

# Testimony Before the 36th Legislature of the U.S. Virgin Islands

## Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture

July 14, 2025

### Opening Statement

Good day Chairman Frederick, Members of the Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture, other Honorable Members of the 36th Legislature, and the viewing public.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide an update on the progress and vision of the UVI Research and Technology Park (UVI RTPark). Since taking over on September 1, 2024, my vision has been simple – ensure the people of the Virgin Islands benefit significantly from the existence of the RTPark. As a result, we’ve been undergoing a strategic evolution. We have restructured our team, redefined our priorities, and launched new initiatives.

At the heart of the RTPark’s strategy is a simple but powerful idea: when we align business attraction with intentional investments in education and workforce development, we can create a self-sustaining ecosystem that benefits the entire Virgin Islands.



Figure 1: New UVI RTPark Vision

The companies we attract to the Territory don’t just receive incentives, they contribute directly to programs that support our students, strengthen our university, and prepare our residents for meaningful careers in tech and innovation. Every initiative we’ve launched, from youth STEM programming to workforce preparedness, is part of a larger, interconnected system designed to grow our talent pipeline, diversify our economy, and position the Virgin Islands as a competitive hub for knowledge-based industries.

It's important to preface this conversation with the fact that real economic development doesn't happen overnight. It takes time, intention, and a willingness to build, brick by brick. We are laying the foundation for a future where opportunity is homegrown, and where young people don't feel the need to leave the Territory to pursue success.

What follows is a closer look at how the RTPark is putting this vision into action and the intentional strategies we're implementing to create lasting impact for Virgin Islanders.

## Overview of the UVI RTPark

The University of the Virgin Islands Research and Technology Park (UVI RTPark) was established in 2002 under Title 17 of the Virgin Islands Code to drive economic growth, diversification, and innovation across the Territory. We do this by providing tax incentives and negotiating strategic partnerships with companies that align with our dual mission of building a robust technology sector while simultaneously strengthening the academic, research, and public service missions of the University of the Virgin Islands (UVI).

In alignment with our mandate, the RTPark attracts technology and knowledge-based companies in various sectors including e-commerce, software development, MedTech, FinTech, sustainable development, consulting, etc. Currently, we have 70 RTPark Clients across the Territory: 50 in St. Thomas, 16 in St. Croix, and 4 in St. John.



Figure 2: RTPark Clients by Island and Sector

## How the UVI RTPark Operates

Every initiative, program, contract, and salary you'll hear about today is fully funded through fees collected from RTPark clients. As an autonomous governmental instrumentality, we operate under a model similar to a private, mission-driven corporation. Like them, we are guided by a clear public purpose and sustain our operations through earned revenue—in our case, by negotiating terms with each company and collecting fees for participation in the RTPark's tax incentive program. Because of this, we are 100% self-sufficient.

## Process to become a UVI RTPark Client

To become a client of the UVI RTPark, companies go through a thorough, multi-step process designed to ensure alignment with the Virgin Islands' broader economic development goals. Prospective clients typically enter the pipeline through outreach, referrals, or direct inquiries and begin by receiving a detailed orientation on the RTPark's mission, eligibility criteria, and the tax incentives available under Title 17. They then complete a two-part formal application that outlines their business model, financial structure, and proposed commitments to both the Territory and the University of the Virgin Islands.

After submission, the RTPark team conducts interviews to evaluate the company's fit along with its potential impact. Simultaneously, the parties negotiate a term sheet detailing incentives, financial obligations, and strategic contributions. If approved, a rigorous due diligence process, including background checks and a tax/income sourcing analysis, is carried out to ensure regulatory compliance and integrity. Once these steps are completed, and the board approves the terms, the company enters into a 15-year Park Tenant Agreement (PTA), a legally binding document that establishes the terms of participation.

The PTA includes key elements such as the RTPark's equity stake, annual fees, and contributions to UVI, ranging from internships and scholarships to capacity-building programs. It also defines the scope of eligible business activities, outlines compliance and reporting requirements, and addresses terms related to renewal, amendment, and termination.

## Clarifying Our Compliance Practices

That being said, it has come to our attention that public remarks, made both on the Senate floor and in media outlets, have suggested that the UVI RTPark lacks compliance protocols. This is not accurate, and unfortunately, such misstatements can have significant consequences.

In fact, a company that was seriously considering relocating to the U.S. Virgin Islands ultimately chose Puerto Rico instead. Their decision was based, in part, on public comments made on the Senate Floor and the uncertainty about the future of the USVI's economic development programs. Not only was this a missed business opportunity, but it's also a loss of investment, direct benefits to UVI students, STEM programming, and potential jobs.

To clarify, the RTPark operates under a formal, well-defined compliance framework.

While our compliance process may not mirror that of the Virgin Islands Economic Development Authority (VIDEA), that is because our agencies operate under different legislative mandates.

**Difference does not mean absence.** Our compliance framework is built to support the RTPark's hybrid public-private structure and its direct connection to the University of the Virgin Islands.

## Our Compliance Structure Includes:

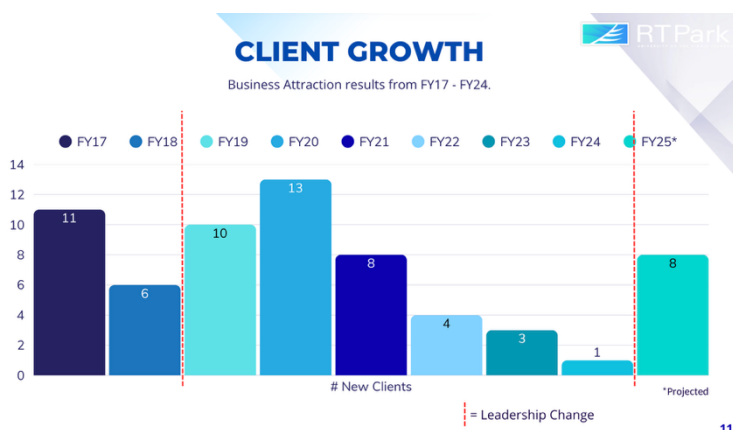
- Formal operating agreements with every client, outlining:
  - Management fees
  - Contributions to UVI
  - Internship and job creation benchmarks
  - In-kind and community engagement requirements
  - Reporting and documentation obligations
- Active internal monitoring of all client obligations to ensure compliance
- Direct engagement with each UVI RTPark client and their advisors, including their legal, accounting, and tax professionals, to ensure that all contractual and statutory obligations are clearly understood, properly documented, and fully met
- Corrective measures available for non-compliance, including enforcement and removal from the program if necessary

We understand that we are accountable to the people of the Virgin Islands via the Legislature and mandates of Title 17. Because of this, we take compliance seriously, ensuring that our negotiations with clients result in real, tangible benefits for the community, and that clients are held accountable to the terms outlined in their Park Tenant Agreement (PTA).

