



**COMMITTEE ON CULTURE, YOUTH, AGING, SPORTS,
AND
PARKS**

**GARY MOLLOY
COMMISSIONER**

October 31, 2025

Good day, Honorable Senator Angel Bolques Jr., Chairman of the Committee Culture, Youth, Aging, Sports, and Parks, Honorable Members of the Committee, distinguished Senators of the 36th Legislature of the Virgin Islands and listening and viewing audiences. I am Dr. Gary Molloy, Commissioner of the Virgin Islands Department of Labor (VIDOL).

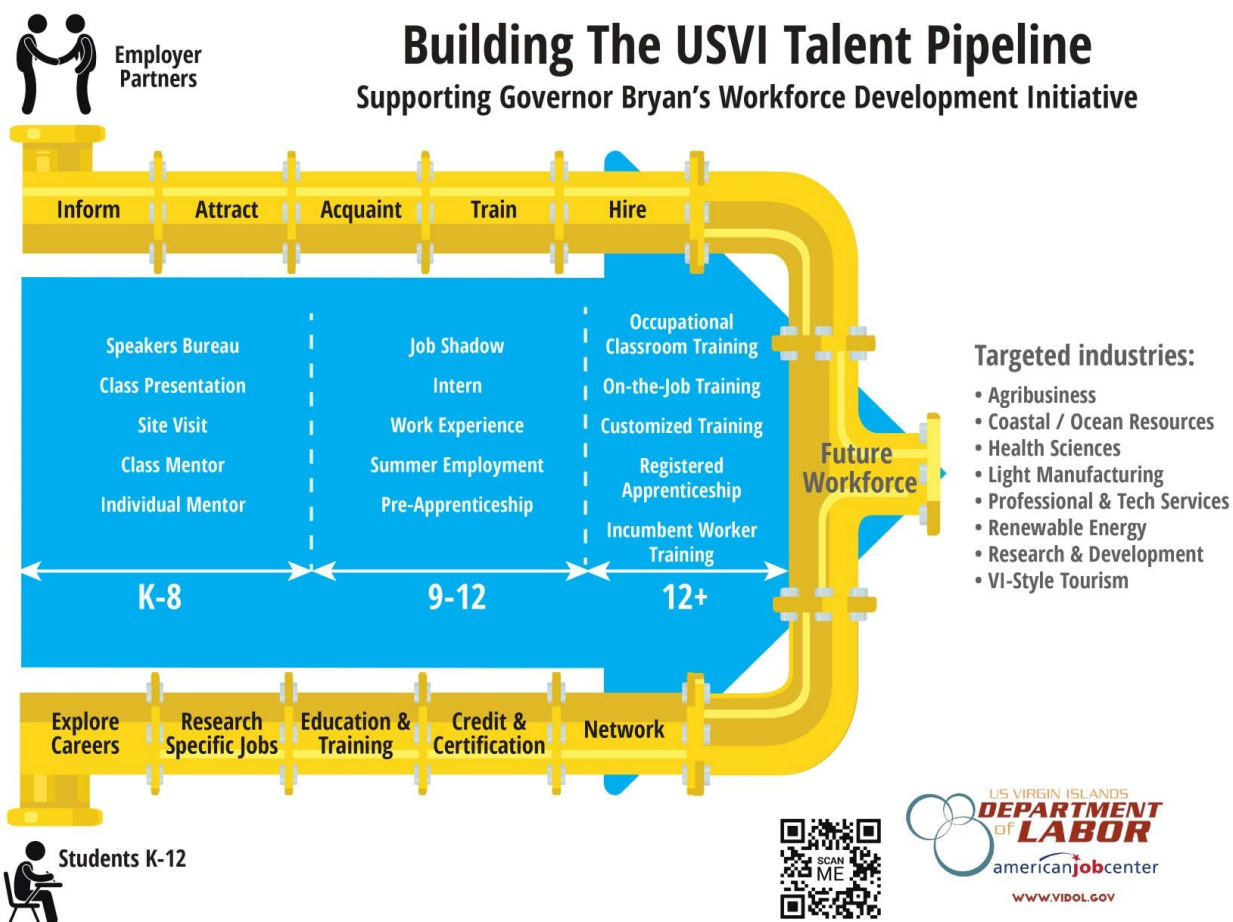
I am joined today on St. Croix by Nesha Christian Hendrickson Elskoe, Assistant Commissioner and Legal Counsel, and Tshanny Macedon, Assistant Director of Workforce Development Services. On St. Thomas, we are represented by Jean Forde, Assistant Commissioner; Charlene Hodge, Director of Workforce Development Services; and Shenika Sebastien, Director of Youth and Apprenticeship.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on long-term solutions to enhance youth opportunity through workforce readiness, technical training, and equitable access to employment. To begin, I will provide an overview of the Workforce Development System to frame the breadth of youth workforce opportunities available across the Territory.

