These priorities define the region's long term strategic focus and establish the foundation for the recommendations and projects that follow. Each priority represents a core driver of entrepreneurial growth—supporting founders, accelerating commercialization, and expanding access to capital across all subregions. Together, they provide the strategic backbone for coordinated, region-wide action.

Priority 1 — Strengthen Entrepreneur Support & Founder Discovery:

Priority Overview

Region 6's entrepreneurial ecosystem is rich with programs, institutions, and local champions, but these assets are not connected and operate inconsistently across the region. Strengthening support for entrepreneurs requires building coordinated systems that make it easier for founders to find resources, receive guidance, and navigate the ecosystem, regardless of where they live. This priority focuses on reducing fragmentation, improving visibility, and creating the connective tissue needed to support founders at every stage.

Why This Priority Matters

Entrepreneurs across Region 6 consistently identify challenges in knowing **where to start**, who to talk to, and how to access support. Existing Entrepreneurial Support Organizations (ESOs) do meaningful work but lack a unified structure, which limits regional collaboration and reduces the visibility of available resources. Strengthening support and discovery is essential for increasing founder engagement, improving satisfaction, and accelerating the startup pipeline.

Key Strategies

- Build a **region-wide support hub network** that provides clear navigation and consistent access points.
- Deploy a **regional ecosystem builder** to coordinate organizations, events, and communications.
- Launch region-wide **founder discovery activities**, including rotating meetups and workshops.
- Standardize **wayfinding and navigation tools** (website, referral systems, resource guides).
- Strengthen entrepreneurial **storytelling and visibility** across all three subregions.

Connected Recommendations & Projects

- **Primary Projects:**
  - 4a — Regional Entrepreneur Support Hub Network, Advisory Councils & Communications
  - 4d — Maker, Inventor & Product Entrepreneurship Initiative
- **Supports:**
  - All subregional high-growth projects (Projects 1–3)

How it Supports *Thrive by Water*

Creates unified access across a geographically dispersed, water-connected region by ensuring every community — regardless of shoreline or distance — has consistent entrepreneurial support.

Priority 2 — Advance Technology Commercialization & High-Growth Development:

Priority Overview

Region 6 is home to powerful innovative drivers — including the Naval Surface Warfare Center Dahlgren Division (NSWCDD), the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS), the Blue Catfish initiative, the Festival Halle Aquaculture Incubator, and a growing set of water-based industries. This priority strengthens the commercialization pipeline, expands Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR)/Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) competitiveness, and accelerates the formation of high-growth businesses across all three subregions.

Why This Priority Matters

Commercialization and tech transfer represent Region 6's most significant untapped opportunity. Subregions have strong but underutilized research assets and emerging water-based industries, yet founders face barriers to accessing patents, research expertise, test beds, and commercialization pathways. Advancing high-growth development ensures that research, innovation, and natural assets translate into new companies, jobs, and investment.

Key Strategies

- Expand **technology transfer** and dual-use commercialization opportunities with NSWCDD and Potomac Tech Bridge.
- Strengthen **research-based entrepreneurship and high-growth business development** in the Middle Peninsula and Northern Neck.
- Establish **SBIR Phase 0** programming to increase proposal quality and founder readiness.
- Build a structured **commercialization pipeline** for technologies emerging from Dahlgren, VIMS, aquaculture, and coastal resiliency sectors.
- Support **sector-aligned innovation** (marine science, seafood systems, defense systems, coastal adaptation).

Connected Recommendations & Projects

- **Primary Recommendations:**
    - Recommendation 1 — Fredericksburg High-Growth Business Development
    - Recommendation 2 — Middle Peninsula High-Growth Business Development
    - Recommendation 3 — Northern Neck High-Growth Business Development
    - Project 4b — Dahlgren/VIMS Commercialization Pipeline

How it Supports *Thrive by Water*

Transforms water-connected research strengths — marine science, aquaculture, naval systems, and coastal innovation — into commercial ventures that drive regional prosperity.

Priority 3 — Expand Capital Access & Regional Network Connections:

Priority Overview
Capital availability is one of the most persistent constraints facing Region 6 entrepreneurs. Founders frequently cite difficulty accessing even early-stage funding, and rural/urban disparities exacerbate these challenges. Expanding access to capital ensures that startups can secure the financial resources needed to test, grow, and scale their ventures.

Why This Priority Matters
Without access to early-stage capital, innovative businesses stall before reaching viability. Region 6 lacks a coordinated angel network, has limited investor readiness programming, and experiences siloed investment activity across subregions. Expanding access to capital and regional network connections is crucial for building a vibrant, competitive entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Key Strategies

- Launch a **Region 6 Angel Network** to facilitate early-stage investment.
- Establish a **micro-seed fund** offering first in capital ($10K–$50K).
- Provide **investor readiness training** for founders.
- Connect startups with **regional, statewide, and national investment networks**.
- Reduce **capital access disparities** between rural and urban communities.

Connected Recommendations & Projects

- **Primary Project:**
  - 4c — Angel Network & Micro-Seed Fund
- **Supports:**
  - All high-growth business development projects (1–3)
  - Commercialization and ecosystem support efforts

How it Supports *Thrive by Water*
Brings financial resources into a region where distance, geography, and rural dispersion have historically restricted investor engagement across river-separating communities.

Recommendations

The following recommendations represent the specific strategic focus areas required to implement the Region 6 entrepreneurial vision. These recommendations include three subregional opportunities and one region-wide project portfolio designed to support all communities in the region. As shown in the Visual Strategy Map, Recommendations 1-3 present subregional high-growth strategies, while Recommendation 4 provides the region-wide project portfolio that enables implementation.

