



Regional Council Guidelines

Section 1: Introduction

Introduction

The *GO Virginia Regional Council Manual* provides a structured framework for the formation, governance, and ongoing operation of Regional Councils certified under the Virginia Growth and Opportunity Act. These Councils are tasked with advancing regionally driven economic development strategies and recommending projects for funding through the GO Virginia program.

Developed in accordance with the Growth and Opportunity Act, this manual is designed to guide Regional Councils operate with transparency, inclusivity, and long-term impact in mind. It outlines expectations for effective governance, transparent operations, and alignment with GO Virginia's mission to promote regional collaboration and economic growth and diversification. The manual serves as a foundational reference to ensure consistency, accountability, and impact across all regions.

Regional Collaboration and Meaningful Local Participation

Foundational to the GO Virginia program is the concept of regionalism and growing and diversifying regional economies through the collaboration of at least two Virginia localities on a region. The enabling legislation for GO Virginia funds states in [§ 2.2-2489](#) :

“Moneys in the Fund shall be used to facilitate regional collaboration on economic growth and diversification. Specifically, the Fund shall be used to incentivize and encourage cooperation among business, education, and government on regional strategic economic development and workforce development efforts.”

To demonstrate this collaboration, eligible projects must demonstrate the participation of two or more localities, political subdivisions, or public bodies. The [Memo on Regional Collaboration and Local Participation](#) provides additional information.

Section 2: Regional Council Functions

Purpose of Regional Councils

Regional Councils are formed to bring together business, education, and government leaders to promote private sector growth, economic diversification, and workforce alignment. Councils serve as the strategic body recommending projects for GO Virginia funding and guiding regional economic priorities. Councils are tasked with fostering activities that strengthen economic competitiveness, grow existing clusters, scale small and mid-size companies, and support entrepreneurs.



Core Responsibilities of Regional Council Members

Regional Councils are the official entities through which the GO Virginia State Board receives project recommendations, monitors program outcomes, and ensures responsible stewardship of public funds. The structure incentivizes regional collaboration to diversify economies, grow high-paying jobs, and align workforce and economic strategies.

Regional Council members play a central role in the success of GO Virginia. Members are expected to:

- Advance regional goals by participating in strategic decision-making and contributing to the development of regional priorities.
- Recommend and approve projects that align with the region's Growth and Diversification Plan and GO Virginia funding requirements.
- Represent key sectors by bringing forward the perspectives of business, education, workforce, local government, and community organizations.
- Participate actively in Council meetings, strategic planning sessions, and relevant committee work.
- Support Council effectiveness by helping identify, recruit, and retain members who reflect the region's economic diversity and strategic needs.

Through these responsibilities, Regional Council members help shape the long-term economic future of their regions and strengthen the Commonwealth as a whole.

Growth and Diversification Plan

Each Regional Council is required to develop a Growth and Diversification Plan that meets standards established by the GO Virginia State Board. The plan serves as a strategic blueprint to guide regional collaboration, support economic diversification, and create high-paying jobs by addressing workforce gaps and leveraging emerging opportunities.

To be effective, the plan must be tailored to the unique assets and needs of the region and should align with existing strategies or initiatives. The plan should outline actionable strategies to:

1. Recruit and retain talent aligned with business and industry needs
2. Grow and scale existing businesses and industry clusters
3. Prepare a portfolio of economic development sites for targeted industry clusters
4. Develop, implement, and support regional entrepreneurial initiatives building regional
5. Advance joint economic development initiatives across locality boundaries

This plan is foundational to the Council's ability to recommend projects, prioritize investments, and demonstrate impact. It is updated periodically to reflect evolving regional priorities and economic conditions.

Section 3: Formation and Certification of Regional Councils

Formation Process

Although the GO Virginia regions are already established, this section outlines the procedures that would apply if a new region is approved or an existing region is restructured. These guidelines reflect the enabling legislation outlined in Title 2.2, Chapter 24, Article 26 of the Code of Virginia.¹

Upon the approval of new regional boundaries by the GO Virginia State Board, the region must submit a Letter of Intent to the Board through the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). A template is available from DHCD to assist with this submission. Failure to submit a letter of intent may result in the Board initiating efforts to establish a Regional Council for that region.