Overview of the Workforce Development System

The Virgin Islands Workforce Development Board (VIWDB) determines the target industries in the Territory. VIDOL builds the territory's pipeline through Workforce Development programs that focus on target industries. Workforce Development continues to build stronger and better relationships with employers throughout the territory, recognizing that employers drive the workforce. The Workforce Development system is under the umbrella of the US Virgin Islands American Job Center, which includes the One-Stop Operator, Equus, contracted by the Workforce Development Board and housed in the VIDOL offices on St. Croix and St. Thomas. When customers visit the VIDOL office, they will initially interact with a staff member in Employment Services. After further assessment and determining their individual needs, the customer will then either remain in Employment Services or be referred to Equus for an Adult or Dislocated Worker programs, Youth Services, or One Stop services from other partners.

Building the USVI Talent Pipeline creates a pathway from the classroom to the workplace. It is a five-stage process: **Inform, Attract, Acquaint, Train, and Hire**. It is essential to introduce students from kindergarten through twelfth grade to career opportunities within high-growth sectors. Career awareness is fostered in the classroom, where educators guide students in exploring their identities and potential futures. Initiatives such as elementary career days and following up on those interests in high school with Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs lay the foundation for purposeful career development. Ultimately, these opportunities stem from education, which serves as the cornerstone of a prosperous economy.



Youth employment programs currently administered by the Department

The Virgin Islands Department of Labor (VIDOL), through its Youth and Apprenticeship Division, administers a range of initiatives designed to prepare young Virgin Islanders with the skills, experiences, and career pathways essential for success in today's workforce.

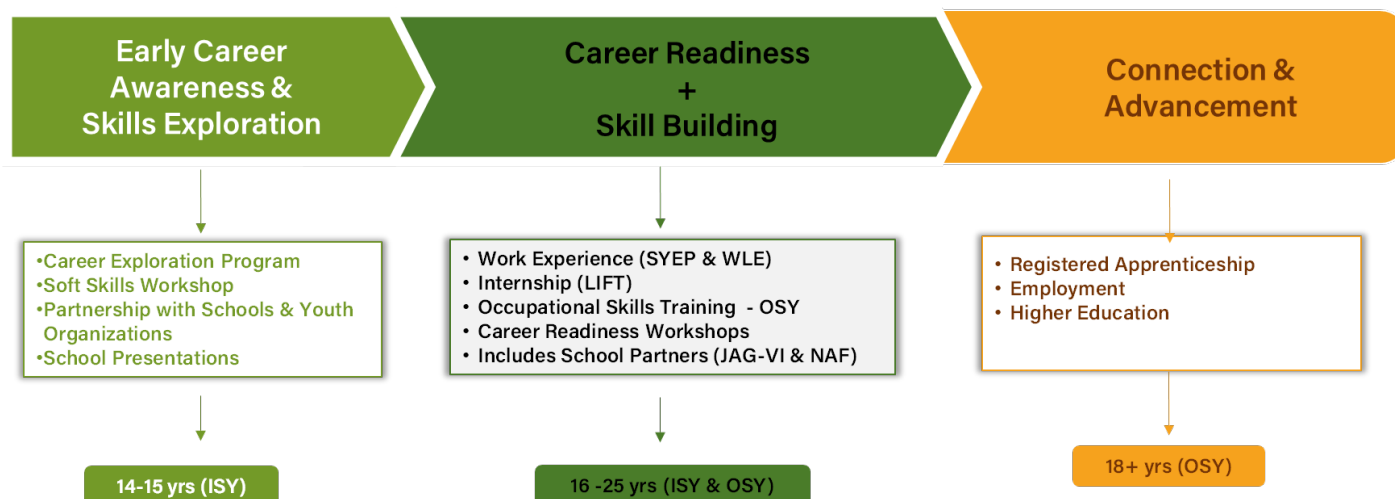
The Youth and Apprenticeship Division develop and manages workforce development programs for individuals ages 14 to 25, providing personalized support through an Individual Service Strategy (ISS). Through a structured workforce pipeline, the Youth Team connects participants to training opportunities, supportive services, and practical work experiences that enhance job readiness and professional growth. This individualized approach ensures that each young person receives the tools, guidance, and opportunities needed to secure meaningful employment and achieve long-term career success.