Recommendation 1 — Fredericksburg Subregion High-Growth Business Development

Summary

The Fredericksburg Subregion (Planning District (PD) 16), including Caroline, King George, Spotsylvania, Stafford, the City of Fredericksburg, and the towns of Bowling Green and Port Royal, has significant potential for high-growth business (HGB) formation driven by its proximity to the Naval Surface Warfare Center Dahlgren Division (NSWCDD), the Potomac Tech Bridge, and a highly educated commuting workforce. This project accelerates high-growth entrepreneurship by identifying dual-use technologies, expanding access to federal patents, and supporting technology transfer through structured events, commercialization readiness, and navigation support. These activities leverage existing relationships with the Fredericksburg Regional Alliance (FRA), the University of Mary Washington (UMW), military and federal partners, Entrepreneurial Support Organizations (ESOs), and subregional Economic Development Authorities (EDAs) to drive innovation and reduce out-commuting by creating scalable companies locally.

Activities

- Expand technology transfer engagement among NSWCDD, Potomac Tech Bridge, FRA, RREE, and regional partners.
- Identify dual-use applications appropriate for technology founders.
- Provide commercialization readiness support, including Cooperative Research and Development Agreements (CRADA) and patent licensing navigation.
- Host patent-focused showcase events with inventors available for Q&A.
- Connect startups to ESOs, universities, accelerators.
- Connect founders with investors, defense sector partners, and commercialization programs.
- Coordinate subregional collaboration among local EDAs, UMW, Germanna Community College (GCC), military councils, and entrepreneurial support organizations.

KPIs

- Patent showcase events hosted
- Entrepreneurs connected to HGB opportunities
- Dual-use technologies evaluated
- Founders supported through commercialization readiness
- HGBs launched in the Fredericksburg subregion

How it Supports *Thrive by Water*

Strengthens the subregion's role as a technology and innovation gateway for the water-connected Region 6 economy, leveraging federal naval assets to drive scalable business creation.

Potential Models

The following examples illustrate similar programs or organizational models that inform the design and implementation of this project.

- NavalX Tech Bridge
- Pacific Northwest Tech Bridge
- SBIR/STTR Funding and Match - KY Innovation

Recommendation 2 — Middle Peninsula Subregion High-Growth Business Development

Summary

The Middle Peninsula (PD-18), comprising Essex, Gloucester, King & Queen, King William, Mathews, Middlesex counties and the towns of Tappahannock, Urbanna, and West Point, has emerging potential in environmental innovation, coastal resiliency, water-based technologies, and marine science. With world-class research from the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS), a skilled workforce, thriving main streets, and growing co-working and maker assets, the subregion is positioned to become a global center for coastal and climate resilience innovation. This project builds high-growth business opportunities by supporting commercialization planning, identifying test beds for environmental technologies, strengthening entrepreneurial pathways, and expanding collaboration across education, research, and industry partners.

Activities

- Provide commercialization planning support for VIMS and Middle Peninsula Planning District Commission research.
- Identify and develop test bed opportunities for climate adaptation, coastal resiliency, and water-based technologies.
- Test-beds may include aquaculture pilot sites, coastal modeling facilities, living-shoreline demonstration areas, or applied resilience environments developed in partnership with local agencies and research institutions.
- Build training programs for environmental innovation founders in partnership with Rappahannock Community College.
- Coordinate with local, regional, and national partners (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), industry leaders, EDAs).
- Strengthen engagement with aquaculture, seafood, and marine manufacturing industries.
- Support entrepreneurs through feasibility studies, market exploration, and business modeling.

KPIs

- Innovation information sessions hosted
- Entrepreneurs connected to HGB opportunities
- Resiliency or water-based technologies piloted/tested
- HGBs launched in the Middle Peninsula subregion
- Research partnerships initiated or expanded

How it Supports *Thrive by Water*

Builds high growth opportunities rooted in the Middle Peninsula's natural water-connected assets—coastal resilience, aquaculture, marine science, and environmental innovation.

Potential Models

The following examples illustrate similar programs or organizational models that inform the design and implementation of this project.

- Maine Technology Institute – Marine Technology & Aquaculture
- NOAA Testbeds
- SBIR/STTR Funding and Match - KY Innovation

Recommendation 3 — Northern Neck Subregion High-Growth Business Development

Summary

The Northern Neck (PD-17)—Lancaster, Northumberland, Richmond, Westmoreland counties, and the towns of Colonial Beach, Irvington, Kilmarnock, Montross, Warsaw, and White Stone—is defined by its water-connected economy, including aquaculture, seafood processing, marine services, and small manufacturing. Ongoing initiatives such as the Festival Halle Aquaculture Incubator, the Blue Catfish Initiative, and the Working Waterman programs create strong opportunities for scalable growth. This project supports high-growth business development through aquaculture scale-up planning, workforce alignment, research collaboration, and business model development, positioning the Northern Neck as a global center for seafood and water-based innovation. The recent National Heritage Area designation enhances the region's visibility and entrepreneurial potential.

Activities

- Conduct planning and feasibility studies for aquaculture and seafood ventures.
- Evaluate equipment, infrastructure, regulatory, and workforce needs for scale-up.
- Support commercialization, productization, and market development for seafood-related products.
- Strengthen RREE–VIMS collaboration around aquaculture technologies and applied marine research. The Baliles Center at Hull Springs is another potential partner.
- Establish a Technology Transfer Mentor Special Interest Group to guide founders.
- Engage local industry leaders, research centers, and community partners in venture development.