The Letter of Intent must include:

- A statement of intent to organize a Regional Council
- A proposed membership list and description of the member selection process, demonstrating broad representation of the region
- A proposed leadership structure and how leadership was selected
- Identification of the sector each proposed member represents
- Evidence of public input and stakeholder engagement in the formation process

If a region fails to organize a Council within a reasonable timeframe, the GO Virginia Board may establish a Formation Committee, consistent with § 2.2-2485. This committee shall include a chair and two members from the region and is responsible for consulting with local stakeholders and recruiting members to form a certified Regional Council. Members of the Formation Committee may also serve as officers or members of the Council, once certified.

Before a Regional Council is certified, the proposed membership must be posted publicly by DHCD for public review. The Board will accept public comments both prior to and during the meeting at which certification is considered.

Before a region may apply for grant funding, the Board must certify the Council for that region. To become certified by the Board, a proposed Regional Council must:

- Submit a Letter of Intent (LOI) through DHCD, including:
- Statement of intent to organize
- Proposed membership and selection process
- Proposed leadership and sector representation
- Evidence of stakeholder engagement and public input
- Undergo public comment at the Board level and regional level

¹ Footnote: For reference, see Code of Virginia Title 2.2, Chapter 24, Article 26 – Virginia Growth and Opportunity Act: <https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacodefull/title2.2/chapter24/article26/>



- Receive Board approval

Annual Certification

At the start of each fiscal year, regional council must certify their councils with the State Board prior to the disbursement of grant funds. To be certified, regions must submit:

- Capacity Building Budget
- Regional Council Memorandum of Understanding (KOU)
- Capacity Building Contract
- Updated Authorized Signatories List
- Regional Council Certification form
- Regional Support Staff organizational chart

Section 4: Membership

Membership Requirements

Regional Councils must be broadly representative of the region they serve. The Code of Virginia requires membership from the following sectors:

1. The business community: A majority of the of the members of the regional council must be from the private sector, and have demonstrated significant business experience. As noted below, the Chair of each region must be a citizen member with significant private-sector business experience
2. The education sector: this could include representatives from K-12 school systems, community colleges, and public institutions of higher education
3. Local Governments: elected officials or senior staff representing counties, cities, or towns in the region
4. Planning District Commissions: Commission members or senior staff representing planning district commissions within the region
5. The economic development and workforce development sector: individuals affiliated with organizations responsible for promoting economic growth, business retention or recruitment at the regional level and individuals affiliated with organizations responsible for workforce development at the regional level.
6. Nonprofit Organizations
7. Other entities that significantly affect regional economic or workforce development

The goal of the membership structure is to ensure that key regional stakeholders are intentionally brought together to collaborate on economic development priorities. Each Council should reflect the unique economic, geographic, educational, and demographic characteristics of its region.

When determining representation, regions should consider factors such as key industry sectors, workforce and education alignment, urban and rural balance, and demographic diversity. Representation must be inclusive, strategic, and grounded in the long-term needs of the region. Sector-based composition provides a foundation for broad expertise and balanced decision-making across Council activities



Leadership Requirements

Each Regional Council must be chaired by a citizen member from the region with significant private-sector business experience. Both the Chair and Vice Chair must meet this requirement, along with a majority of the Council's membership:

- **Chair:** The Chair is a citizen member of the Council with significant private-sector business experience, responsible for presiding over meetings, guiding strategic discussions, representing the Council in official capacities, and ensuring the overall effectiveness of the Council's governance.
- **Vice Chair:** The Vice Chair is responsible for supporting the Chair, presiding over meetings in the Chair's absence, and assisting with governance duties as needed.

Among the business representatives, there should be individuals with direct experience managing both small and large enterprises to ensure Council decisions are informed by diverse operational perspectives.

Council Officer Roles and Election Process

Each Regional Council should clearly define the roles, responsibilities, and selection process for its

- Officers should be elected by a majority vote of the full Council, following a nomination process outlined in the bylaws.
- Officer terms should be clearly defined (e.g., two years), with guidance on reappointment and succession planning.
- Councils are encouraged to stagger officer terms to promote continuity and leadership development.