## Business Attraction in FY25

Thus far in FY25, we have activated five new clients across sectors ranging from artificial intelligence and blockchain technologies, to Department of Defense contracting, and we anticipate at least three additional client activations before the end of the fiscal year.

Figure 3: RTPark Business Attraction Results FY17 - FY25



While the pipeline continues to grow, client retention remains a priority. In FY25, we had one formal exit, with two exits in the process. These exits were driven by a need to relocate due to family obligations, frequent power outages, and medical circumstances that involve treatments that cannot be performed within our local healthcare system. These

transitions reflect the human realities that occasionally influence participation in our program.



## Understanding the Importance of the RTPark to UVI

As I mentioned previously, the companies we attract to the Territory don't just receive incentives, they contribute directly to the RTPark and the University of the Virgin Islands.

Historically, Park Tenant Agreements, our contractual agreement with each client, offered two key avenues for funding and collaboration with UVI:

- Tier I - Annual Scholarships and/or Internships
- Tier II - Programmatic Commitments: Contributions (financial and in-kind) that provide direct support for strategic projects identified by UVI's leadership.

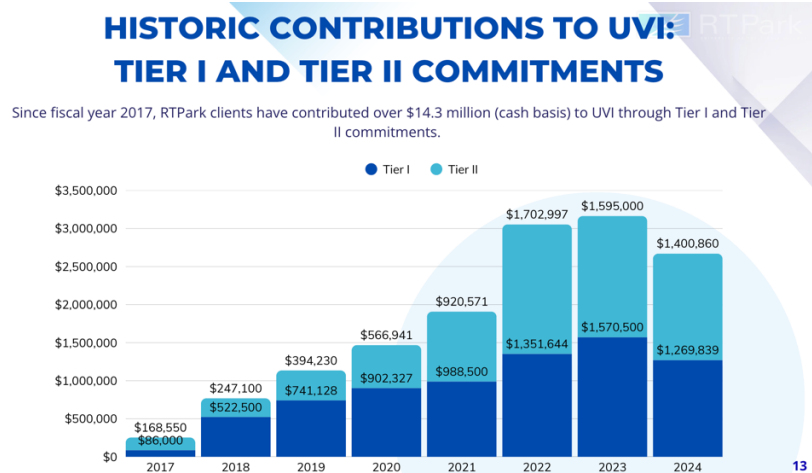


Figure 4: RTPark's Historic Contributions to UVI

Through this model, the RTPark contributed over \$14M in funding to UVI over the past 8 years, including over \$3 Million (accrual basis) last fiscal year.

These funds were used for internships, scholarships, and other contributions to the advancement of the University, including within key areas such as STEM, research development, entrepreneurship, and innovation. In addition, RTPark companies engage with UVI faculty, offer IT support and operational assistance, and contribute to special projects that enhance the university's mission.

Below I've included a breakdown of Tier I and Tier II payments from RTPark Clients to UVI from fiscal year 2017 through 2024.

## The RTPark Student Success and Innovation Program

With both UVI and the RTPark under new leadership, we have evolved Tier I and Tier II commitments into the RTPark Student Success and Innovation Program. This Program gives UVI more flexibility in how it utilizes client commitments and serves as a strategic partnership platform between RTPark clients and the university. It also enables clients to contribute directly to key areas that have been identified by UVI's President and the UVI Student Government Association.

## Community Advancement Initiatives

To further our impact, this fiscal year, we rolled out a series of initiatives aimed at advancing STEM education and workforce development across the territory.

*Youth STEM Enrichment Video:* <https://youtu.be/V-t9axFsk6g?si=TpKMPqUPdXJHwNRD>

### Youth STEM After-School Program

In January 2025, we launched our pilot Youth STEM Enrichment After-School Program, a flagship initiative designed to lay the foundation for long-term STEM engagement across the Territory. The program was strategically introduced at Eulalie Rivera K–8 on St. Croix, Lockhart K–8 on St. Thomas, and Julius E. Sprauve K–8 on St. John to assess implementation across our three unique island communities. A total of 94 students participated in the pilot, 28 from St. Croix, 18 from St. Thomas, and 48 from St. John. We plan to scale this to all VIDE K-8 schools this Fall.

### STEAM Days

To extend our impact to even younger learners, we hosted our first Territory-Wide STEAM Day on March 14, Pi Day, where we engaged Pre-K and Kindergarten students in playful, interactive learning. The event welcomed 161 students from 8 schools across St. Croix for a vibrant day of science, technology, engineering, art, and math activities designed to inspire wonder from the very start of their academic journey.

### Youth STEM Summer Camp

We built on the success of our after-school program and launched our first-ever free Youth STEM Summer Camp at our HQ on St. Croix and at the UVI XIIID Research & Strategy Innovation Center on St. Thomas. The camp enrolled 122 students, 64 from St. Croix and 58 from the St. Thomas/St. John District and was delivered by a team of 18 trained Virgin Islanders, including coordinators and facilitators from each island. This experience not only empowered students but also provided valuable workforce opportunities for emerging Virgin Islands talent, reinforcing the park's commitment to investing in local capacity and future leadership.

