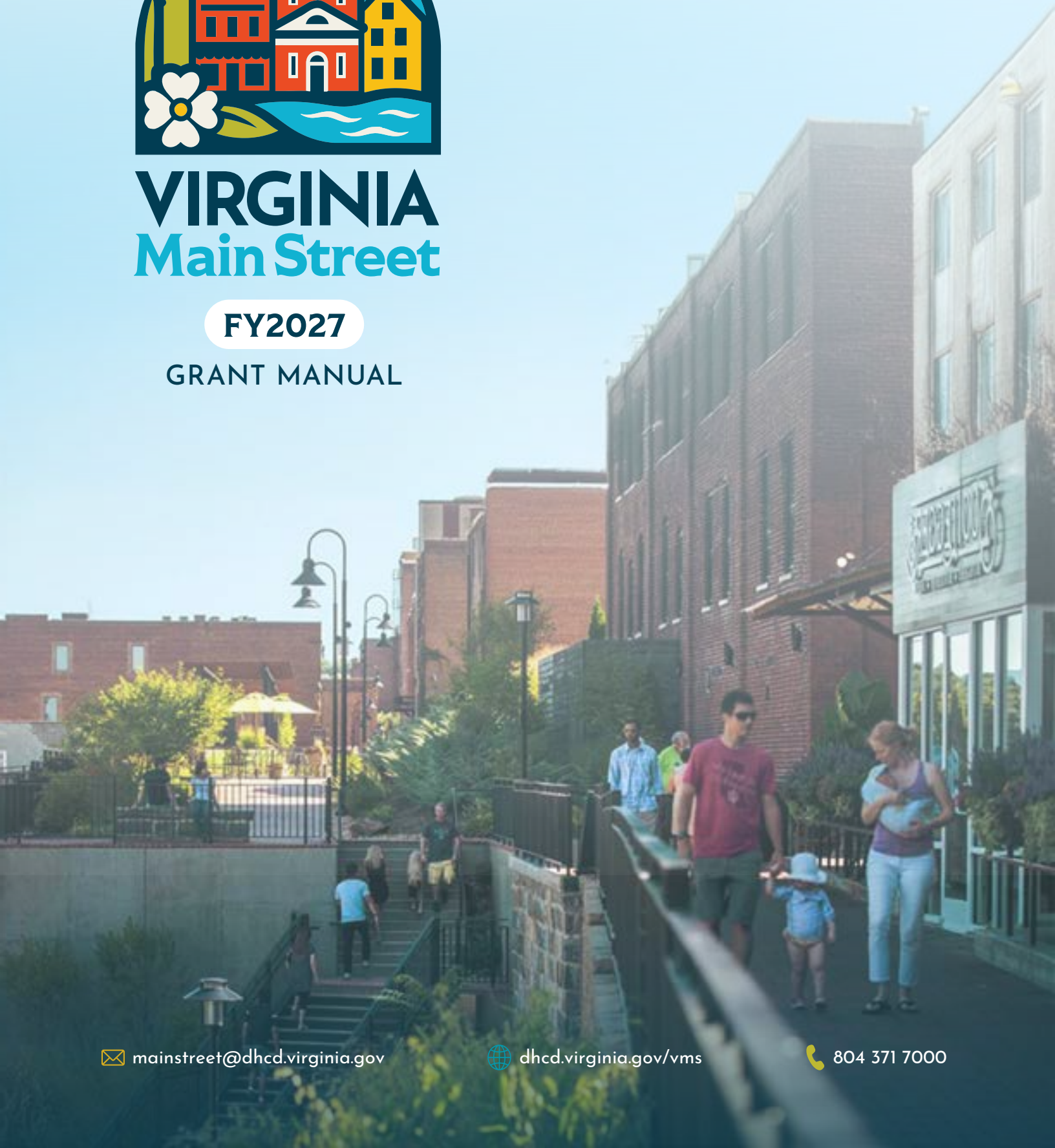
VIRGINIA Main Street

FY2027

GRANT MANUAL



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Background

The Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development's (DHCD) Virginia Main Street Program (VMS) is a community economic development program that follows the Main Street Approach™ of Main Street America. Each year local Main Street organizations work to attract the necessary public and private investment to their historic commercial districts in order to: (1) breathe new life into blighted and vacant buildings; (2) establish and expand independent businesses that make downtowns fun and unique consumer destinations; and (3) create mixed-use downtowns where people live above bustling commercial establishments and property owners maximize the productive use of every floor of downtown buildings.

The cumulative success of the Main Street Approach™ and local programs has earned Main Street the reputation as a powerful economic revitalization tool. In 2024 alone, VMS designated communities reported:

- More than **$79 million** in privately funded improvements to downtown historic buildings;
- More than **$28 million** in public improvements to help encourage private investment in downtowns;
- More than **340 unique businesses** created, expanded or retained in historic commercial districts, and;
- More than **1,000 jobs** created or retained for local community members seeking employment.

How-to-Apply Webinar

DHCD will offer virtual a How-to-Apply Webinar for VMS grants on January 14, 2026. The session will be recorded and shared on the VMS page of the DHCD website: dhcd.virginia.gov/vms. Applications will open February 2, 2026. Prospective applicants are also encouraged to reach out to DHCD staff as soon as possible to discuss any projects in development.

VMS Grants at a Glance

Each year, DHCD and VMS offer a number of grant opportunities to further the revitalization and preservation of Virginia's historic downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts with a goal of creating vibrant and thriving local economies.

Grant Opportunities

	Downtown Investment Grants (DIG)	Community Vitality Grants (CVG)*
Who is eligible?	Advancing Virginia Main Street (AVMS) organizations	Exploring (EMS) & Mobilizing Main Street (MMS) communities
Maximum Award	$75,000	$15,000