Each Council may adopt additional officer positions or modify role descriptions based on the size, needs, and structure of the region. Regardless of variation, clear documentation of roles and transparent election processes are essential to ensuring accountability and shared leadership.

Membership Size

Councils must have no fewer than 15 members and no more than 25 members during any time of operation. Any request to operate outside of this range must be accompanied by a written justification and submitted for approval by the GO Virginia State Board.

Representation and Vacancy Policies

In cases where multiple organizations in the region share similar missions, the Council should designate one representative entity from each functional group. This representative will serve as the liaison and be responsible for communication across its broader network.

Councils should adopt a policy outlining how vacancies will be filled and whether appointments are tied to an individual or the position they hold at the time of appointment. Additionally, councils should ensure gender, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity in their membership, as part of a commitment to inclusive and representative governance.



Nominating New Members

New member nominations should be part of a transparent and inclusive process led by the Council in coordination with its support organization. Nominations must be based on current regional priorities and representation needs and should be reviewed periodically to maintain alignment with Council goals.

Quorum and Voting

A quorum, defined as a majority of appointed voting members, must be present to conduct official Council business. Council actions should be approved by a majority vote of the members present, unless otherwise specified in the Council's bylaws.

Orientation and Training

All new members are encouraged to participate in an onboarding process. This may include a review of this manual, the region's Growth and Diversification Plan, FOIA and COIA guidelines, and other Council-specific policies or procedures.

Attendance and Engagement

Council members are expected to actively participate in quarterly Council meetings, serve on committees if requested, and contribute to the strategic work of the Council. Sustained engagement is essential to maintaining a high-performing, representative body.

Membership Engagement and Participation

Council engagement helps ensure that Council members are well-prepared to fulfill their responsibilities and contribute to the long-term success of the region and the GO Virginia program. To promote an active, informed, and effective Regional Council, the following engagement practices are recommended as a best practice:

- **Conduct Annual Orientation Sessions**
All new and returning members should participate in an annual orientation. This session should provide an overview of the GO Virginia program, available grant types, Council responsibilities, regional planning documents, and key governance expectations.
- **Establish a Mentorship Approach**
Councils are encouraged to pair new members with experienced Council members who can offer guidance on navigating the Growth and Diversification Plan, project evaluation, committee participation, and meeting protocols.
- **Set Clear Expectations for Active Participation**
Council members are expected to be active contributors—not passive attendees. Members should regularly participate in quarterly meetings, engage in strategic planning discussions, and serve on committees or working groups when requested.

Section 5: Governance

Council Bylaws



Each Regional Council must adopt bylaws that outline the Council's governance framework and operating procedures. At a minimum, bylaws must include:

- A description of sector group representation and the process for member selection and appointment
 - The Council's meeting schedule, quorum requirements, and voting procedures
 - The length of member terms, reappointment processes, and procedures for removal or replacement of member
 - Provisions to ensure compliance with the Virginia Conflict of Interest Act (COIA), the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), and applicable indemnification or liability standards for public bodies
- The optional inclusion of advisory councils or committees to provide additional support and subject matter expertise

Project Development, Approval, and Oversight

Regional Councils play a critical role in shaping regional priorities and recommending high-impact projects for GO Virginia funding. Each Regional Council must demonstrate, in a format acceptable to the State Board, that it has effective internal processes for organizing, supporting, and overseeing the implementation of GO Virginia-funded projects. Councils are responsible for monitoring performance, ensuring compliance, and participating in audit and assessment activities as required.

Council Role in Project Development and Approval

While support organizations manage project oversight and implementation, Councils are responsible for guiding project development, ensuring alignment with strategic goals, and exercising due diligence during the review and approval process.