By reinvesting client fees into programs that empower Virgin Islanders from an early age, we're cultivating the next generation of innovators, problem-solvers, and leaders.

## Workforce Development

To build a resilient and future-ready economy, we must also invest in Virgin Islanders at pivotal career moments, whether they're preparing to enter the workforce for the first time or seeking opportunities to advance their career.



*Professional Pathways Program Video: [https://youtu.be/iYYl317MvE8?si=JzPLhYr\\_qVFhAlHB](https://youtu.be/iYYl317MvE8?si=JzPLhYr_qVFhAlHB)*

## UVI RTPark Professional Pathways Program (PPP)

To bridge the gap between academic learning and career readiness for University of the Virgin Islands (UVI) students, we launched the Professional Pathways Program (PPP) in February of this year. The program delivered 12 weeks of intensive training on business etiquette, generative AI, resume building, and communication. Participants received individualized coaching through mock interviews and presentations, supported by the Skillsoft platform and facilitators on both campuses. Each of the 20 students accepted into the inaugural cohort received a \$500 monthly stipend, and 17 successfully completed the program. Following the instructional phase, students entered a formal internship placement process with RTPark Clients.

## Solar Farm and Renewable Energy Learning

As part of the workforce development strategy, the RTPark collaborated with UVI to launch the SPARK Initiative to address two critical needs at once: strengthening workforce capacity in renewable energy infrastructure and enhancing energy resilience on St. Croix.

The initiative includes a major expansion of the RTPark's energy infrastructure, a new 423 kW ground-mounted solar farm funded through a \$1.1 million FEMA Mitigation 406 grant. In partnership with the University of the Virgin Islands' Caribbean Green Technology Center, the project will also feature a dedicated solar teaching array, an advanced educational platform that provides UVI Renewable Energy Technology students and WAPA trainees with hands-on experience in solar energy production, system maintenance, and monitoring.

## Entrepreneurship Programming

The RTPark is also focused on nurturing entrepreneurship by providing local founders with the tools, networks, and resources they need to turn ideas into thriving businesses that create jobs, build wealth, and drive innovation right here in the Virgin Islands.

Since the Fall of 2019 we have consistently launched and innovated the AccelerateVI and Idea Incubator (formerly Pre-AVI) programs. AccelerateVI is a three-month accelerator program dedicated to supporting entrepreneurs who are building innovative technology solutions. The program provides early-stage companies with the resources, mentorship, and structure needed to grow and scale their businesses globally. Since its inception, the program's graduates have raised over \$5 million in funding and generated more than \$10 million in revenue.

## **Requests and Recommendation for Legislative Support**

In preparation for today's conversation, I challenged my team to think creatively about ways we can work with you to boost the economy of the territory. One idea I would like to propose is legislation that enables payroll and tax flexibility for remote workers living in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Currently, many residents working remotely for mainland companies face legal and administrative barriers that make it difficult for their employers to process payroll through the Territory. These challenges often result in missed job opportunities, as some companies choose not to hire or retain employees based in the USVI due to compliance concerns. As remote work continues to grow, this represents a meaningful opportunity to expand our local tax base and allow Virgin Islanders, who are able to work from anywhere, to return home.

To address this, I propose the creation of a "Remote Worker Employer Facilitation Act." This legislation would simplify employer registration for U.S.-based companies hiring USVI residents, establish safe harbor provisions to protect compliant businesses, and clarify payroll withholding and filing requirements. We could model this effort after Puerto Rico's successful Remote Worker and Export Services legislation, which streamlines tax reporting and encourages companies to support remote employees living on the island. By reducing friction and regulatory uncertainty, we can make the USVI a more attractive place to live and work, bringing home higher-income residents, boosting local spending, and generating new tax revenue without added government overhead.

## **Closing Reflections**

To conclude, the vision of the RTPark is a self-sustaining cycle where business attraction fuels community investment, workforce development, and economic diversification.

One of the things I value most about the RTPark is that it gives us the rare opportunity to think long-term. So much of government and community work focuses on making it through the next crisis. As a self-sustaining organization, the RTPark gives the Virgin Islands the freedom to think boldly, act strategically, and invest in a future driven by innovation and opportunity, not survival. The real results of what we're doing today, in STEM, workforce development, and economic diversification, won't be visible tomorrow or next year. But in ten years, we'll know if we stayed the course and made the right moves. And we're tracking that progress every step of the way.

It is my hope that this comprehensive testimony clarifies that the UVI RTPark isn't just a tax incentive program, it is a catalyst for innovation, economic diversification, and youth empowerment. We look forward to continuing this work in collaboration with the Legislature, UVI, GVI, and our community partners.

Thank you for your continued support and the opportunity to testify today.