Match Requirement **	1:1 for requests of $50,001+; 2:1 for requests of $25,001 to $50,000; and 3:1 for requests up to $25,000	3:1
Project Types	Downtown economic improvement & community revitalization	Downtown revitalization & organizational development
Application Deadline	May 1, 2026	May 1, 2026
Expected Project Completion	Fall 2027	Fall 2027

*Grant can be administered through the designated local Main Street organization or local government.
**Ratio is DHCD grant funds to grantee match. For a 2:1 match, for every $2 of grant funding applied for, there must be $1 in match funding committed.

Downtown Investment Grants

Overview

Downtown Investment Grants (DIGs) allow Main Street organizations to take on unique, catalytic, one-time projects that measurably, creatively, and sustainably advance the organization's goals and strategies. DIGs involve multiple downtown partners and require active leadership and participation by the organization's board, committees, and volunteers.

Eligibility

Grants are available only to designated Advancing Virginia Main Street (AVMS) organizations and must be administered through the local Main Street organization. Applicants must be current on all VMS and DHCD reports (as applicable) and comply with DHCD's financial auditing requirements denoted below. Priority is given to Main Street America Nationally Accredited Communities and communities that do not have open VMS grants at the time of application submission.

Award Amount

The maximum award amount per organization/project is $75,000.

Match Requirements

Matching fund requirements are based on a sliding scale. Grant requests for:

- $25,000 or less require 3:1 matching, for every three dollars of funding requested, there must be one dollar of matching funds committed.
- $25,001 to $50,000 require 2:1 matching, for every two dollars of funding requested, there must be one dollar of matching funds committed.
- $50,001 or more require 1:1 matching, for every dollar of funding requested, there must be one dollar of matching funds committed.

In-kind services provided by local government, consultants, and other Main Street stakeholders and partners may be included as match. Time contributed solely to the implementation of the project by volunteers from the Main Street organization or the organization's partners may be included. Please see the "Application Attachments" section for match verification details.