- **Identify Strategic Project Opportunities**
Council members should actively engage in identifying challenges, opportunities, and partnership ideas within their region that could lead to impactful GO Virginia projects. Members are encouraged to share insights from their respective sectors to help shape responsive, forward-looking initiatives.
- **Review and Evaluate Proposed Projects**
Councils must review proposed projects for alignment with the region's Growth and Diversification Plan, funding eligibility, regional impact, private sector support, and sustainability. Councils may use scoring tools, rubrics, or committee processes to facilitate a transparent and consistent review.
- **Recommend Projects for State Board Approval**
Only projects approved by a certified Regional Council may be submitted to DHCD and the GO Virginia State Board for funding consideration. Councils should ensure that recommended projects:
 - Are feasible and well-defined
 - Include realistic and measurable outcomes
 - Demonstrate strong regional collaboration



- Meet match requirements and leverage local/private resources
- **Participate in Strategic Project Planning**
Councils may work with their support organization to refine project ideas, connect potential partners, and request planning grants or pilot funding to test concepts before full-scale implementation.

Annual Governance Review

Each Regional Council is encouraged to conduct an annual review of its governance practices, including its bylaws, structure, and compliance procedures. This review may be completed through a self-assessment process or as part of a board planning session. The purpose is to ensure continued alignment with GO Virginia's goals, operational effectiveness, and adherence to public governance standards.

Section 6: Regional Support Organizations

Each Regional Council must be affiliated with, or supported by, an existing or newly established organization with expertise in collaborative planning, economic development, or workforce initiatives. This designated support organization is responsible for assisting the Council with functions such as data analysis, evaluation of best practices, review of project proposals, and other duties as assigned by the Council.

- a. Eligible support organizations may include, but are not limited to, planning district commissions, institutions of higher education, regional economic or workforce development partnerships, community foundations, and other nonprofit organizations with a regional scope. A new organization can be established for the specific purpose of supporting the Regional Council.
- b. The contractual agreement between the Regional Council and its support organization must clearly define the support organization's responsibility for fiduciary oversight and administrative services related to activities funded by GO Virginia and other matching sources. In all matters pertaining to the GO Virginia program, the support organization shall operate under the direction and with the advice and consent of the Regional Council.
- c. The support organization must demonstrate capacity in financial management, including sound accounting practices, grant administration, project management, and the ability to track and report performance metrics and comply with audit protocols. DHCD will review audits, contracts, and performance data submitted by the Regional Council and its affiliated support organization to ensure compliance and accountability.

A new organization may be established solely to support the Council if no suitable existing organization is available. The contractual agreement between the Regional Council and its support organization must clearly define roles and responsibilities, including:

- Fiduciary oversight and administrative services related to GO Virginia and other matching funds



- Operation under the advice and consent of the Council in matters related to GO Virginia programming
- Demonstrated capacity in financial management, including accounting, grant administration, project management, and performance tracking

DHCD is responsible for reviewing audits, contracts, and performance reports submitted by both the Council and its support organization to ensure compliance and accountability.

Role of the Support Organization

While Regional Council members provide strategic leadership and decision-making, the Support Organization handles the administrative, logistical, and programmatic functions that enable effective implementation. By managing these essential functions, Support Organizations enable Regional Councils to focus on high-level strategic leadership while ensuring that GO Virginia funds are deployed effectively, compliantly, and in service of regional economic goals.

- **Prepare Meeting Materials and Facilitate Communication**
Coordinate logistics for Council and committee meetings, including drafting agendas, preparing background materials, and recording and distributing meeting minutes. Support Organizations also serve as a communication bridge between Council members, partners, and stakeholders.
- **Manage Grant Applications and Deadlines**
Assist applicants in navigating the GO Virginia application process. This includes providing technical assistance, ensuring application completeness and alignment with regional priorities, and tracking deadlines for submission to DHCD and the State Board.
- **Coordinate Project Reviews and Evaluations**
Organize internal and external review processes for proposed projects. This includes preparing materials for Regional Council review, facilitating Council deliberation, and managing any required pre-review steps such as scoring or initial staff assessments.
- **Serve as Liaison to DHCD**
Maintain ongoing communication with the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to ensure compliance with program guidelines, timely submission of required documentation, and alignment with state-level directives and funding strategies.
- **Track Project Performance and Submit Reports**
Monitor active projects for progress toward stated outcomes, financial compliance, and reporting obligations. The Support Organization collects performance data, compiles quarterly and final reports, and submits all required documentation through the state's reporting system.