KPIs

- Entrepreneur information sessions held
- Founders supported in water-based HGB opportunities
- Aquaculture or seafood technologies assessed
- HGBs launched in the Northern Neck
- Collaborations with VIMS, Baliles Center, incubators, or regional employers

How it Supports *Thrive by Water*

Elevates the Northern Neck's identity as a water driven innovation hub by expanding aquaculture, seafood entrepreneurship, and marine based product development rooted in the region's heritage.

Potential Models

The following examples illustrate similar programs or organizational models that inform the design and implementation of this project.

- Chesapeake Bay Foundation's Environmental Innovation Initiative
- Maine Center for Coastal Fisheries
- Maine Technology Institute – Marine Technology & Aquaculture

Recommendation 4 — Regional Project Portfolio (4a–4d)

4a — Regional Entrepreneur Support Hub Network, Advisory Councils & Communications

Summary

Region 6 has strong but disconnected support assets — libraries, community colleges, chambers, ESOs, and economic development offices. However, the region lacks a unified, accessible, and navigable ecosystem. This project creates a distributed "hub network," enabling each subregion (George Washington, Middle Peninsula, Northern Neck) to serve entrepreneurs locally while tying together shared programming, wayfinding, and referrals. This network addresses the documented issues of **no front door, limited founder discovery, and fragmented support organizations**.

At the heart of each hub, subregion-specific **Entrepreneurial Support Advisory Councils (ESACs)** provide the human infrastructure that makes the network function. ESACs recruit and organize industry mentors, legal advisors, investors, workforce partners, and veteran and minority business champions to offer structured, ongoing guidance to founders at every stage. Together, the hub network and ESACs—supported by a unified regional communications strategy—ensure that every entrepreneur in Region 6 has a place to go, people to turn to, and a clear path forward.

Underpinning the entire hub network is a coordinated **RREE Communication Strategy** that ensures entrepreneurs across all three subregions can find, access, and engage with available resources. This includes a fully populated and regularly updated RREE website serving as the region's primary "front door," a monthly newsletter with founder spotlights and resource updates, a one-page entrepreneur navigation guide, an ecosystem health dashboard, and ongoing storytelling campaigns that elevate regional entrepreneurial identity and visibility.

Activities

HUB NETWORK

- Establish 3–5 "Entrepreneur Support Hubs" using libraries, community colleges, and co-working sites across all three subregions.
- Standardize regional wayfinding tools (website, intake form, referral workflow).
- Develop monthly founder meetups in each subregion (rotating locations).
- Deploy an "ecosystem builder" to coordinate hub activities and unify programming.
- Share calendars, events, and resource guides across subregions.

ENTREPRENEURIAL SUPPORT ADVISORY COUNCILS (ESACS)

- Establish subregion-specific ESACs at each hub, recruiting industry mentors, legal advisors, investors, and veteran/minority business champions to provide structured guidance to founders.
- Formalize ESAC advisory structures, roles, and onboarding processes.
- Host quarterly ESAC convenings coordinated through the RREE to align mentorship with regional priorities and emerging founder needs.

RREE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

- Build and maintain the RREE website as the region's primary entrepreneurial navigation and resource tool.
- Publish a monthly newsletter featuring founder stories, upcoming events, and resource updates.
- Develop and distribute a one-page entrepreneur guide to ecosystem resources and support pathways.
- Build a shared ecosystem health dashboard to track engagement, referrals, and program outcomes.
- Launch regional storytelling campaigns across digital and community channels to highlight regional entrepreneurial successes.

KPIs

- Entrepreneurs assisted at hubs
- Warm referrals between ESOs
- Founder events convened across three subregions
- Web traffic/inquiries via regional "front door"
- Newsletter open rates and subscriber growth
- Stories/spotlights published about local founders
- Number of entrepreneur interactions with ESAC advisory members
- Number of active ESAC mentors across all three subregions
- Entrepreneur-reported awareness of available resources

How it Supports *Thrive by Water*

Creates unified access across a geographically dispersed, water-connected region by ensuring every community—no matter the shoreline—has consistent entrepreneurial support and a network of experienced advisors ready to help founders navigate the path from idea to high-growth businesses, and a visible, well-told regional story that attracts talent, capital, and partners to Region 6.

Potential Models

The following examples illustrate similar programs or organizational models that inform the design and implementation of this project.

- Knoxville Entrepreneur Center
- Launch Loudoun
- 1 Million Cups (Kauffman Foundation)
- 757Collab / Mid-Atlantic Tech Bridge Defense Technology Accelerator

4b — Dahlgren/VIMS Commercialization Pipeline

Summary

Region 6's two highest potential innovation engines—**Naval Surface Warfare Center Dahlgren Division (NSWCDD)** and the **Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS)**—are not producing new startups at a level that reflects the scale and strength of their research and development activity. This project establishes a formalized commercialization pipeline that moves technologies through a structured sequence of development stages, beginning with research, advancing into prototyping, transitioning to founder team formation, progressing through Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) submissions, and ultimately reaching early customers and investment readiness. Commercialization and technology transfer were repeatedly identified as major missed opportunities for the region.

Activities

- Expand the Partnership Intermediary Agreement (PIA) with NSWCDD to identify commercializable technologies.
- Establish a commercialization fellows' program to pair technologists with entrepreneurs.
- Launch a "Phase 0" SBIR program (modeled after Kentucky).
- This program increases regional competitiveness in federal grant programs and reduces technical barriers for first-time SBIR applicants.
- Conduct quarterly pitch/tech showcases featuring Dahlgren and VIMS researchers.
- Connect founders with prototyping capabilities via community colleges and makerspaces.
- Build Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with the University of Virginia (UVA), Virginia Tech (VT), Old Dominion University (ODU), the Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), and the University of Mary Washington (UMW) for joint research commercialization.