Staff time of the applicant organization is not eligible as match. Matching funds must be documented upon application submission. Matching funds expended prior to a fully executed grant Memorandum of Understanding may not be eligible project expenses.

Funding Priorities & Anticipated Outcomes

A strong application will clearly explain how the proposed project will result in measurable economic improvement in the Main Street district. The project will:

- Address one or more of the organization's Transformation Strategies or market-based strategic planning goals for the Main Street district;
- Support the community's vision for encouraging the private investment necessary for the economic revitalization of the Main Street district;
- Clearly align with the mission of the Main Street organization; and

- Be specified as a community revitalization goal as expressed in a written work plan, small area plan, downtown plan or municipal plan

While more than one activity may be included in an application, all activities should cohere in a single project. The implementation of the proposed project should empower board and committee volunteers as leaders and help develop and capitalize on the expertise and financial support of the organization's stakeholders and community partners.

Physical improvement projects should be visible from the public realm and emphasize or be compatible with the existing historic fabric. Physical improvement projects that use grant funds for durable goods (with a useful life of five years or more) will be prioritized over projects that use grant funds for nondurable goods.

Funds used for single use and/or ephemeral goods such as food, beverages, or plant materials should be allocated to matching funds/resources rather than grant funds.

Grantees are encouraged to utilize Consultant Services (see pages 11-14 in the VMS Program Guidelines available online at DHCD's VMS webpage.) to develop design projects, as well as the planning and organizational support components for economic vitality projects.

Unallowable Activities

Except for 10% or less of grant administration fees, DIG funds may not be used for operational expenses, such as payroll, debts, or any other ongoing, predictable organizational expenses for which the board could have reasonably planned (i.e. general marketing materials, website updates, financial management expenses, etc.). Additionally, funds may not be simply "passed through" the Main Street organization to third parties.

Project expenses incurred prior to a fully executed grant Memorandum of Understanding may not be reimbursable.

Scoring Rubric

Grant applicants are scored on a 0-100 point scale. Grant funds are limited and only those proposals exceeding the minimum 70-point threshold will be considered for funding. Funds will be allocated from top scoring until all funds are exhausted.
The project scoring methodology is as follows:

Criteria	Points
Alignment with organization's strategies/goals and mission/ vision	30
Project's impact/outcomes in alignment with grant program's priorities	30
Organizational capacity/readiness	15
Included in organizational annual workplan/dashboard	10
Realistic project work plan and budget	10
Organization is Nationally Accredited by MSA	5
Total	**100**

Sample Projects

1. Altavista's Spark Innovation Parklet – A $54,000 DIG supported the creation of a street-facing public space outside the Spark Innovation Center for small business development. The parklet enhanced amenities at the center, increased utilization of the facility and improved the appearance of the downtown overall.
2. Farmville's Façade Improvement Grant Project - A $50,000 DIG funded a façade improvement grant matching program to help enhance the exterior appearance of buildings and stimulate private investment in Farmville's historic commercial district.
3. St. Paul Tomorrow, Inc.'s Outdoor Dining & Alleyway Improvement Project - An $18,000 DIG supported the completion of an alleyway activation project, creating a pocket-sized outdoor eating space between two restaurants that hosts both permanent and temporary art exhibits.

Timeline

Register your Organization in CAMS	ASAP
Application Submittal Deadline	May 1, 2026
Application Review	May & June 2026
Anticipated Award Announcement	Summer 2026
Successful Projects Under Contract	Fall 2026
Project Completion & Outcomes Achieved	Fall 2027

Projects must be completed, all disbursements made, and final reports on project activities and outcomes submitted within 12 months from the contract start date.

Application Deadline

All grant applications and supporting documentation must be submitted in DHCD's Centralized Application Management System (CAMS) by 11:59 p.m. on May 1, 2026. See "Additional Information & Requirements" below for more information about CAMS.