Section 7: Transparency & Compliance

Regional Councils are expected to uphold the principles of public transparency, responsible governance, and programmatic accountability.

Public Notices:

In accordance with § 2.2-3707 of the Code of Virginia, all public bodies are required to provide notice of their meetings at least three (3) working days in advance. The notice must include the meeting's date, time, and location, A statement if the meeting will be held electronically or include a virtual participation option, The agenda or a summary of key topics to be discussed.

As a best practice to ensure public awareness and participation, Councils should:

- Make agendas clear and user-friendly, with action items and topics written in plain language. Agendas should support the strategic direction of the regional council
- Include supporting materials (e.g., project lists, presentations) alongside the posted agenda
- Post all materials in a prominent and easy-to-find location on the Council's website

If changes are made to the date, time, or location of a previously announced meeting, a revised notice must be issued as soon as practicable, following the same posting requirements.

Freedom of Information Act

Regional Councils must comply with the Virginia Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), § 2.2-3707, which ensures public access to meetings and records of public bodies. Under FOIA:

- Meeting notices must be posted at least three working days in advance, including the date, time, and location.
- Meetings of three or more members discussing Council business are considered public meetings and must be open to the public—whether held in person or electronically.
- Meeting minutes must be recorded, include summaries of discussions and votes, and be posted publicly in a timely manner.
- Councils must make public records available upon request, unless an exemption applies.

Closed sessions are allowed only for specific, limited statutory purposes such as discussion of personnel matters, consultation with legal counsel or the development of confidential grant proposals containing proprietary or financial information not subject to public disclosure (see Va. Code § 2.2-3711).

Councils should ensure meeting materials and records are easy to access and understand, and work with their support organization to uphold FOIA requirements in all operations.

Conflict of Interest (COIA)



Although Regional Council members are not formally required to file financial disclosures or complete COIA training under Virginia law, GO Virginia encourages Councils to adopt conflict of interest best practices that promote public transparency and ethical decision-making.

Recommended practices include:

- Encouraging all Council members to complete the online COIA training available through the Virginia Conflict of Interest and Ethics Advisory Council: <https://ethics.dls.virginia.gov/>
- Establishing a local policy requiring disclosure of any personal, financial, or organizational interests that may influence Council decisions
- Requiring members to recuse themselves from voting on matters where a conflict or appearance of conflict exists
- Including a standing agenda item to remind members to disclose any conflicts at the start of each meeting
- interest policies to promote transparency and accountability in decision-making.

As a best practice, councils should consult legal counsel when questions arise about personal interests in Council business or potential conflicts.

Financial Disclosure

Regional Council members are not required to file a Financial Disclosure Statement under the State and Local Government Conflict of Interests Act (COIA), § 2.2-3100 et seq. This is because Regional Councils, as established under the Virginia Growth and Opportunity Act, are not classified as public bodies whose members fall under COIA's formal filing or training requirements.

As such, DHCD does not recommend that Councils develop or require their own financial disclosure forms. Imposing local disclosure requirements may unintentionally create confusion, deter participation—particularly from private-sector members—or introduce legal or administrative risk. However, if a Regional Council chooses to implement a voluntary internal disclosure process to promote transparency and reinforce ethical governance, DHCD encourages the following best practices:

- **Use Official Templates**
Councils should use disclosure templates developed by the Virginia Conflict of Interest and Ethics Advisory Council, which are designed to align with statewide standards.
- **Obtain Legal Guidance**
Councils should consult with legal counsel to ensure that any adopted process or form complies with applicable law and does not conflict with state-level policy.
- **Define the Scope and Purpose**
If implemented, the disclosure process should clearly outline its purpose (e.g., identifying potential conflicts), frequency (e.g., annual or upon appointment), and how disclosures will be reviewed and retained.

A voluntary disclosure process, if structured appropriately, may serve as a helpful tool to strengthen



accountability and build public trust—especially in matters involving funding decisions, partnerships, or potential conflicts of interest.