KPIs

- SBIR/Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) applications submitted
- Technologies assessed for commercialization (e.g. patents harnessed for high growth business development)
- Research-to-startup matches
- Prototypes developed
- Startups launched from Dahlgren/VIMS sources
    - Total federal research dollars leveraged

How it Supports *Thrive by Water*

Transforms water-connected research strengths—such as marine science and naval systems—into commercial ventures that drive regional innovation.

Potential Models

The following examples illustrate similar programs or organizational models that inform the design and implementation of this project.

- FedTech (Startup Studio)
- NavalX Tech Bridge
- SoCal Tech Bridge
- SBIR/STTR Funding and Match - KY Innovation

4c — Region 6 Angel Network & Micro-Seed Fund

Summary

Access to risk capital is the region's **largest structural gap**. Founders repeatedly report difficulty accessing even $100K for early-stage growth, and fundraising activity is among the lowest in the state despite proximity to Washington, DC, and Richmond, Virginia. This project establishes the region's first coordinated **angel network** supported by a **micro-seed fund** that deploys early-stage capital ($10K–$50K) to help startups reach investable milestones.

Activities

- Recruit and organize founding angel members from across all three subregions.
- Develop standardized pitch sessions and due diligence processes.
- Establish a micro-seed fund targeting first in capital for both Main Street Businesses (MSBs) and HGBs.
- Provide investor readiness training for founders (with Small Business Development Center (SBDC), UMW, GCC, Rappahannock Community College, and existing entities such as the Virginia Black Chamber of Commerce (VABCC)).
- Host annual investor showcases drawing in Richmond and DC capital networks.
- Develop a shared Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system for tracking deals, opportunities, and investor interest.

KPIs

- Active angel members
- Investments made annually
    - Total capital deployed through the micro-seed fund
- Companies receiving first-in funding
- Follow-on investments or venture connections
    - Founder satisfaction/capital readiness improvements

How it Supports *Thrive by Water*
Brings new resources and capital into a region where physical distance and geography have historically limited investor engagement.

Potential Models
The following examples illustrate similar programs or organizational models that inform the design and implementation of this project.

- Charlottesville Angel Network
- Launch Tennessee
- Appalachian Investors Alliance (AIA)

4d — Maker, Inventor, & Product Entrepreneurship Initiative

Summary
Region 6 possesses strong legacy strengths in **manufacturing, maritime trades, and craft-based entrepreneurship, but the region lacks coordinated, region-wide programming for makers, inventors, hardware entrepreneurs, and product builders**. The Region 6 Ecosystem Report identified that **monthly maker and inventor gatherings across multiple counties could immediately strengthen entrepreneurial identity and accelerate product-based innovation**. This project builds that missing infrastructure by creating a connected, multi-site maker and inventor ecosystem serving all three subregions.

Activities

- Launch monthly regional "Maker Meetups" rotating across counties.
- Provide training on prototyping, e-commerce, logistics, packaging, and Intellectual Property.
- Establish mobile "pop-up labs" using community college equipment.
- Connect makers to regional manufacturers for small-run production.
- Create a Maker-to-Market Accelerator track focused on product companies.
- Use libraries as low-barrier, high-access gathering spaces.

KPIs

- Maker meetups held
- Participants attending
- Prototypes developed
- Maker-to-market companies launched
    - Revenue growth for participating businesses
- Intellectual property consultations

How it Supports *Thrive by Water*
Expands entrepreneurial opportunity to makers and artisans whose craft traditions are deeply tied to Region 6's maritime heritage and water connected culture.

Potential Models
The following examples illustrate similar programs or organizational models that inform the design and implementation of this project.

- MAKE SOUTH BEND
- Valley Makers Association
- Makers Mill

Implementation Plan

The Implementation Plan outlines how the Region 6 REI strategy will move from planning to coordinated, measurable action. It establishes clear roles and responsibilities, identifies project leads and partners, and defines the governance, reporting, and funding structures needed to sustain long term progress. This plan ensures accountability across all subregions and project partners while enabling Region 6 to adapt to new opportunities, secure state and federal funding, and maintain consistent support for high growth business development.

Roles & Responsibilities

A successful regional entrepreneurial strategy requires clear ownership at both the **regional** and **project** levels. The following groups will guide, manage, and execute the REI Plan.

Region 6 Rivers Region Entrepreneurial Ecosystem (RREE) Council (Regional Governance & Stewardship)
The Region 6 Council will serve as the overall governing body responsible for:

- Approving project scopes, funding requests, and modifications
- Maintaining alignment with *Thrive by Water*
- Ensuring regional balance across subregions
- Overseeing Key Performance Indicator (KPI) reporting and performance monitoring
- Coordinating with GO Virginia State Board and staff
- Championing the long term vision of the REI Plan

Regional Lead Organizations (Project-Level Leadership)
Each Recommendation and each Project (4a–4d) should have a designated lead organization responsible for:

- Day to day project management
- Budget execution and compliance
- Partner coordination and communication
- KPI tracking and reporting
- Providing quarterly updates to the Region 6 RREE Council Executive Director

Potential lead organizations include:

- Fredericksburg Regional Alliance (FRA)
- University of Mary Washington (UMW)
- Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS)
- George Washington Regional Commission
- Middle Peninsula Planning District Commission
- Northern Neck Planning District Commission
- Local Economic Development Authorities (EDAs)
- Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs), libraries, and community colleges
- Regional nonprofits involved in entrepreneurship

Subregional Partners (Local Implementation)
Local organizations and stakeholders will enable execution at the subregional level, especially for Recommendations 1–3. These partners may include:

- County and city elected officials
- Chambers of commerce
- Local Entrepreneurial Support Organizations (ESOs)
- Makerspaces and co working facilities
- Industry leaders (aquaculture, maritime, defense, tourism)
- Workforce boards
- Community colleges (Germanna Community College, Rappahannock Community College)

Entrepreneurial Support Organizations (ESO Network)
ESOs across the region will support:

- Founder outreach and discovery
- Navigation and warm referrals
- Workshops and programming
- Storytelling and visibility initiatives
- ESAC Networks—structured subregional advisory councils providing mentorship, legal guidance, and investor connections to founders at each hub.