Applicants must submit completed responses to all appropriate questions and include all required attachments. Applications not submitted accordingly may be disqualified. Additional information can be found below in the "Additional Information & Requirements" section.

Application Questions (Project Description)

Enter the following information into the relevant text box within the Narrative Information tab on CAMS. Please limit responses to no more than 500 words per text box (about one written page).

1. Provide a detailed description of the proposed project. What activities are you proposing to do with this funding? Where will this project take place – districtwide or a specific site within the district? Include as an attachment any design renderings, façade program guidelines or other supporting documents to demonstrate the scope of your project.
2. Describe your organization's capacity and readiness to successfully complete the project. Explain how and when the proposed project be accomplished, and what

resources you will leverage to complete the project. Please include members of the project committee, skills that they bring, and how they will contribute to the project's success.

3. Describe how the proposed project furthers the community's vision for the Main Street district, aligns with the mission of the Main Street organization, and addresses one or more of the organization's Transformation Strategies/goals for the Main Street district.
4. Describe outcomes that are expected from this project, both quantitative and qualitative. Examples of outcomes include but are not limited to: number of new jobs created, number of new businesses created or supported, building renovation or construction, private and public investment, number of housing units created, public improvement, increased community engagement, percentage increase in foot traffic, percentage increase in shopper spending, and such. For projects involving technical services from a consultant, describe how the end report or deliverable will be used.
5. Describe how project outcomes will be measured, tracked and reported, and how these anticipated outcomes align with grant program priorities.

Application Attachments

The below supporting documents are required as PDFs. If the application does not utilize the templates linked below, the alternate documentation should include the same information.

1. Organizational support documents:
    a. Mission/vision: Include the community's vision statement for the Main Street district and mission statement for the Main Street organization.
    b. Strategic plan/transformation Strategies: Include the organization's strategic plan or Transformation Strategy report/overview that lists the organization's transformation strategies or key focus areas for the Main Street district.
    c. Annual workplan/dashboard: Include the organization's annual, comprehensive workplan/dashboard.
2. Project related support documents:
    a. Project Work Plan - Provide an effective and appropriate work plan for the project that includes tasks, responsible individuals, timeline, and budget. Please use this template or a similar format.
    b. Project Budget – Provide a project budget that includes all project related line items for expenditures and all project related line items for funding sources. Please use this template or a similar format.
    c. Explanation of Estimated Project Costs – If applicable, provide detailed information on how project costs were estimated. Include estimates from consultants/vendors and the date(s) estimates were received.
    d. Match Verification – Provide verification of matching funds such as contracts, memorandums of understanding/agreements, award letters, and other documentation that confirms the commitment of other resources for the project.
        i. Cash match: Include a signed letter of commitment from the organization head (for nonprofits, this should be the board president) that is providing these funds denoting the total dollar amount that is being commitment to this project.

ii. In-kind match: Include a signed letter of commitment from the organization head (for nonprofits, this should be the board president) that is providing services/support for the project. If it is a consultant/vendor, please include an invoice or letter denoting the in-kind contribution. If administrative funds are being requested, the Main Street organization cannot use staff hours as match.

iii. Volunteer hours: Time contributed solely to the implementation of the project by volunteers from the Main Street organization or the organization's partners may be included. Include a signed letter of support from the organization head (for nonprofits, this should be the board president) that is providing these hours detailing the total number of anticipate volunteer hours and activities, along with the market value of these hours (based on Independent Sector's current rate).

iv. Further verification of funds may be required at contracting if an application is successful.

The below supporting documents are required as needed based on the project type:

- Design Projects – Include a map of the downtown with the location of the project identified on the map along with current photos of the proposed project area. Also, include design renderings of the project, if available.
- Program Designs – Include draft documents of proposed façade/grant program or other plans and documents as appropriate.
- Plans/Studies – Upload any recent economic development plans or studies the organization or locality has completed that includes the downtown area. Include any plan or study that supports the proposed project.