The youth workforce pipeline is a comprehensive and intentional system that meets young people where they are, whether in high school, college, or entering the workforce, and guides them through a progression of career awareness, skill development, and employment. Each stage is developmentally aligned to prepare participants for the next level of opportunity. Together, these

stages create a seamless continuum of services that move youth from early exploration to sustainable career advancement.

The pipeline consists of several interconnected programs, each serving youth at different stages of their development:

- **Career Exploration (CE) Program (Ages 14–15):** Serves as the foundation of the pipeline by introducing youth to the world of work through career assessments, job shadowing, and workplace readiness workshops.
- **Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) (Ages 16–25):** Often a young person’s first paid work experience, this short-term employment initiative provides hands-on exposure to professional settings across the public, nonprofit, and private sectors—bridging classroom learning with real-world application.
- **Work, Learn, and Earn (WLE) Program (Ages 17–24):** Designed for out-of-school youth and young adults, combining education, paid work experience, and skill-building opportunities to support career and personal development.
- **Labor Investing for Tomorrow (LIFT) Internship Program:** Targets college juniors, seniors, and recent graduates (**Ages 18–25**) with a minimum GPA of 2.8 and at least 60 earned credits, preparing them for entry into professional employment.
- **Occupational Skills Training:** Provides job-specific training aligned with local labor market demand, equipping participants with industry-recognized credentials.
- **Jobs for America’s Graduates – Virgin Islands (JAG-VI):** Conducted in partnership with the Virgin Islands Department of Education, JAG-VI helps students overcome barriers to graduation and employment success.
- **Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP):** Offers structured, earn-while-you-learn opportunities in high-demand industries, preparing participants for sustainable, long-term careers.

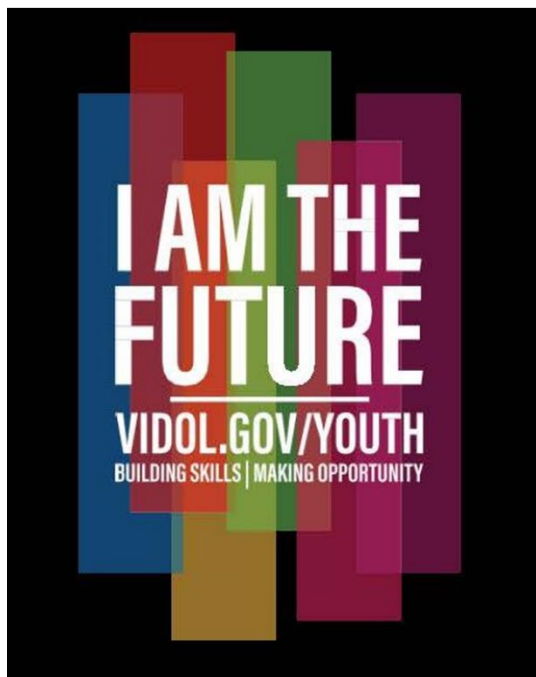


Through these programs, the Youth and Apprenticeship Division serves more than **800 youth annually** across the territory, utilizing both federal and local funding sources. Local funds are essential for maintaining flexibility and ensuring responsiveness to the unique workforce needs of the Virgin Islands. Continued financial investment is critical to meeting the growing demand for youth services and expanding opportunities for underserved populations.

