Virginia Technology Councils' 2023 Policy Agenda

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CHARLOTTESVILLE **BUSINESS INNOVATION** COUNCIL
ADVANCING TECHNOLOGY AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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Overview

Virginia has made great strides in recent years on issues of importance to the technology industry. That includes integrating computer science education into the K-12 curriculum, significantly boosting annual degrees in computer science and information technology at our institutions of higher education, record levels of investment in broadband deployment, and revitalizing our focus on innovation and entrepreneurship at the Virginia Innovation Partnership Authority.

The Commonwealth is again positioned to continue its leadership in innovation and technology. The incoming administration has a great opportunity to build on burgeoning sectors including unmanned systems, autonomous vehicles, electric vehicles, clean energy technologies, advanced manufacturing, and modern pharmaceuticals. Strengthening our workforce, recruiting the required investor capital, and improving research commercialization at our universities can all help to accelerate our growth in these areas and return Virginia to a position of leadership in creating and growing successful businesses.

Virginia's technology community recommends Governor Youngkin and the General Assembly embrace the following priorities to solidify our position as the best state in the country to do business and strengthen our position for the best place to start a new business, particularly in technology.

Education & Workforce Development

In order for Virginia's businesses to grow and thrive, they need diverse, well-trained and highly skilled employees. In the technology industry, Virginia continues to experience a shortage of trained workers. Technology businesses want to locate in areas with an abundant workforce, and technologists want to locate where there are numerous job opportunities in their field.

We support the following efforts to increase our workforce:
- Strengthening Virginia's math standards to ensure that students are prepared to advance in areas such as computer science education and information technology.
- Supporting diversity, equity and inclusion to bring more students into the workforce, including students for whom english is their second language.
- Aligning the Commonwealth's computer science education initiatives in K-12 schools to ensure that all students have access, and ensuring training and logistical support to all school divisions in compliance with the Virginia K-12 computer science Standards of Learning.
- Increase funding for computer science teacher training and professional development, including support for increasing diversity among computer science educators.
- Continue funding for apprenticeship programs, work experience internships, and other innovative approaches to education where students can earn while they learn. Virginia should dedicate resources to a comprehensive database for inventorying work-based learning opportunities, and for connecting schools, teachers and students to these opportunities.
- Advancing laboratory schools dedicated to supporting education in computer science, cybersecurity, and other in-demand technology fields.
- Utilizing technology to assist students in recovering from pandemic-related learning loss.
- Aligning and consolidating workforce development programming to maximize the return on investment in all areas of education from Pre-K through adult learning, and to ensure that these investments are aligned with workforce needs.
- Continue building on the success of initiatives like "grow by degrees" to increase the number of higher education degrees and credentials issued in Virginia and encourage those students to stay in the Commonwealth.

Innovation and Economic Development

Virginia has made great strides in laying the foundation for long term growth of our technology industry including restructuring our state level programs and creating the Virginia Innovation Partnership Authority. Additionally, significant investments in education and workforce development continue to increase our potential for growth.

We support the following efforts to strengthen our efforts to grow and recruit Virginia-based IT businesses:
- Strengthen funding for the Virginia Innovation Partnership Authority to promote early-stage entrepreneurship, capital support for high-growth startups, and expanded commercialization of Virginia higher education research. Increase funding for the Regional Innovation Fund to provide sustained support for entrepreneurial ecosystem development activities across the Commonwealth.
- Expand and diversify key technology sectors including Cybersecurity, Smart Communities, Autonomous and Intelligent Systems, Biomedical, Clean Energy Technologies, and Electric Vehicles. The Commonwealth is home to several key existing and emerging technologies and our agencies and resources should be utilized to help these sectors expand and diversify.
- Preserving key investment incentives such as tax credits for Research & Development and Angel Investors, which attract high growth companies to Virginia.
- Strengthen Virginia's competitive position as the global leader in the data center market by preserving the Data Center Retail Sales and Use Tax Exemption and ensuring that data centers, and all companies, have access to affordable, reliable, clean energy.

Broadband Access

Universal access to affordable broadband is essential to every Virginia family and business in order to compete in today's global economy, and the COVID-19 pandemic has made high-speed internet even more critical.

We support the following for increasing access to high-speed internet:
- Preserve recently allocated state and federal funds for broadband deployment.
- Ensure those resources are used efficiently and effectively to reach as many unserved Virginia families and businesses as possible in recognition of the critical role high-speed internet plays in supporting all levels of education and economic development.
- Reduce unnecessary red tape and barriers that make deployment more difficult.
- Support digital equity programs which complement the FCC's Affordable Connectivity Program and aim to achieve affordable broadband options for low-income households.
- Increasing access not only to high speed internet but to the devices and technologies needed to benefit from it.

IT Procurement

The Commonwealth is home to a vibrant industry of technology companies employing thousands of Virginians. Many of these technology companies offer high-value, innovative solutions increasing access to and improving the efficiency of our state government.

We support:
- Modernizing agency technologies to reduce risk to the Commonwealth and improve on the delivery of government services to our citizens, and the creation of a longer term roadmap for agency modernization.
- Policies to ensure that the Commonwealth's procurement processes are open, transparent and promote a culture of creativity and competition.
- Agency solicitations requesting solutions to problems rather than prescribing the specific solution that they are seeking in order to promote innovation and competition.
- Streamline IT procurement processes to better meet the needs of the citizens and the agencies of the Commonwealth, and keep burdensome regulations to a minimum, especially as additional costs ultimately get passed back to the Commonwealth in the form of higher priced procurement.
- Legislation to have agencies address details surrounding contract terms and conditions to the negotiation phase of procurement, as has been done for other professional services.