Respectfully submitted,

*Eric Sonnier*

**Eric Sonnier**

Executive Director

UVI Research and Technology Park

# APPENDIX



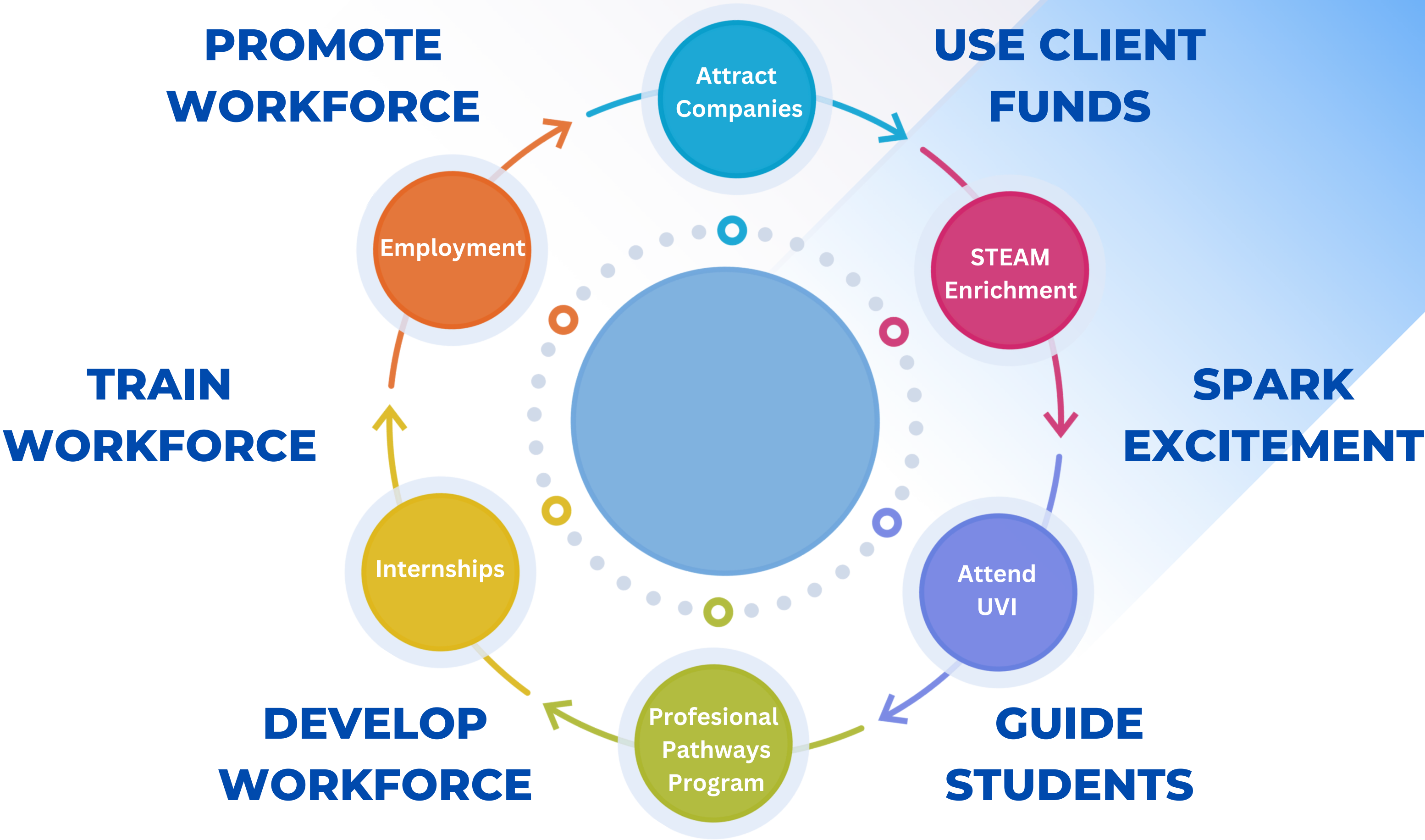
The University of the Virgin Islands

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**Research and Technology Park Corp.**