The success of these initiatives is built upon the strategic alignment of resources and strong partnerships with key stakeholders, including the Department of Human Services, Department of Education, nonprofit organizations, and other community-based entities. Employers and community organizations serve as the backbone of the Department's youth development efforts by providing mentorship, hands-on learning, and real-world experiences that prepare participants for meaningful employment. The Youth Team actively engages employers throughout the territory, developing trusted relationships with businesses that rely on VIDOL to identify, train, and develop emerging local talent. By aligning local and federal resources, the Department maximizes impact, stretches funding, and strengthens the overall youth employment pathway.

Outreach remains a cornerstone of the Department's youth initiatives. The Youth Team conducts year-round outreach to schools, community organizations, faith-based groups, and local employers to promote awareness of available programs and opportunities. Staff regularly participate in high school and college career fairs, classroom presentations, and community events to connect with students early and guide them toward workforce readiness. The Division also leverages social media, community radio, and collaborations with partner agencies to reach disconnected and underserved youth populations.

In 2022, the Department launched the “***I Am the Future***” Youth Campaign, which serves as a bold and inspiring symbol of empowerment for young people across the territory. The campaign reflects the belief that youth are not only tomorrow's leaders but also today's innovators, learners, and changemakers. The logo and message are designed to inspire confidence by encouraging youth to see themselves as capable and valuable contributors to their community and workforce. It promotes identity and pride by fostering a sense of belonging and ownership in the programs, reminding participants that they are an essential part of shaping the future. The campaign unifies all youth initiatives under a recognizable brand, connecting opportunities from career exploration to apprenticeships, while motivating engagement and reinforcing the message that investing in personal growth, education, and career readiness strengthens the community.



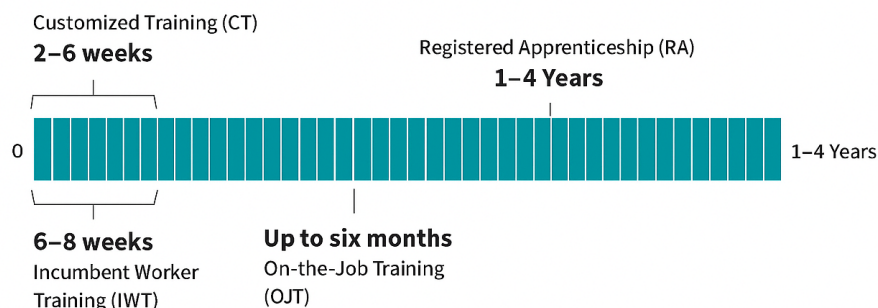
This summer, as part of our continued efforts to inspire and motivate participants, the Division hosted our Summer Youth Work Experience Program (SYWEP) Closing Ceremonies, featuring guest speaker Akeem Shannon, founder and CEO of *Flipstik*. Shannon, who gained national recognition after appearing on *Shark Tank* and securing an investment deal, delivered an energetic and motivational presentation that resonated deeply with our youth participants. These closing ceremonies celebrated the achievements of our participants and highlighted the Department's dedication to creating experiences that inspire long-term growth, confidence, and career readiness among Virgin Islands youth.

Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP)

Registered Apprenticeships operate as a work-based learning model, combining supervised on-the-job training with job-related education, while apprentices earn a progressively increasing wage. Designed for long-term employment, these programs serve as proven training strategies for recruiting, training, and retaining top-tier talent, with a history spanning decades across various industries.

All registered programs adhere to industry occupational standards, ensuring authenticity and consistency, ultimately leading to a nationally recognized certificate. The duration of a registered apprenticeship program varies from one to five years, contingent on occupation training requirements.

TRAINING TIMELINES



*Training Timelines vary depending on the type of training

Functioning as a State Apprenticeship Agency, VIDOL contributes to program development by registering those that meet Federal and State standards. VIDOL also actively promotes the creation of new programs through marketing and technical assistance, provides ongoing support to sponsors throughout the program lifecycle, and ensures that all programs maintain high-quality training standards. The most recently approved Apprenticeship program is the K-12 Teacher program sponsored by the Virgin Islands Department of Education. Individuals must be at least 18 years of age to enroll in a registered apprenticeship program. Interested applicants may complete the Apprenticeship Interest Application found at apprenticeship.vidol.gov.