Compliance and Corrective Action

If a Council or its support organization fails to operate within these guidelines—whether due to noncompliance, negligence, or inattention to core responsibilities—DHCD and the GO Virginia State Board may initiate corrective action. Actions may include:

- Written notification and technical assistance
- Required governance or leadership changes
- Suspension of funding
- Decertification of the Council

DHCD will conduct ongoing monitoring of governance practices, project oversight, and documentation compliance. Councils are expected to respond promptly and transparently to any formal requests from DHCD.

Section 8: Additional Resources & References

To support the effective operation of Regional Councils, this section provides a curated list of tools, templates, and references that Council members and support organizations may find helpful. These resources are intended to supplement the guidance in this manual and promote consistency, transparency, and high performance across all regions.

Key Resources

- [GO Virginia State Board Overview](#)
 - Summary of the boards mission, policies, and meeting materials.
- [Growth and Diversification Plan Guidelines](#)
 - Template and instructions for developing or updating a regional plan.
 - Available through DHCD or your regional support organization.
- FOIA and COIA Training
 - Online training for Conflict of Interest (COIA): ethics.dls.virginia.gov
 - FOIA compliance guidance: dhcd.virginia.gov FOIA Policy

Conclusion

Regional Councils are at the heart of GO Virginia’s mission to drive regionally led economic growth and innovation. Through committed leadership, strategic investments, and cross-sector collaboration, Council members help strengthen Virginia’s workforce, business climate, and long-term economic vitality.

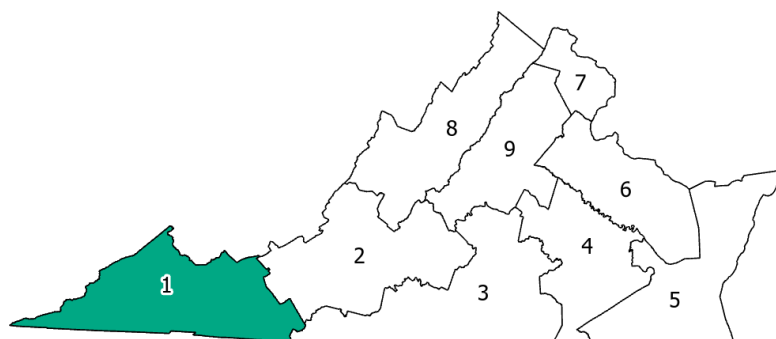
Thank you for your service and dedication to advancing regional opportunity and prosperity across the Commonwealth.

GO Virginia Regions

Region 1

Region One includes the counties of Bland, Buchanan, Carroll, Dickenson, Grayson, Lee, Russell, Scott, Smyth, Tazewell, Washington, Wise, and Wythe, and the cities of Bristol, Galax and Norton.

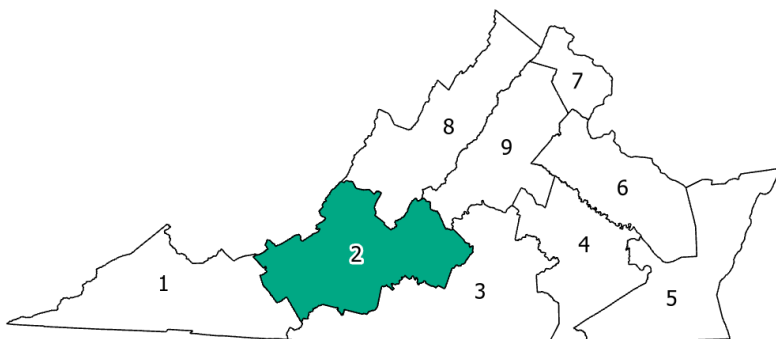
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Region 2

Region Two includes the counties of Alleghany, Amherst, Appomattox, Bedford, Botetourt, Campbell, Craig, Floyd, Franklin, Giles, Montgomery, Pulaski, and Roanoke, and the cities of Covington, Lynchburg, Radford, Roanoke and Salem.