Community Vitality Grants

Overview

Community Vitality Grants (CVGs) are designed to assist Main Street communities/organizations achieve their downtown revitalization goals. CVG projects are unique, one-time momentum generators that spark Main Street efforts and create long lasting positive impact on the historic downtown or neighborhood commercial district. CVG grants are available for downtown revitalization activities, including, but not limited to:

- Design projects;
- Wayfinding system development;
- Non-profit organizational development;
- Strategic planning (including vision/mission development);
- Work plan and budget development;
- Market studies;
- Downtown organization website development;
- Entrepreneur support programs;
- Economic vitality projects; and
- Consultant services that will positively contribute to the historic downtown or neighborhood commercial district and for which other funds are not available.

Eligibility

Grants are available to all of Virginia's active Exploring Main Street (EMS) and Mobilizing Main Street (MMS) communities and organizations that are "Active" as defined in the VMS Program Guidelines available at DHCD's VMS webpage. Applicants must be current on all VMS and DHCD reports (as applicable) and comply with DHCD's financial auditing requirements denoted below. Priority is given to communities that do not have open VMS grants at the time of application submission.

Award Amount

The maximum award amount for a community or organization is $15,000.

Match Requirements

All projects require a 3:1 match. For every three dollars of grant funding requested, there must be one dollar in match funding committed. In-kind services provided by local government, consultants, and other Main Street stakeholders and partners may be included as match. Time contributed solely to the implementation of the project by volunteers from the Main Street organization or the organization's partners may be included. Please see the "Application Attachments" section for match verification details.

Staff time of the applicant organization is not eligible as match. Matching funds must be documented upon application submission. Matching funds expended prior to a fully executed grant Memorandum of Understanding may not be eligible project expenses.

Funding Priorities & Anticipated Outcomes

A strong application will clearly explain how the proposed project or service is an effective organizational or economic development strategy for the commercial district.

- Proposed organizational development projects via consultant services must advance the sustainability of the local organization through the development of bylaws and organizational structure, mission/vision statements, work and budget plans, market studies, or the creation of entrepreneur support programs that will positively contribute to the revitalization of downtown.
- Proposed economic vitality, promotion or design related projects must directly support existing work plans and identified strategies for improving the functionality and/or usage of the downtown district.

Competitive applications will make it clear that the applicant is capable of successfully completing the service or project and that it will increase organizational readiness, strengthen entrepreneurial ecosystems, or enhance the built environment for the district.

Funds used for single use and/or ephemeral goods such as food, beverages, or plant materials should be allocated to matching funds/resources rather than grant funds.

Unallowable Activities

Except for 10% or less of grant administration fees, CVG funds may not be used for continuing operations, program administration, or any other ongoing operational expenses. Funds are not available for predictable expenses for which the community or organization could have reasonably planned (for example, general marketing materials, financial management expenses, etc.).

Project expenses incurred prior to a fully executed grant Memorandum of Understanding may not be reimbursable.

Scoring Rubric

Grant applicants are scored on a 0-100 point scale. Grant funds are limited and only those proposals exceeding the minimum 70-point threshold will be considered for funding. Funds will be allocated from top scoring until all funds are exhausted.
The project scoring methodology is as follows:

Criteria	Points
Project's impact on organizational development or the commercial district	35
Relation to community/organization's strategies/goals	30
Organizational capacity/readiness	20
Realistic project work plan and budget	15
Total	**100**

Sample Projects

1. Town of Gate City's Streetscape Project - A $15,000 CVG funded the purchase and installation of street furniture and planters building momentum for additional enhancements in the future.
2. Town of Leesburg's Wayfinding Update - A $15,000 CVG funded the redesign and modernization of Leesburg's existing wayfinding system.
3. Louisa Forward Foundation's Strategic Market Analysis Project - A $7,000 CVG provided funding for Main Street America to complete a strategic market study to help Louisa leverage its unique community assets and build on larger retail trends.