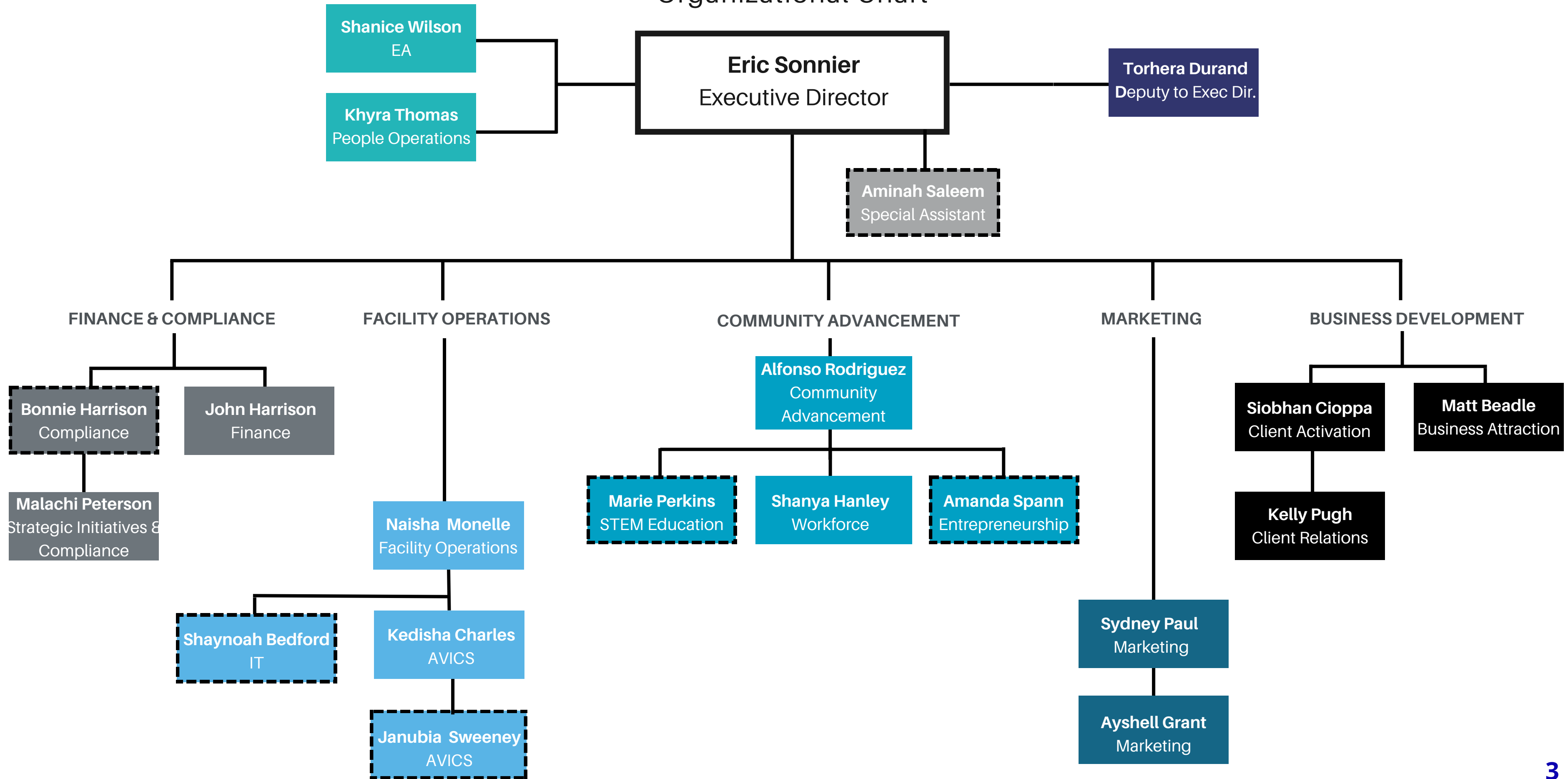
# NEW RTPARK VISION



# UVI RESEARCH & TECHNOLOGY PARK



## Organizational Chart





# MEET THE TEAM

## Legend



= From Virgin Islands



= UVI Graduate



**Eric Sonnier**  
Executive Director



**Aminah Saleem**  
Special Assistant to the  
Executive Director



**Torhera Durand**  
Deputy to the Executive  
Director



**John Harrison**  
Director of Finance



**Bonnie Harrison**  
Director of Compliance



**Shanya Hanley**  
Senior Associate -  
Community Advancement



**Marie Perkins**  
STEM Education  
Program Manager



**Alfonso Rodriguez Jr.**  
Director of Community  
Advancement



**Siobhan Cioppa**  
Director of Client  
Activation



**Kelly Pugh**  
Client Relations Manager



**Matt Beadle**  
Associate Director of  
Business Attraction



**Naisha Monelle-Joseph**  
Facility Operations Manager



**Kedisha Charles**  
Senior Associate -  
AVICS



**Shanice Wilson**  
Executive Assistant



**Sydney Paul**  
Director of Marketing



**Ayshell. H. Grant**  
Senior Marketing Associate



**Malachi Peterson**  
Strategic Initiatives &  
Compliance Associate



**Khyra Thomas**  
Senior People Operations  
Manager



## **MEET THE TEAM**

**Click to Play UVI RTPark Team Video!**

**<https://youtu.be/JKbP3nO2XrE>**



# WHERE TO FIND THE RTPARK

Headquartered in St. Croix, we operate across the USVI, offering soft landing spaces that provide a professional environment to launch and grow companies in the region. These spaces also foster collaboration, networking, and engagement with the vibrant local tech ecosystem.

## UVI 13D Research and Strategy Innovation Center

A state-of-the-art facility located on the Orville E. Kean Campus of the University of the Virgin Islands on St. Thomas.

St. Thomas

St. John

## 64 West (RTPark HQ)

Serving as the RTPark headquarters located on the Albert A. Sheen Campus of the University of the Virgin Islands on St. Croix.

St. Croix

## Accelerate VI Coworking Space

A dynamic coworking space located on St. Croix which includes key card access, high-speed WiFi, and access to conference rooms for its members.

# WHERE TO FIND RTPARK CLIENTS

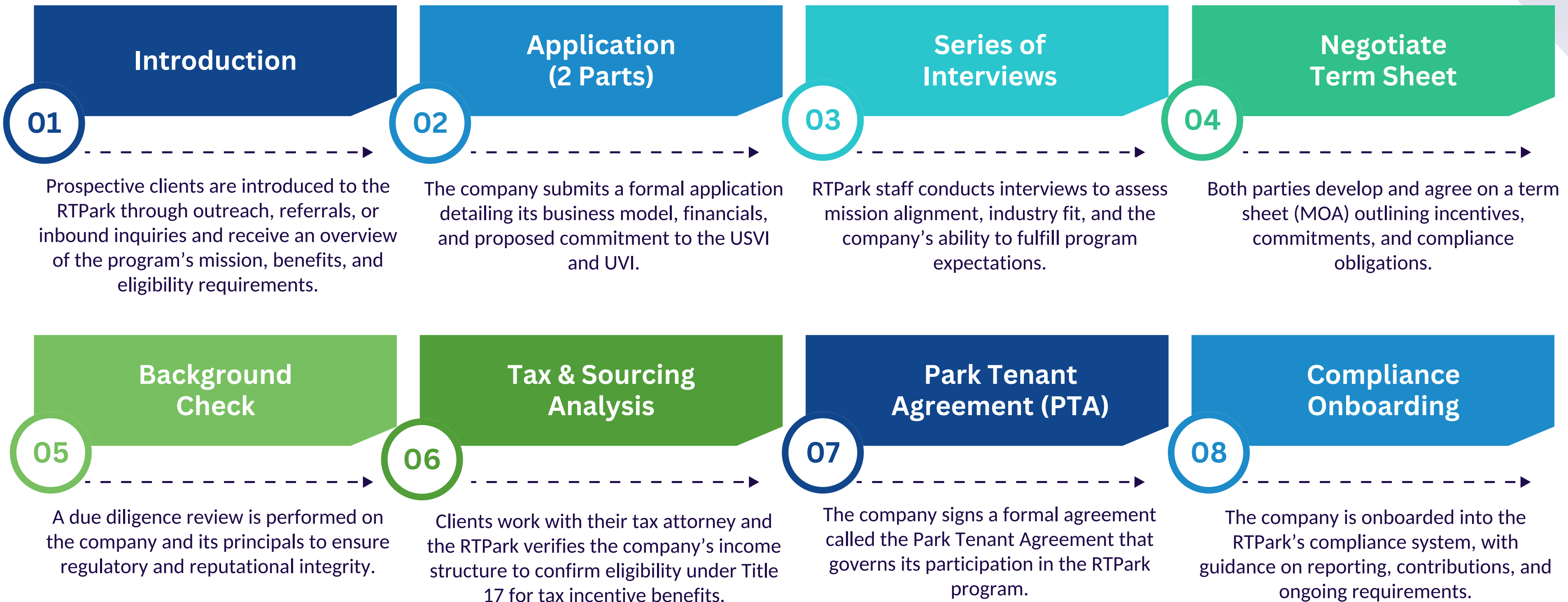
## RTPARK CLIENT SECTORS

Consulting and Investment	26
Specialized Software Development	15
Healthcare and Medical Services and Technologies	9
Financial Services and Technologies	7
Internet Advertising and E-Commerce	6
Telecommunications / Infrastructure	6
Sustainability Solutions	1