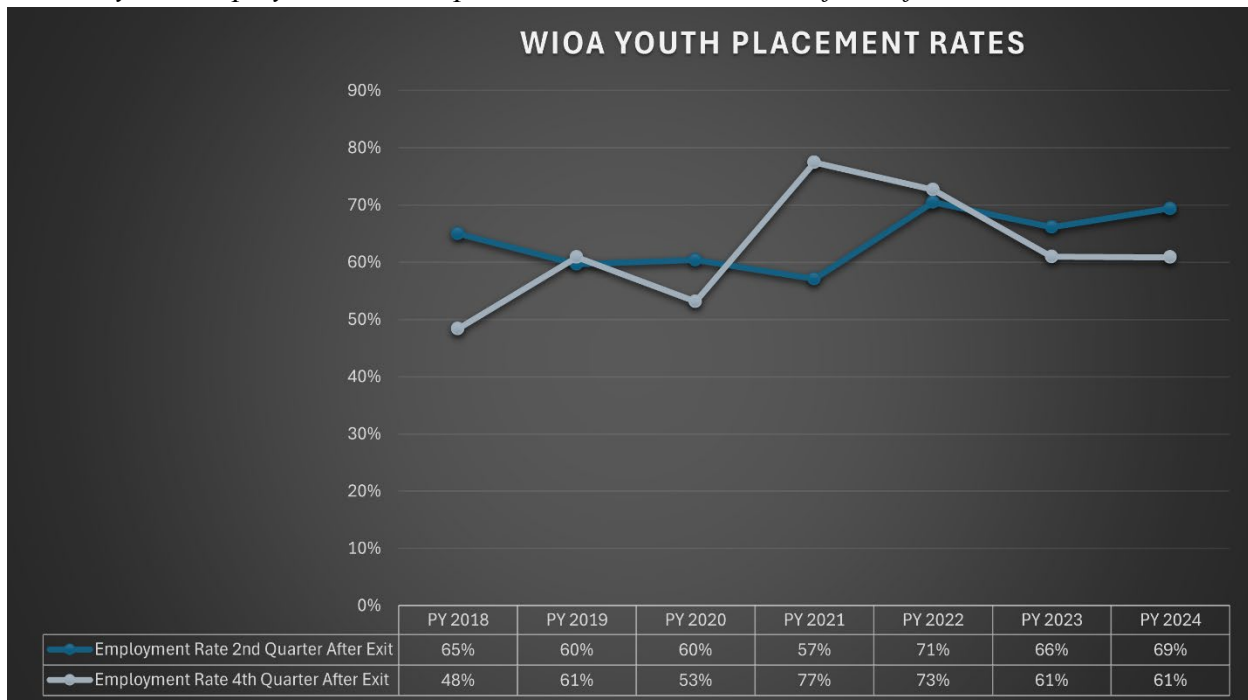
Current Registered Apprenticeship Programs

Occupations	
• Certified Massage Therapist (CMT) – Territorial*	• Pipefitter (Construction) – Territorial*
• Medical Assistant/Patient Care Coordinator - STX	• Certified Nursing Assistant – Dementia Specialty - STX
• Life Safety Coordinator - STX	• Certified Nursing Assistant – Restorative Specialty - STX
• Surgical Technologist - STX	• Recreation Assistant - STT
• K-12 Teacher – Territorial*	• Human Resource Specialist – Territorial*
• Able Seaman (Water Transportation) – STT*	• Boat Building
• Construction Craft Laborer - STX	• Marine Services Technician
• Cook	• Boat Building

*These programs have active apprentices.

The Virgin Islands Apprenticeship Council is a nine (9) member body that assists in the development of procedures and policies for the promotion of apprenticeships in the Territory. The body includes representation from VIDOL, the VI Career & Technical Education Board, the University of the Virgin Islands, and Hotel & Tourism. This ensures that different sectors of the workforce are represented during quarterly meetings.