<https://cece.vt.edu/GOVAR2.html>



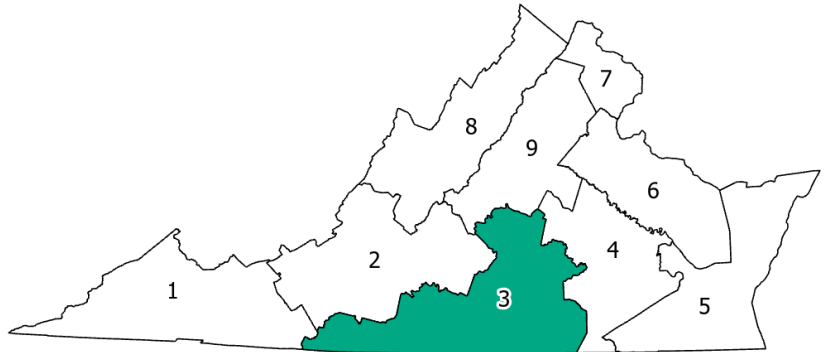


VIRGINIA INITIATIVE FOR
**GROWTH &
OPPORTUNITY**
IN EACH REGION

Region 3

Region Three includes the counties of Amelia, Brunswick, Buckingham, Charlotte, Cumberland, Halifax, Henry, Lunenburg, Mecklenburg, Nottoway, Patrick, Pittsylvania, and Prince Edward, and the cities of Danville and Martinsville.

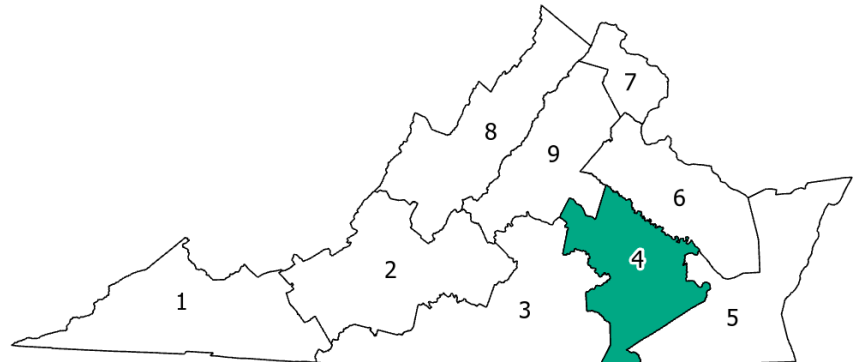
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Region 4

Region Four includes the counties of Charles City, Chesterfield, Dinwiddie, Goochland, Greenville, Hanover, Henrico, New Kent, Powhatan, Prince George, Surry, and Sussex, and the cities of Colonial Heights, Emporia, Hopewell, Petersburg and Richmond.

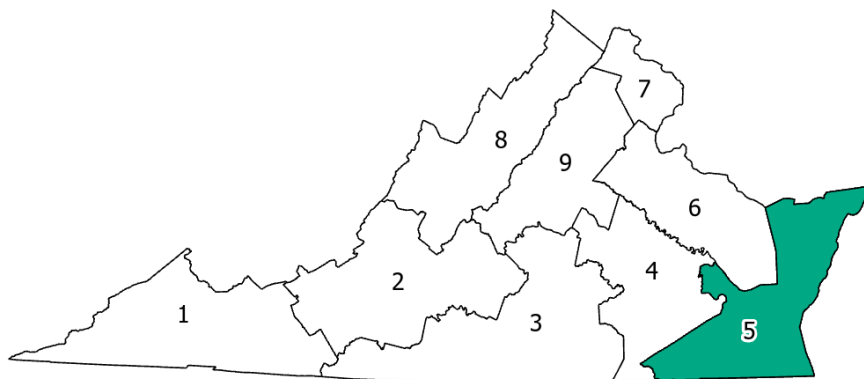
<https://growcapitaljobs.org/>



Region 5

Region 5 consists of the cities of Chesapeake, Franklin, Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Poquoson, Portsmouth, Suffolk, Virginia Beach, and Williamsburg; and the counties of Accomack, Isle of Wight, James City, Northampton, Southampton, and York.