These organizations are essential for Projects 4a and 4d.

Governance & Reporting Structure

To ensure accountability, transparency, and performance improvement, Region 6 will use a structured governance model.

REI Governance Structure

- **Region 6 RREE Council:** Strategic oversight, funding approval, annual review
- **REI Steering Committee:** Operational coordination, quarterly progress reviews
- **Project Leads:** Monthly performance reporting, partner convening
- **ESO Network:** Frontline feedback on founder needs and service gaps
- **Data & KPI Team:** Responsible for KPI tracking and dashboard maintenance

Reporting Cadence

- **Monthly:** Project lead check ins
- **Quarterly:** Regional KPI dashboard updates and Steering Committee review
- **Semi-Annual:** Subregional impact reports
- **Annual:** Full REI Plan performance review and public report

This ensures Region 6 demonstrates measurable progress to GO Virginia and other grantees, local stakeholders, and investors.

Funding Strategy

The REI Plan uses a multi source funding approach to fund regional projects, sustain operations, and leverage private investment.

GO Virginia Funding

- State funding will be requested for initial project implementation, particularly for
  - Hub Network (4a)
  - Commercialization Pipeline (4b)
  - Angel Network & Micro-Seed Fund (4c)
  - Maker/Product Initiative (4d)
- Projects may be phased or scaled based on available GO Virginia resources. For example, Projects 1, 2, and 3, may be individually funded through separate grants.

Federal Funding Opportunities
Potential sources include:

- United States Economic Development Administration (EDA) Build to Scale
- EDA Tech Hubs (partner grants)
- United States Small Business Administration (SBA) Growth Accelerator Fund
- SBA Community Navigator
- United States Department of Defense (DoD) Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation (OLDCC)
- United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Business Development Grants (RBDG)
- United States National Science Foundation (NSF) Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR)/Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) support programs

These align especially well with SBIR related programming (4b) and maker/manufacturing efforts (4d).

Local Government & EDA Contributions
Subregions may support:

- Match funding
- In kind staff support
- Event hosting and navigation services
- Co location or space for hub activities

Looking ahead:

The goal is to blend public and private funds to sustain the REI Plan long term.

Philanthropy & Foundations

- Rural-focused foundations
- Community foundations in Region 6
- National funders focused on entrepreneurship and workforce

Private Sector Investment

- Angel capital (through Project 4c)
- Corporate sponsorships (e.g., banks, utilities, employers)
- Industry challenge grants (for aquaculture, resilience tech, defense tech)

The goal is to blend public and private funds to sustain the REI Plan long term.

Implementation Timeline

Year 1 – Launch & Build

- Stand up Steering Committee and governance
- Hire/assign project leads
- Launch Hub Network pilot sites
- Recruit founding ESAC members and formalize advisory structures
- Launch RREE website and begin monthly newsletter publishing
- Formalize Partnership Intermediary Agreement (PIA) expansion & commercialization fellows
- Launch angel network recruitment
- Begin Maker Meetups and prototype programming

Year 2 – Scale & Integrate

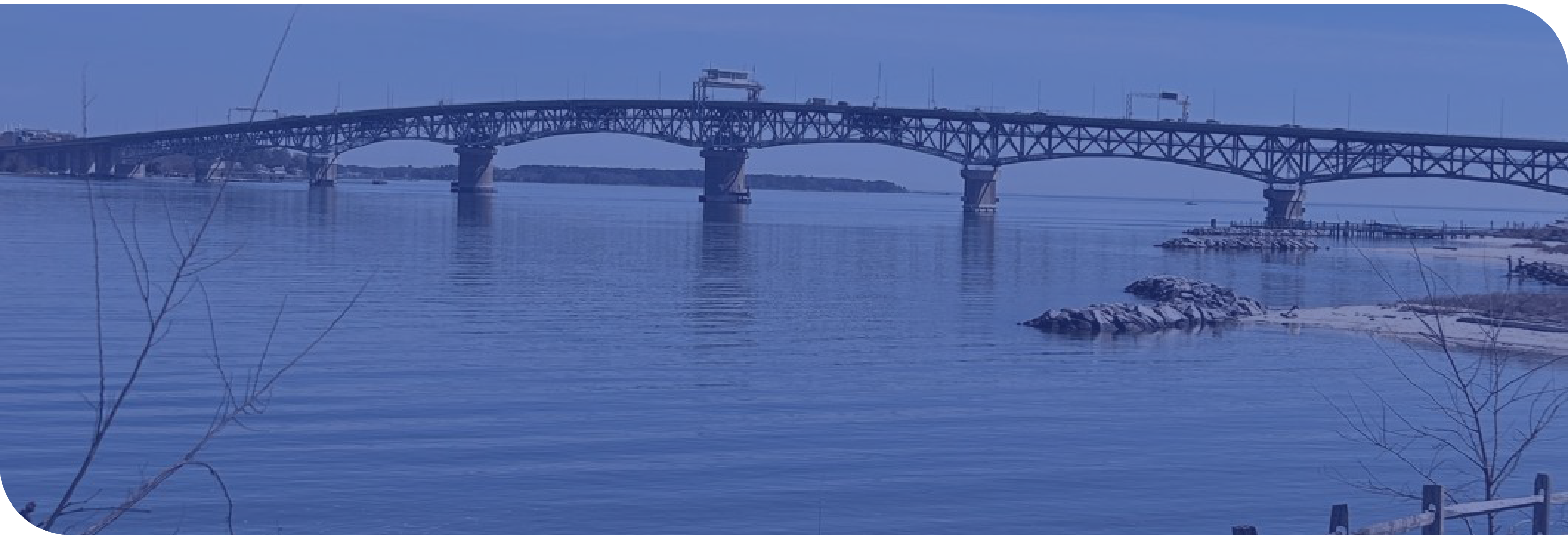
- Expand hub sites to all subregions
- Launch SBIR Phase 0 programming
- Begin joint VIMS/Naval Surface Warfare Center Dahlgren Division (NSWCDD) tech showcases
- Deploy micro-seed investments
- Introduce Maker-to-Market Accelerator