*Clients listed on website.*

# PROCESS TO BECOME A RTPARK CLIENT





# **PARK TENANT AGREEMENT (PTA) OVERVIEW**

**A Park Tenant Agreement (PTA) is a legally-binding agreement between the RTPark and an approved business (RTPark Client) that outlines the terms of participation in the RTPark program.**

## **Terms:**

- Term of Agreement (typically 15 years)
- RTPark Ownership Percentage
- Financial Commitments to RTPark
- Tier I Commitments to UVI
- Tier II Commitments to UVI
- Other Strategic Commitments

## **Other Items Covered:**

- Eligibility and Scope of Activities
- Tax Incentives Offered
- Reporting and Compliance Requirements
- Termination Clauses
- Amendment and Renewal Provisions

# RTPARK (PTA) COMPLIANCE OVERVIEW

## Review of Park Tenant Agreement (PTA)



PTA is reviewed to identify financial and programmatic compliance requirements specific to each client.

## Financial Compliance



Client payments are tracked through automated accounting, with timely invoicing, payment confirmations, and remittance of any UVI-related funds.

## Programmatic Compliance



Clients are provided with a secure folder containing all required templates, legal references, and submission tools to ensure timely uploads.

## Client Onboarding and Support



Each client receives an onboarding meeting to walk through the compliance process and address any questions.

## Compliance Monitoring



Annual compliance status is tracked and updated as documentation is submitted.

## Ongoing Communication



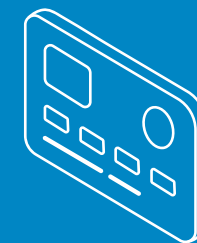
Regular meetings are held to review compliance status and support client understanding and performance.

# BUSINESS ATTRACTION STRATEGY

We have begun implementing diverse strategies to attract clients who create jobs and increase the RTPark's impact on the territory.



Pursue Companies that  
Create Jobs



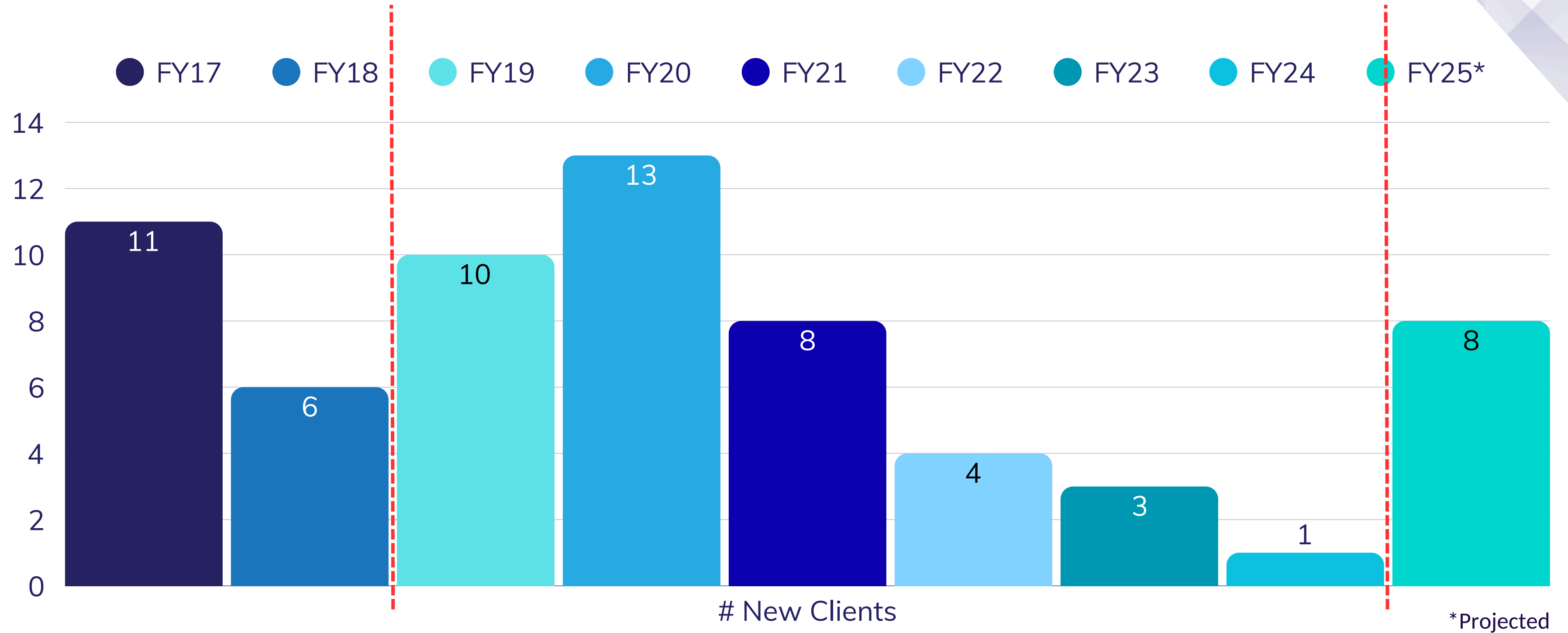
Diversify Lead Sources



Improve RTPark Technical  
Assistance

# CLIENT GROWTH

Business Attraction results from FY17 - FY24.