Data on youth employment trends, placement rates, and areas of workforce demand



Analysis of WIOA Youth Employment and Workforce Demand

The WIOA youth data from Program Year (PY) 2018 through PY 2024 highlights both employment outcomes and occupational interests of young Virgin Islanders. Two indicators were tracked: employment rates in the 2nd quarter after program exit (immediate job placement) and in the 4th quarter after exit (longer-term retention).

Employment Trends

Overall, the 2nd quarter placement rates have been steady, ranging between 57% and 71%. While there were declines in PY 2019 and PY 2021, the most recent year (PY 2024) shows recovery with 69% of exiters employed, indicating that youth are consistently entering the workforce soon after program completion.

The 4th quarter outcomes reveal a more uneven pattern. Employment retention rose sharply to 77% in PY 2021, reflecting post-pandemic recovery and targeted interventions, but later stabilized around 61% in 2023–2024. This suggests that although participants are finding jobs, sustaining long-term employment remains a challenge.

A particularly strong year was PY 2022, when both measures peaked at 71% (2nd quarter) and 73% (4th quarter), showing that participants not only secured employment quickly but were also able to maintain it. Since then, results have leveled off, signaling stability but not the same momentum.

Occupational Interests

Youth demand for training and career opportunities is concentrated in a few key areas. The top five desired fields, healthcare support (14%), office and administrative support (13%), transportation and material moving (12%), construction (11%), and healthcare practitioners and technical roles (10%), account for more than 60% of total interest.

This distribution reflects a dual pathway: many youths are seeking immediate entry-level opportunities in support roles, while others are targeting professional careers in healthcare and technical fields. Interest in installation and repair (10%) and food services (6%) further emphasizing responsiveness to the Territory's service-based economy, while smaller proportions in IT, education, and protective services point to broader but less concentrated aspirations.

Key Insights

The data highlights both progress and areas for improvement:

- **Strong Entry, Weaker Retention:** Youth are entering the workforce successfully, but long-term retention is inconsistent, suggesting barriers such as seasonal employment, limited advancement opportunities, or skill mismatches.
- **Alignment with Market Needs:** Participant interests align closely with high-demand industries identified in Vision 2040, healthcare, construction, transportation, and emerging sectors such as IT and renewable energy.
- **Supportive Services Matter:** Sustained outcomes will depend on expanding wraparound supports, such as transportation assistance, mentoring, and continued training, to help underserved and at-risk youth remain employed and advance in their careers.
- **Strategic Priorities:** Expanding apprenticeships and technical certifications in high-growth industries, particularly healthcare, IT, marine services, and construction, will directly respond to both youth aspirations and employer demand.

The evidence demonstrates that WIOA youth participants are motivated, focused on growth industries, and capable of securing employment. The next step is to strengthen retention and career progression by ensuring that job placements are tied to sustainable, career-track opportunities. With targeted supports and deeper alignment with employer needs, the Territory can transform early workforce success into long-term economic resilience for its youth.

Challenges faced in youth engagement, training participation, or employer partnerships

Many young people face barriers to participating in workforce development programs, including transportation difficulties, and competing responsibilities such as school or family obligations. Building effective partnerships with employers requires ongoing collaboration with private and public partners to ensure that youth employment initiatives align with industry needs and provide meaningful career pathways for participants.

Recommendations for improving employment pipelines and expanding support for underserved or disengaged youth populations.

VIDOL will continue to prioritize the development of targeted workforce programs that connect underserved and disengaged youth to sustainable career pathways. This includes expanding technical training and workforce readiness initiatives through public-private partnerships that will equip young Virgin Islanders with the skills necessary to meet evolving labor market demands. Interagency collaboration and employer engagement are essential to ensure that youth employment programs are accessible, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of marginalized populations. By embedding equity in employment access across all government-supported initiatives, the territory can foster greater opportunity and long-term economic resilience for its youth.

Closing

The Virgin Islands Department of Labor is dedicated to continued collaboration with our partners. Our commitment is evident through the various programs and services offered at our offices in St. Croix, St. Thomas, and St. John. On behalf of VIDOL, I express gratitude to the staff at VIDOL for their continued dedication and hard work, and the members of the Committee on Culture, Youth, Aging, Sports, and Parks for allowing us to testify about this subject. This concludes my testimony. My team and I are prepared to answer any questions you have.