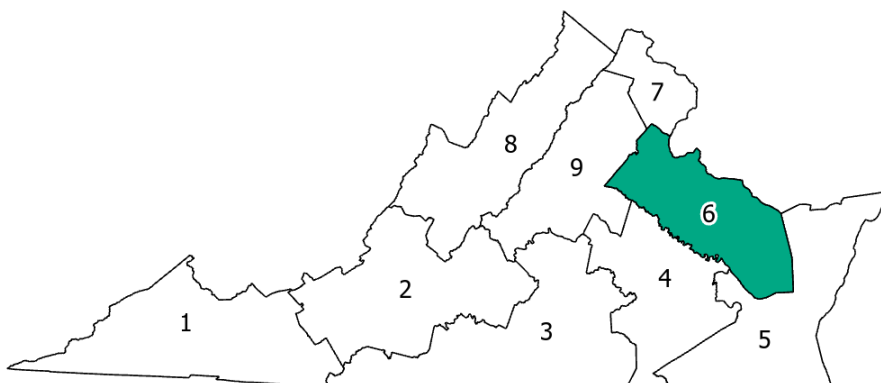
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Region 6

Region 6 consists of the city of Fredericksburg; and the counties of Caroline, Essex, Gloucester, King and Queen, King George, King William, Lancaster, Mathews, Middlesex, Northumberland, Richmond, Spotsylvania, Stafford, and Westmoreland.

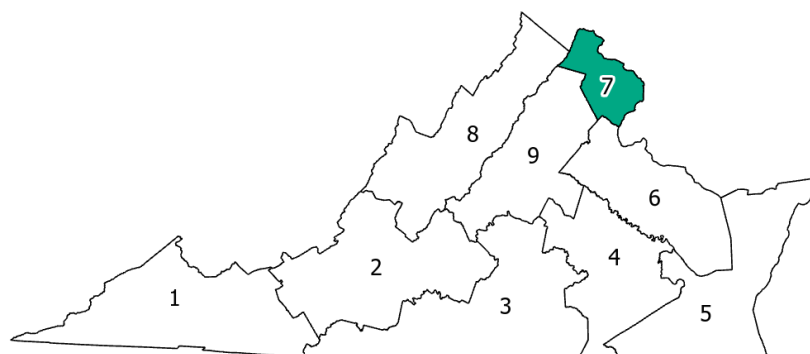
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Region 7

Region 7 consists of the cities Alexandria, Fairfax, Falls Church, Manassas, and Manassas Park; and the counties of Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun, and Prince William.

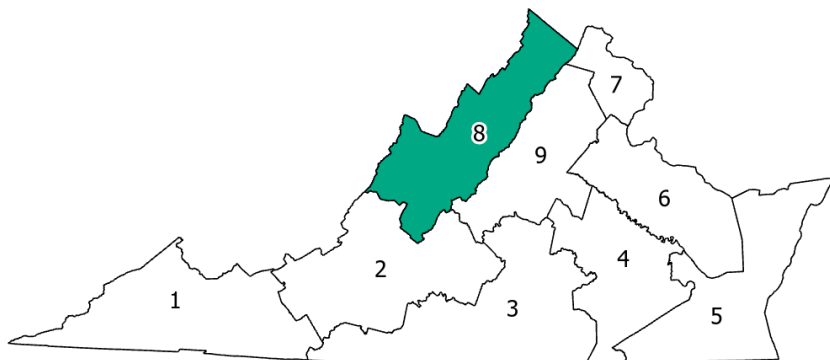
<https://www.gonorthernva.com/>



Region 8

Region 8 consists of the cities of Buena Vista, Harrisonburg, Lexington, Staunton, Waynesboro, Winchester; and the counties of Augusta, Bath, Clarke, Frederick, Highland, Page, Rockbridge, Rockingham, Shenandoah, and Warren.

<https://govirginiaregion8.org/>



Region 9

Region 9 consists of the city of Charlottesville; and the counties of Albemarle, Culpeper, Fauquier, Fluvanna, Greene, Louisa, Madison, Nelson, Orange, and Rappahannock.

<https://www.govirginia9.org/>