Timeline

Register your Organization in CAMS (See below)	ASAP
Application Submittal Deadline	May 1, 2026
Application Review	May & June 2026
Anticipated Award Announcement	Summer 2026
Successful Projects Under Contract	Fall 2026
Project Completion & Outcomes Achieved	Fall 2027

Projects must be completed, all disbursements made, and final reports on project activities and outcomes submitted within 12 months of the contract start date.

Application Deadline

All grant applications and supporting documentation must be submitted in DHCD's Centralized Application Management System (CAMS) by 11:59 p.m. on May 1, 2026. (See Additional Information below for more information about CAMS.) Applicants must submit completed responses to all appropriate questions and include all required attachments. Applications not submitted accordingly may be disqualified. Additional information can be found below in the "Additional Information & Requirements" section.

Application Questions (Project Description)

Enter the following information into the relevant text box within the Narrative Information tab on CAMS. Please limit responses to no more than 500 words per text box (about one written page).

1. Provide a description of the proposed project. What activities do you propose to do with this funding? Where will this project take place?
2. Describe your readiness to successfully complete the project. Explain how and when the proposed project be accomplished, and what resources you will leverage to complete the project.
3. What is your community's vision for the commercial district, and how does this project assist in these downtown revitalization goals?
4. Describe outcomes that are expected from this project, both quantitative and qualitative. Outcomes might be increased visitors, new jobs created, private investment generated or changes in perception of the district. For projects involving technical services from a consultant, describe how the end project will be used, communicated and/or lead to a more sustainable organization.
5. Describe how project outcomes will be measured, tracked and reported and how these anticipated outcomes align with grant program priorities.

Application Attachments (Supporting Documents)

The below supporting documents are required:

1. Vision/Mission: Include the community's vision statement for the district and mission statement for the organization.
2. Strategies: Include any community or organizational strategic plans that outline goals for the commercial district or the organization.
3. Project related support documents:
    a. Project Work Plan: Provide an effective and appropriate work plan for the project that includes tasks, responsible individuals, timeline, and budget. Please use this template or a similar format.
    b. Project Budget – Provide a project budget that includes all project related line items for expenditures and all project related line items for funding sources. Please use this template or a similar format.
    c. Explanation of Estimated Project Costs – If applicable, provide detailed information on how project costs were estimated. Include estimates from consultants/vendors and the date(s) estimates were received.
    d. Match Verification – Provide verification of matching funds such as contracts, memorandums of understanding/agreements, award letters, and other documentation that confirms the commitment of other resources for the project.
        i. Cash match: Include a signed letter of commitment from the organization head (for nonprofits, this should be the board president) that is providing these funds denoting the total dollar amount that is being commitment to this project.
        ii. In-kind match: Include a signed letter of commitment from the

organization head (for nonprofits, this should be the board president) that is providing services/support for the project. If it is a consultant/vendor, please include an invoice or letter denoting the in-kind contribution. If administrative funds are being requested, the Main Street organization cannot use staff hours as match.

iii. Volunteer hours: Time contributed solely to the implementation of the project by volunteers from the Main Street organization or the organization's partners may be included. Include a signed letter of support from the organization head (for nonprofits, this should be the board president) that is providing these hours detailing the total number of anticipate volunteer hours and activities, along with the market value of these hours (based on Independent Sector's current rate).

iv. Further verification of funds may be required at contracting if an application is successful.

The below supporting documents are optional based on the project type:

- Design Projects – Include a map of the downtown with the location of the project identified on the map along with current photos of the proposed project area. Also, include design renderings of the project, if available.
- Program Designs – Include draft documents of proposed façade/grant program or other plans and documents as appropriate.
- Plans/Studies – Upload any recent economic development plans or studies the organization or locality has completed that includes the downtown area. Include any plan or study that supports the proposed project.