 = Leadership Change

# TIER I & TIER II

## UVI COMMITMENTS

### Tier I

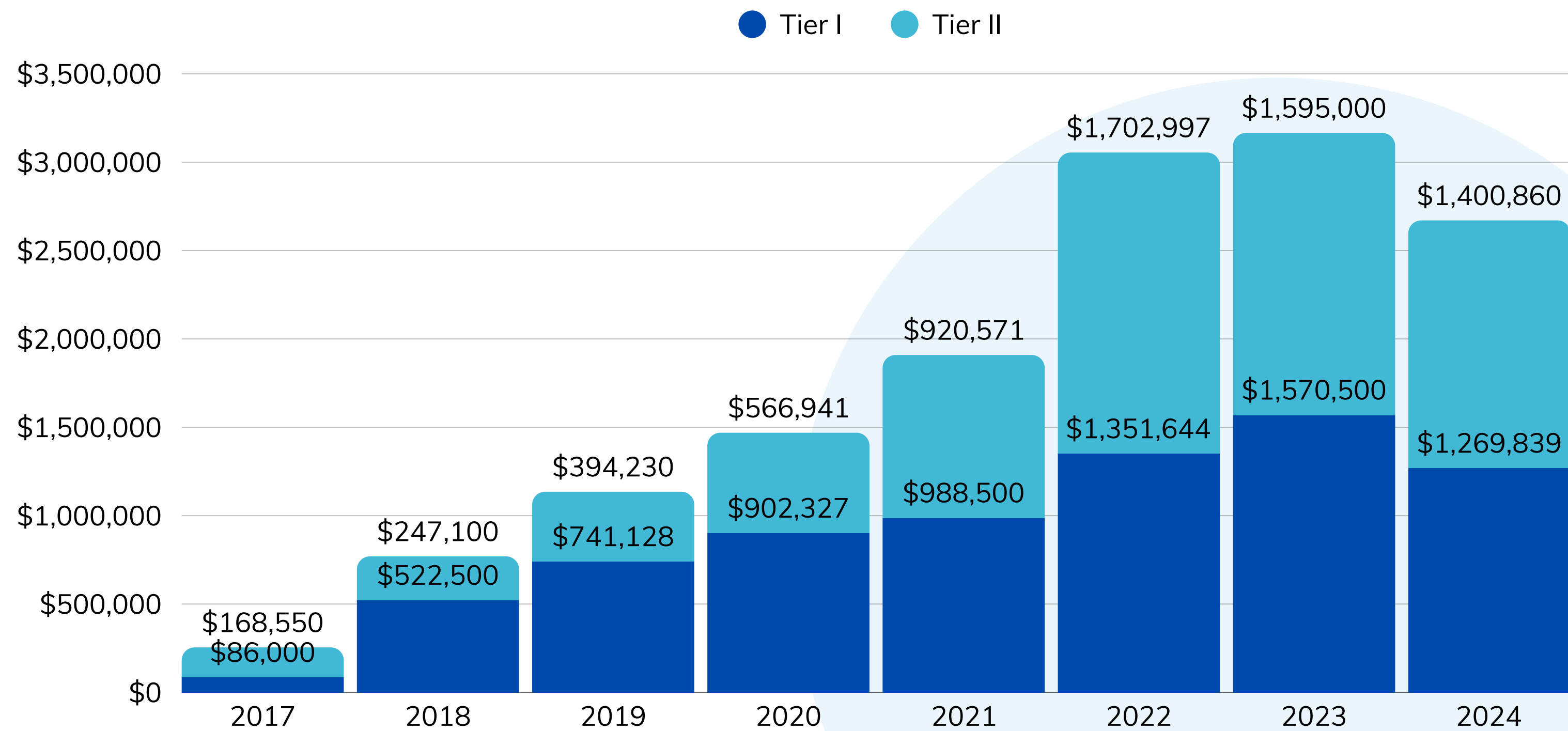
- Client contributions to UVI - Internships and/or Scholarships
- Start at \$15,000 - increase stepwise as revenue hits certain levels

### Tier II

- Client contributions to programmatic areas of UVI i.e. Computer Science
- Start at \$20,000 - increase stepwise as revenue increases
- Can be offset by certain, mutually agreed upon in-kind contributions

# HISTORIC CONTRIBUTIONS TO UVI: TIER I AND TIER II COMMITMENTS

Since fiscal year 2017, RTPark clients have contributed over \$14.3 million (cash basis) to UVI through Tier I and Tier II commitments.



# YOUTH STEM ENRICHMENT

The RTPark has implemented After-School STEM Enrichment Programs, STEM Summer Camps, and partnerships with VIDE to expand hands-on learning opportunities for students in the USVI.



After-School STEM  
Enrichment Program



STEM Summer Camps

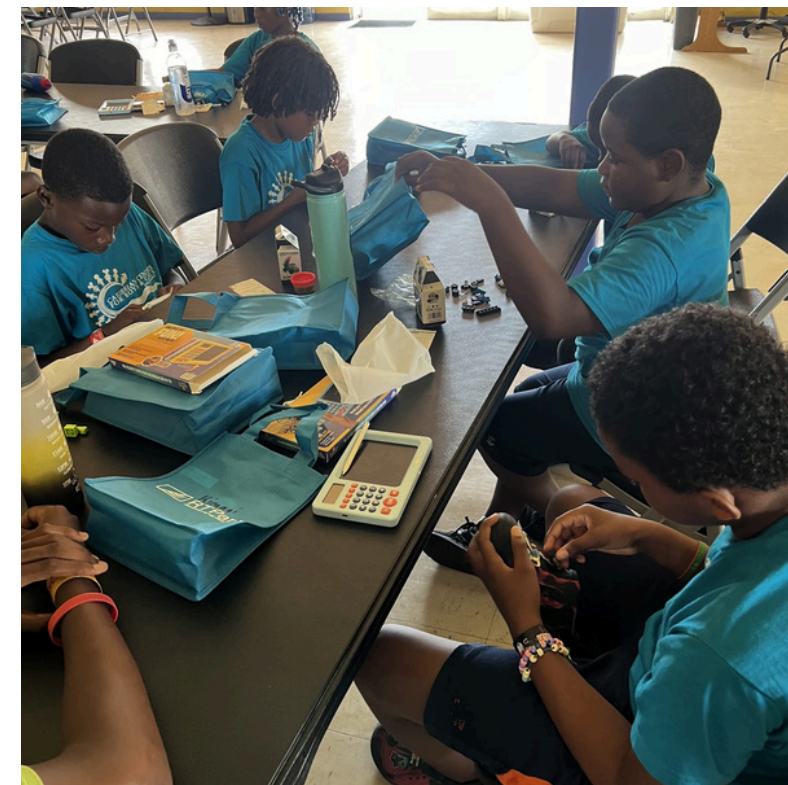


Potential Partnership with  
VIDE



# Youth STEM

RTPark client fees help launch local entrepreneurs, fund youth STEM initiatives, and foster a thriving tech ecosystem. Together, we're building opportunities and shaping the future of our community.



