



Virginia Growth and Opportunity Fund (GO Virginia) Planning, Feasibility, and Small-Scale Pilot Guidance

Section 1: Overview

GO Virginia Planning, Feasibility, and Small-Scale Pilot grants are intended to build regional capacity for impactful, saleable projects.

Planning Grants help regions explore and refine ideas that have the potential to drive economic growth. They provide an opportunity to test concepts, formalize strong partnerships, conduct in-depth research or feasibility studies, and develop actionable strategies. These grants can also support small-scale pilot initiatives that, if successful, can be scaled up through a GO Virginia Implementation Grant or another measurable investment opportunity.

The primary intent of Planning Grants is to prepare projects for future GO Virginia Implementation funding. In some cases, planning work may also strengthen a project's ability to compete for other funding sources or, occasionally, determine that an initiative should not move forward. While those opportunities are valuable, applicants should design proposals with a clear line of sight to GO Virginia Implementation as the expected pathway.

Eligible Applicants

See the Eligibility Requirements section of the Program Manual for full details.

Funding Availability

Each region may allocate up to \$250,000 per fiscal year toward Planning Grants. Requests under \$100,000 can be administratively approved by DHCD. Site Development and Infrastructure planning grants do not count toward a region's annual planning grant gap.

Section 2: Allowable Activities

Planning Grants are intended to produce actionable products and strategies that directly position a region for a future GO Virginia Implementation Grant. Projects are most effective when they include

- Meaningful stakeholder engagement,
- Outline specific next steps toward implementation,
- Establish a realistic timeline for moving forward, and
- Present a clear budget pathway for the proposed activities

Activities may generate one or more core GO Virginia grant outcomes. Below is a list of allowable activities for GO Virginia Planning Grant Applications. Please note an application may



propose multiple activities as part of one grant request.

- 1) **Planning and Feasibility Studies:** allowable activities include the development of a feasibility study, need analysis and prioritization, strategy development activities, a business plan, etc. The purpose of these activities is to assess whether a concept has the industry demand, stakeholder commitment, and economic potential to justify a future GO Virginia Implementation Grant.

Planning efforts must result in specific deliverables — such as a feasibility study, business plan, sustainability plan, or strategic framework — that outline next steps toward implementation. While Planning Grants are not required to demonstrate measurable economic impact during the planning phase, they must establish a clear pathway showing how the proposed concept could generate economic impact if advanced to implementation.

- 2) **Small-Scale Pilots:** Activities may include small-scale initiatives or proof-of-concept projects designed to strengthen partnerships and generate preliminary data for future GO Virginia Implementation Grants. Pilot activities are expected to be time-limited, achievable within the 12-month planning grant period, and aligned with GO Virginia’s objectives for economic impact. These projects may also generate [GO Virginia’s core grant outcomes](#).

Planning grants must be completed within 12 months, from the project’s start date to its end date.

All

products and outcomes are to be reported within three months following the project’s end date.

Section 3: Evaluation Criteria

The following table summarizes criteria used to evaluate GO Virginia Planning Grant applications. Applications are evaluated using four criteria: Economic Impact, Regional Collaboration, Project Readiness, and Line of Sight to Implementation. These categories provide a framework for how reviewers assess the strength of each proposal. Applicants should show how their proposed activities are aligned with regional priorities, are well-structured and achievable, and will position the region for future projects that generate economic impact.

Applicants are expected to address these core program principles in their responses. Applications that fail to meet any of these criteria are unlikely to align with GO Virginia grant funding requirements.