Additional Information & Requirements

Note: The below sections are **applicable to all VMS grants.**

Audit Requirements

DHCD has instituted an agency-wide audit policy. All applicants must upload a copy of the organization's W-9 and most recent audit or financial statements, as applicable, to DHCD's Centralized Application Management System (CAMS) by the grant's application deadline. All grantees that receive funding during a specific program year are required to submit financial documents or audits in accordance with the agency policy. The full DHCD Audit Policy, including an explanation of the specific document requirements, can be found online here.

All grantees are required to upload a copy of their organization's procurement policy to CAMS, along with a signed statement acknowledging that this policy was adhered to throughout the implementation of this project.

Memorandum of Understanding

If the application is selected for funding, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between DHCD and the grantee must be executed and the organization must be in compliance with DHCD's audit policy (denoted above) before any funds are disbursed. The MOU will outline project deliverables, conditions, fund disbursement, and termination.

Grant Payments (Remittances)

Funds may only be used for eligible expenses incurred after the signing of the MOU. Funds will be disbursed as outlined in the MOU. Financial support documentation for all project related expenses and leverage must be uploaded to CAMS prior to closeout as outlined in the MOU.

DHCD reserves the right to end funding at any point should the project prove nonviable. This includes, but is not limited to, lack of progress in conformance with the approved MOU.
To apply for direct deposit of funds, register for Electronic Data Interchange with the Virginia Department of Accounts. Forms must be mailed via post mail and can be downloaded here.

Reporting

Reporting through CAMS is required for projects. This includes interim progress reports and/or a final report as outlined in the MOU.

Administrative Costs

A portion of the awarded grant funds (up to 10% of total award amount) must be used to cover administrative costs. The administrative section of the project budget will be based on activities completed or milestones achieved–such as completing progress and final reports–rather than for time and materials. These milestones are negotiated between DHCD and the grantee and outlined in the MOU.

Calculating Volunteer Hours

Generic volunteer hours are calculated at the rate provided by Independent Sector each April. You can find this information here.
Professional services provided pro bono are calculated at the providers billing rate—not the volunteer rate.

CAMS

Applications for funding must be submitted through DHCD's Centralized Application Management System (CAMS). You can access CAMS here.

Google Chrome is the recommended browser for CAMS. Please remember to SAVE often. In order to access CAMS and complete an application for funding, a locality must establish a CAMS profile. A profile request can be made by going to the CAMS site and selecting the "Registration" option. In order to register your organization, you will need your organization's Unique Entity ID (UEI) and Federal Employer Identification Number (FEIN). Please allow up to five business days for DHCD to process and approve your registration request.

Once your organization has been registered, you may log in with your username and

password and select the "Applications and Programs" option. From this page, select the "Apply" option and select the program from the dropdown menu. A description of the program will appear. Click the "Apply" button next to the pencil icon to begin an application.

As you complete the application, be sure to save each page. You have the option to close out of CAMS and return to the application at any time until the application is submitted, or the deadline has passed.

The CAMS User Guide can be found online here.

CAMS technical support is available weekdays Monday-Friday between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. If you need assistance with registration or the completion of the application in CAMS, please reach out to the CAMS Help Desk at camshelp@dhcd.virginia.gov.

Application Instructions

The application in CAMS will require the organization to complete each tab:

1. **Project Information:** Include the primary point of contact, primary location of the project and service area.
2. **Project Budget:** Complete budget information, including grant requested funding and other match funding. Within the budget narrative space, describe how the budget was derived and sources of other funding.
3. **Narrative Information:** Answer narrative questions related to the project, timeline, budget and outcomes. For additional information, please see respective "Application Questions" sections for each grant.
4. **Attachments:** Upload multiple supporting documents as attachments. For additional information, please see respective "Application Attachments" sections for each grant.
5. **Additional Information:** This is not required. If you have additional information to describe or share that was not asked in the application, please include it here.

VIRGINIA Main Street
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VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
Partners for Better Communities