Year 3 – Optimize & Measure

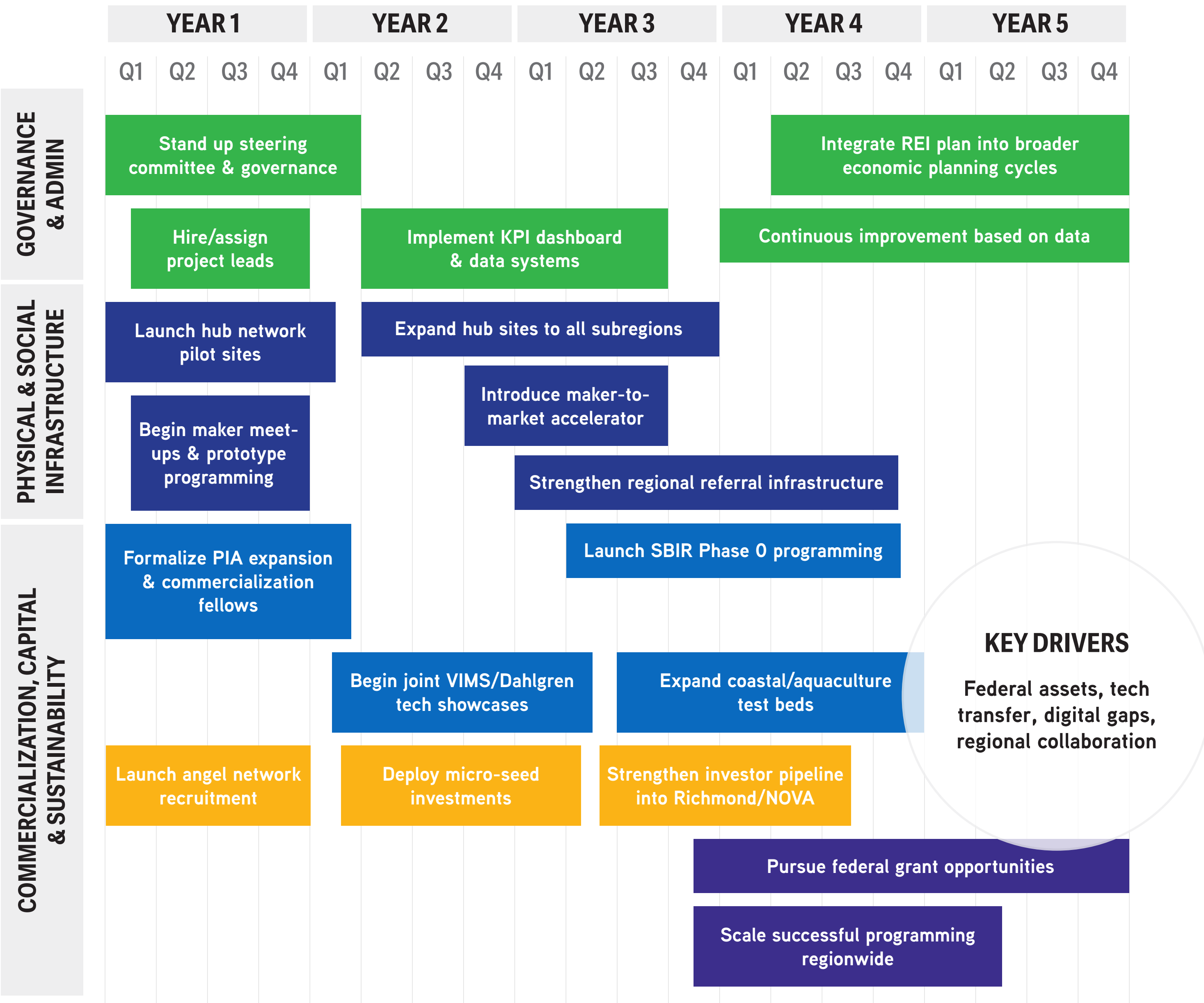
- Strengthen regional referral infrastructure
- Implement KPI dashboard and data systems
- Strengthen investor pipeline into Richmond/NOVA
- Expand coastal/aquaculture test beds

Years 4-5 – Sustain & Evolve

- Continuous improvement based on data
- Pursue federal grant opportunities
- Seek private corporate sponsorship
- Scale successful programming region-wide
- Integrate REI Plan into broader economic planning cycles