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Criteria	Description
Economic Impact	Planning Grants should demonstrate clear potential to strengthen the region's economy and align with targeted industry priorities. • Supports at least one targeted industry sector identified in the region's Growth & Diversification (G&D) Plan and connects proposed activities to a GO Virginia investment strategy (cluster scale-up, sites and infrastructure, talent and workforce, or startup ecosystem). • Show alignment with the regions Talent Pathway Initiative and/or Regional Entrepreneurship Initiative strategic plans as applicable. • Demonstrates alignment with GO Virginia's mission to grow traded-sector jobs and diversify the economy, supported by relevant data or evidence where available. • Addresses unmet industry needs, strengthens the traded-sector ecosystem, or creates a new activities that supports long-term growth.
Regional Collaboration	Projects must engage partners meaningfully and leverage regional assets. • Involves at least two participating localities in the region (see Regional Collaboration and Local Participation Guidance) • Demonstrates meaningful participation from businesses, education providers, and other key stakeholders in project design and execution. • Shows evidence of cost efficiencies, shared resources, or leveraging of existing assets. • Coordinates with existing regional initiatives to avoid duplication and add value
Project Readiness	Applications must show that the project can be executed effectively and is positioned to advance to implementation within a reasonable time period • Describes a clear and realistic project timeline and milestones achievable within the grant period • Identifies and engages the stakeholders essential to moving the project forward. • Demonstrates Involvement of private industry and subject matter experts to ensure the planning work reflects real demand and best practices. • Assesses potential challenges or risks and proposes strategies to address them.



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	Presents a complete and feasible budget for the proposed planning project, with eligible costs clearly tied to project activities, and submits all required match verification forms to confirm non-state match contributions. Demonstrates that partners have the administrative, financial, and personnel capacity to complete the work and comply with grant requirements.
Line of Sight to Implementation	Applicants should demonstrate how the proposed planning or pilot work will create a clear pathway toward an implementation project. While planning work may also strengthen a project's ability to pursue other funding opportunities, the expectation is that proposals are designed with GO Virginia Implementation as the primary pathway. • Describes how the planning or pilot work will directly position the region for implementation funding. • Identifies the anticipated deliverables (reports, plans, prototypes, etc.) and how they will be used to launch an implementation project. • Provides a realistic timeline for initiating and completing the future implementation project. • May also identify opportunities to leverage future federal or other non-state resources, provided they are clearly connected to the planning work. Outline specific and concrete recommendations or next steps that can be acted upon to advance to implementation.

Section 4: Project Budget and Matching Funds

Budget

A well-developed budget is essential to demonstrating the scope, feasibility, and readiness of a Planning Grant project. Applicants must use the GO Virginia Sources & Uses Budget Template provided by DHCD and submit the Excel version (not a PDF) with their application. Applicants must also provide a Milestones Overview and Drawdown Schedule.

Match Requirements

GO Virginia Planning Grants require matching funds from non-state sources equal to at least **2:1** of the GO Virginia request (for every \$2 of GO Virginia dollars requested, applicants must provide \$1 in match)). Eligible match may include cash or in-kind contributions from local governments, private industry, regional organizations, or other eligible non-state sources.

Match documentation should be submitted and completed at the time of project submission.

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[Match verification forms](#) ensure match is qualified prior to the project start date. Failure to submit match documentation may impact the project review process.

Please refer to the [GO Virginia Match Guidance](#) for full match guidelines and requirements.

Budget and Match Best Practices

Strong Planning Grant proposals present a clear budget pathway for the work to be completed under the planning grant. As best practice, it is helpful to:

- Ensure all budget items directly support project deliverables.
- Provide enough detail to explain the purpose and necessity of each cost.
- Secure match commitments early and verify their eligibility.
- Where possible, leverage private-sector resources and expertise to maximize project impact.

Section 5: Application Process

Applicants should first contact their regional support organization to discuss the project idea and next steps. Your support organization will guide you through the required process before the full application is submitted.

The Planning, Feasibility, and Small-Scale Pilot application template is available on the GO Virginia website, but applicants should work with their support organization to ensure the proposal aligns with regional priorities and follows the correct process. [View the application template here.](#)

Section 6: Application Attachments

Required Attachments

- Match Verification Form(s)
- Budget Overview (DHCD Sources & Uses Template – Excel version)
- Milestones Overview and Drawdown Schedule (a DHCD template is available)
- Letters demonstrating meaningful local participation

Optional Attachments

- GO Virginia Core Outcomes spreadsheet (if applicable)
- Applicants proposing projects in the healthcare industry should also review [the Healthcare Industry Project Addendum guidelines](#). This supplemental document provides additional requirements and evaluation considerations specific to healthcare-related projects and must be submitted with the application if applicable.