Thank you



# WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

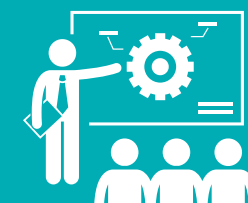
To strengthen the local workforce, we believe it is essential to build a comprehensive workforce database, attract companies with clear hiring plans, and develop targeted training programs that align with industry needs, ensuring career pathways and economic growth in the USVI.



Build workforce database



Increase internship  
placements



Develop training programs

# PROFESSIONAL PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Unlock Exclusive Career Opportunities

## Discover Internships Tailored to Your Skills

Connect with top companies offering exclusive internships tailored for UVI students. Submit your resume to join our talent pool and unlock real-world experience opportunities.

[Browse Internships](#)[Apply Now](#)



Connect to Exclusive Internships

## About the RTPark Internships Program

At the RTPark, we believe in creating opportunities for the next generation of tech and business leaders. We are excited to connect University of the Virgin Islands (UVI) students with exclusive internship opportunities offered by our client companies. These internships are designed to provide real-world experience and valuable skills that will help you launch your career in the tech, business, and innovation sectors.

Our client companies range from tech startups to established businesses, all eager to mentor and support UVI students as they develop their professional pathways. Whether you're looking for a part-time or full-time internship, remote or in-person opportunities, the RTPark's network of companies has something for you.

### How It Works

- Browse Internship Listings:** View available internship opportunities from various RTPark clients, tailored to your skills and career goals.
- Submit Your Resume:** Enter your information and upload your resume to be considered for current and future opportunities.
- Join the Talent Pool:** Once submitted, your details are entered into our talent pool, where RTPark clients can select candidates who best fit



Learn. Build. Succeed

## Professional Pathways Fellowship Program

The Professional Pathways Fellowship is a structured, skills-based program designed to support university students in their professional growth through targeted mentorship, hands-on learning, and career development. Unlike our internship program, which connects students directly with RTPark clients for industry experience, the fellowship offers a comprehensive learning journey focused on building core competencies, developing leadership skills, and preparing students for long-term success in their chosen fields.

Application Deadline: November 15, 2024

Apply Today



Explore Your Next Internship

## Internship Listings

Browse through a curated list of internships from leading companies within RTPark's network. Find roles that match your skills and career goals, and take the next step toward building your professional experience.

### AV Technician

STT Campus

Employer: Lifestyle Crasher

Requirements:

- Must be currently enrolled at the Orville E. Kean UVI campus
- Prior audio - visual experience
- Ability to set up/operate cameras, teleprompter, lighting systems, soundboards and visual displays
- Ability to troubleshoot and resolve technical issues

Benefits:

- Flexible working hours
- Great Pay

Apply Now

### Whiteboard Creator

Any Campus

Employer: Lifestyle Crasher

Requirements:

- Must be currently enrolled at the University of the Virgin Islands (any campus)
- Attention to detail and creativity
- Able to work independently
- Willingness to learn new software
- Basic understanding of visual storytelling

Benefits:

- Flexible working hours
- Great Pay
- Remote!

Apply Now

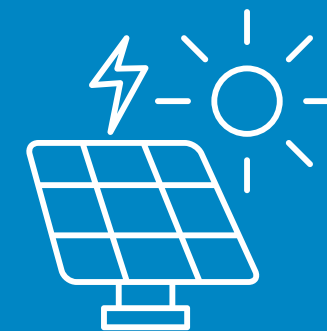


# INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS

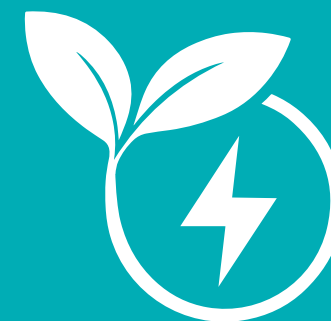
Through partnerships with UVI, community organizations, and our clients (many of whom are experts in their fields), we can promote innovative solutions for some of the Virgin Islands' biggest problems: energy, food security, healthcare, and education.



Advance Technology  
Transfer



Promote Innovative  
Solutions



Entrepreneurship  
Programming



# Sustainable Practices Advancement & Renewable Knowledge Initiative



## UVI RTPark Solar Farm and Teaching Array

This project includes a 423kW ground-mounted solar farm to offset the Research and Technology Park's reliance on the grid and a dedicated teaching array that will provide UVI Renewable Energy Technology students with hands-on training experiences in solar energy production and system monitoring.



## Living Lab-Resilient Buildings Workforce Development Program

This program supports UVI's new AAS degree in Renewable Energy Technology by placing student interns at the RTPark, where they will monitor the building's energy usage, benchmark performance against industry standards, and recommend improvements to enhance energy efficiency and management.



## Resilient UVI Project

Led by UVI, this project will conduct ASHRAE Level 2 energy audits and install energy monitoring systems across 40 campus buildings to reduce the University's utility costs, lower its carbon footprint, and promote sustainable resource use.



**RTPark**  
UNIVERSITY OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS



**S.P.A.R.K is a collaborative effort between the UVI RTPark, the Caribbean Green Technology Center, and the University of the Virgin Islands. The goal of this initiative is to build a more resilient energy future, and prepare the local workforce for careers in advanced energy technologies.**





**THE UNIVERSITY OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS  
RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY PARK**

**THANK YOU!**

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