Strategic Initiative 5-Year Gantt Chart Roadmap: Region 6 Acceleration



Monitoring, KPIs & Performance Management

A shared KPI dashboard will track project performance across all subregions and allow Region 6 to:

- Measure impact consistently
- Identify successful programs early
- Adapt or retire underperforming efforts
- Ensure long term accountability to GO Virginia

Primary KPIs include:

- Number of entrepreneurs assisted
- Number of SBIR/STTR submissions and wins
- Number of high growth businesses formed
- Number of technologies assessed for commercialization
- Number of investor ready companies
- Number of new angel investors in the network
- Number of prototypes developed
- Number of founder navigation referrals
- Number of aquaculture, marine, or dual use ventures launched
- Number of entrepreneur interactions with ESAC advisory members
- Entrepreneur-reported awareness of available ecosystem resources

Sustainability & Long-Term Continuity

To ensure ongoing success beyond GO Virginia funding cycles, Region 6 will:

- Embed roles within existing institutions (e.g., FRA, UMW, VIMS)
- Build recurring revenue models for certain programs (e.g., angel network dues)
- Integrate SBIR Phase 0 into long term Research and Development (R&D) programming
- Cultivate philanthropy and federal support
- Strengthen industry partnerships in defense, aquaculture, and resilience

The goal is to create a **durable, flexible, cross regional innovation system** that thrives over time.

Conclusion

The GO Virginia Region 6 Regional Entrepreneurial Initiative (REI) Action Plan establishes a unified, forward looking strategy for strengthening the region's entrepreneurial ecosystem and positioning its communities to thrive in a rapidly evolving economy. Grounded in the region's shared identity — *Thrive by Water* — the plan connects Fredericksburg, the Middle Peninsula, and the Northern Neck through a common vision that recognizes water not only as a defining geographic feature, but as a catalyst for innovation, collaboration, and economic opportunity.

Through its **Four Tier Strategy Architecture**, the REI Plan links regional priorities to actionable recommendations, subregional implementation, and measurable outcomes. The result is a coordinated framework that ensures strategic coherence across all levels — regional, subregional, and project specific. The plan strengthens founder discovery and entrepreneurial support, expands commercialization pathways rooted in the region's research assets, and increases access to early stage capital across diverse communities.

The regional project portfolio (4a–4d) creates the backbone of this system: a multi site hub network with advisory councils and shared communications, a formal commercialization pipeline connecting NSWCDD and VIMS to founders, a regional angel network supported by micro-seed capital, and a maker and product development initiative that elevates inventors, artisans, and hardware entrepreneurs. Together, these initiatives build the infrastructure required to launch, grow, and sustain high growth businesses across Region 6.

The REI Plan also outlines a clear implementation and governance structure — including project leads, reporting cycles, KPIs, and a multi year timeline — ensuring accountability and long term sustainability. By blending state, federal, philanthropic, and private resources, the plan sets the foundation for scalable growth and resilient partnership networks.

Ultimately, this REI Action Plan is more than a strategy; it is a regional commitment to building a vibrant, water connected entrepreneurial ecosystem that supports every founder, strengthens local economies, and expands opportunity across all communities in Region 6. Through coordinated action, shared investment, and sustained collaboration, Region 6 is poised to enhance innovation, grow high quality jobs, and accelerate a future in which businesses, people, and communities truly *Thrive by Water*.

Appendices

Appendix A — Recent GO Virginia Region 6 Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Initiatives Underway and Completed

Project	Funds Awarded	Match	Description	Partner	GO Virginia Investment Area
RIoT Pre-Accelerator Program	$96,807	$80,791	Pre-accelerator supporting idea-stage entrepreneurs through workshops and 1-on-1 coaching to validate markets and build foundational business capabilities	RIoT / Stafford County EDA	Entrepreneurship Activities
Establishing a RIoT Accelerator Program in the Rappahannock Region	$215,000	$204,500	Expansion of the RIoT Accelerator Program and smart technology testbed support to grow technology-based startups across the Rappahannock Region	RIoT / CIT / Stafford County	Entrepreneurship Activities
Fredericksburg Region Cyber & Smart Tech Entrepreneurial Development Program	$97,500	$75,000	Assessment of market demand and ecosystem capacity for a cyber and smart technology entrepreneurship program	Stafford County EDA & Partners	Entrepreneurship Activities
Commercial Kitchen at Hull Springs	$50,000	$50,000	Feasibility study for a commercial kitchen to support food manufacturing entrepreneurship in the Northern Neck	USDA Rural Development / Local Partners	Entrepreneurship Activities
Launching a Coastal Resilience and Adaptation Economy	$2,937,163	$3,696,411	Development of a coastal resilience innovation ecosystem through entrepreneurship, R&D test sites, and a multi-region consortium	Virginia Sea Grant / RISE / MPCBPAA / ODU	Entrepreneurship Activities / Workforce Development
Virginia Sea Grant Resiliency Ecosystem Development	$49,996	$49,996	Planning activities to build a water management innovation and entrepreneurship economy	Middle Peninsula PDC / Alliance	Entrepreneurship Activities
Virginia Tidewater Aquaculture & Maritime Innovation Incubator Program (Festival Halle)	$280,000	$140,400	Implementation of an aquaculture-focused incubator and commercial kitchen to support watermen and seafood businesses	Greater Reedville Association	Startup Ecosystem
River to Table – Blue Catfish Processing and Marketing Study	$99,840	$62,590	Study of the Blue Catfish industry supply chain with recommendations to expand harvesting, processing, and market access	Middlesex County EDA & Partners	Startup Ecosystem
Stafford County Expanding Smart Community Tech Feasibility Study	$96,250	$66,340	Feasibility study to expand smart technology entrepreneurial testbeds into rural localities	Stafford County EDA	Entrepreneurship Activities

Project	Funds Awarded	Match	Description	Partner	GO Virginia Investment Area
Young Entrepreneurs Program	$98,000	$90,272	Program encouraging youth entrepreneurship through documentation of startup resources and support systems	King George County EDA	Entrepreneurship Activities
Economic Business Empowerment (EBE) Accelerator	$300,000	$155,500	Implementation of a multi-cohort business accelerator serving minority-owned and targeted industry businesses	Virginia Black Chamber of Commerce & Partners	Startup Ecosystem
Empowering Black Entrepreneurs Pilot Business Accelerator	$98,438	$99,738	Planning grant to design a business accelerator addressing sustainability and growth of Black-owned businesses	Virginia Black Chamber of Commerce	Entrepreneurship Activities
Economic Impact Analysis for RIVERE Ecological Center and Entrepreneurial Ecosystem	$72,100	$36,050	Economic impact and feasibility analysis for a water-tech focused entrepreneurial hub and virtual innovation center	RIVERE Ecological Center	Startup Ecosystem
Region 6 Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Initiative	$300,000	$150,000	Regional planning effort to guide development of the Region 6 entrepreneurial ecosystem	Fredericksburg Regional Alliance	Entrepreneurship Activities

Appendix B — GO Virginia Region 6 Awarded Projects Since 2023

Project	Funds Awarded	Match	Description	Partner	Timeline	GO Virginia Investment Area
Stafford County Public Schools Pathways to Success	$100,000	$50,000	JASON Learning modules for career exploration for middle school students in Manufacturing, IT, and Aquaculture	Stafford County Public Schools	12/9/2022 – 12/8/2023	Talent Development
King George County Young Entrepreneurs Program	$98,000	$90,272	Entrepreneurship curriculum for high school students	King George County EDA	1/18/2023 – 1/17/2024	Entrepreneurship Activities
Stafford County Public Schools Innovation Pathways	$978,449	$563,962	Cybersecurity training and CompTIA certification for students, teachers, and adult learners	Stafford County Public Schools	4/15/2023 – 11/30/2025	Workforce Development
MPPDC West Point Airport Industrial Site Evaluation	$100,000	$65,000	Planning grant to conduct due diligence on the West Point Airport site	Middle Peninsula Planning District Commission	6/1/2023 – 7/1/2024	Site Development
Bay Consortium Workforce Development Board – Talent Pathways Initiative	$250,000	$125,000	Development of the Talent Pathways Initiative for strategic workforce planning	Bay Consortium Workforce Development Board		Talent Development
Stafford County EDA – Expanding Smart Community Tech Entrepreneurship	$96,250	$66,350	Study exploring the potential for a Smart Community entrepreneurship ecosystem in rural areas	Stafford County Economic Development Authority	7/15/2023 – 7/14/2024	Entrepreneurship Activities
Rivers Region Entrepreneurship Ecosystem REI	$300,000	$150,000	Strategic plan to develop a regional entrepreneurship ecosystem	Fredericksburg Regional Alliance	1/16/2023 – 1/15/2024	Entrepreneurship Activities
Empowering Black Entrepreneurs Pilot Accelerator	$98,438	$99,738	Planning grant establishing a business accelerator for minority-owned businesses	Virginia Black Chamber of Commerce	10/23/2024 – 8/31/2024	Entrepreneurship Activities
RCC New Career Technical Center	$290,000	$290,000	Development of a workforce center for welding and diesel mechanics with dual enrollment and adult classes	Rappahannock Community College	12/12/2023 – 12/11/2025	Workforce Development
VTCECEP Promoting Careers in Aquaculture 2.0	$302,536	$177,803	Course modules with hands-on learning and paid internships for students interested in aquaculture	Virginia Tech Center for Economic Development	12/12/2023 – 12/11/2025	Talent Development
Bay Consortium WDB – CARE	$307,857	$139,891	Development of industry coalitions pairing education and government to address workforce needs	Bay Consortium Workforce Development Board	2/1/2025 – 1/31/2027	Talent Development
Economic Business Empowerment (EBE) Accelerator	$300,000	$114,500	Implementation of a business accelerator geared toward minority-owned businesses	Virginia Black Chamber of Commerce	12/10/2024 – 12/9/2026	Entrepreneurship Activities
Cyber Titans Virginia Internship Program (VIP)	$99,826	$50,636	Pilot program pairing students with cybersecurity internships and credentials	Cyber Bytes Foundation	2/17/2025 – 2/16/2026	Talent Development

Project	Funds Awarded	Match	Description	Partner	Timeline	GO Virginia Investment Area
Economic Impact Analysis for RIVERE Ecological Center	$72,100	$36,050	Feasibility study for a smart water/tech entrepreneurship hub in Fredericksburg	RIVERE Ecological Center	3/3/2025 – 3/2/2026	Entrepreneurship Activities
Virginia Tidewater Aquaculture & Maritime Innovation Incubator Program	$280,800	$140,400	Development of an incubator for watermen paired with a commercial kitchen	Greater Reedville Association	7/1/2025 – 6/30/2027	Entrepreneurship Activities
UMW Practice Management Certificate Program	$78,014	$40,000	Pilot credential program in practice management for primary care physicians	University of Mary Washington	7/1/2025 – 6/30/2026	Talent Development