



**COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND  
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

**DR. GARY MOLLOY  
COMMISSIONER**

**FEBRUARY 5, 2026**

Good Day, Honorable Senator Kurt Vialet, Chairman of the Committee on Education and Workforce Development; Honorable Members of the Committee; distinguished Senators of the 36th Legislature of the Virgin Islands; and the listening and viewing public. I am Dr. Gary Molloy, Commissioner of the Virgin Islands Department of Labor (VIDOL).

I am joined today by Assistant Commissioner Jean Forde, Director of Youth and Apprenticeship Shenika Sebastien, and Director of Workforce Development Services Charlene Hodge. We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony regarding long-term summer employment opportunities and the broader continuum of youth workforce development initiatives administered by VIDOL.

### ***Youth Summer Employment Programs Currently Administered by VIDOL***

The Youth & Apprenticeship Division is responsible for the design and management of workforce initiatives serving individuals ages 14 to 25 throughout the year. The Division develops Individual Employment Plans and Service Strategies, provides referrals to service providers, and delivers structured youth services including career readiness training, resume development, financial literacy, and both paid and unpaid work experiences. Central to this framework is the Summer Youth Work Experience Program (SYWEP), a core component of our year-round youth strategy. SYWEP provides young Virgin Islanders with the opportunity to earn income while developing the skills, attitudes, and workplace competencies necessary to succeed in today's economy. This approach ensures that summer employment is not merely a short-term job, but a structured learning experience connected to long-term career pathways.

VIDOL currently administers three primary summer initiatives: the Summer Youth Work Experience Program for youth ages 16 to 25; the Career Exploratory Program for youth ages 14 to 15; and the Labor Investing for Tomorrow (LIFT) Internship Program for college juniors, seniors, graduate students, and recent graduates with at least 60 credits and a 2.8 grade point average. Collectively, these programs engage high school students, out-of-school youth, and post-secondary participants in meaningful work-based learning. In Summer 2025, VIDOL received

1,420 applications and successfully placed 722 participants, demonstrating both the strong demand for and the tangible impact of these initiatives.

For 2026, the SYWEP model incorporates several evidence-based components designed to strengthen employability and career readiness. These include pre-employment virtual workshops in April 2026 focused on resume preparation, interview techniques, communication skills, and positive workplace behavior; a five-week paid work experience segment that places youth directly with employers; a Career Exploration Program operating from June 1 through June 26, 2026 for younger participants; and the LIFT Internship Program, which connects advanced students to professional environments aligned with their academic fields of study. The anticipated number of youth served in 2026 remains contingent upon the availability of additional funding; however, current planning targets more than 1,000 participants territory-wide.

### ***Participating Service Providers***

Successful youth employment requires collaboration with a broad network of community organizations, educational institutions, and private-sector employers. These partners provide mentorship, structured supervision, and exposure to high-growth industries. VIDOL continues to strengthen relationships with employers to ensure that placements are meaningful, skill-building, and aligned with labor market demand, thereby creating authentic pathways from education to employment.

To maximize access and equity, VIDOL will implement a comprehensive outreach and marketing campaign. This effort will include press releases and social media features highlighting former SYWEP and LIFT participants, presentations at high schools and the University of the Virgin Islands, radio and newspaper advertisements, media appearances, and the distribution of program flyers and digital content. The online application portal at [vidol.gov/youth](http://vidol.gov/youth) will be open from February 16 to April 17, 2026, and both applicants and employers are encouraged to apply early due to the historically high volume of submissions.

## *Breakdown of Summer Employment Budget*

The projected 2026 Summer Youth Employment Budget is \$1,444,463.38, supporting an estimated 1,034 participants across all programs. These funds will cover stipends for Career Exploration participants, wages for SYWEP and LIFT interns, and supplemental assistance to service providers. VIDOL remains committed to leveraging both federal and local resources to expand opportunities while ensuring responsible stewardship of public funds.

Beyond wages earned, SYWEP delivers measurable and lasting benefits. Participants demonstrate increased confidence and work readiness, improved communication and teamwork skills, enhanced problem-solving abilities, and stronger connections to employers. The program also contributes to a growing pipeline of Virgin Islands talent entering priority industries. These outcomes affirm that summer employment is a critical intervention for workforce attachment, academic persistence, and long-term economic mobility.

## *Closing*

The Virgin Islands Department of Labor remains steadfast in its commitment to the youth of this Territory. Our programs in St. Croix, St. Thomas, and St. John are designed to ensure that every young person, regardless of background, has access to opportunity, mentorship, and meaningful employment. I extend sincere gratitude to the VIDOL staff, our employer partners, and this Legislative body for its continued investment in the next generation of Virgin Islands workers.

We will now share brief video testimonials from participants and employers.

Finally, VIDOL respectfully request your continued support of an important territorial initiative, the **U.S. Virgin Islands Workforce Development Tour featuring Mr. Mark C. Perna**, scheduled for **February 6–11, 2026 on St. Thomas and St. Croix**.

This engagement builds upon the momentum of the Governor’s Workforce Development Summit and advances our shared goal of aligning education, workforce, and economic development systems to strengthen the USVI Talent Pipeline—**Inform, Attract, Acquaint, Train, and Hire**.

The tour will include leadership deep-dives, student empowerment sessions, and employer roundtables designed to connect industry needs with local talent development.

The testimony provided today is supported by the accompanying slides and informational flyers submitted as attachments. This concludes my testimony, and my team and I are prepared to answer any questions you may have.

# Attachments

## OVERVIEW

### SYWEP

Summer Youth Work Experience Program

- Component of the year-round Youth Program
- Provide youth **ages 14-24** with the opportunity to **earn money** while **learning** and **developing** the **skills, attitudes,** and **commitment** necessary to succeed in today's workforce

### Aim to:



Structured instruction & hands-on learning in career awareness, professional behavior, financial literacy, customer service, workplace safety, & communication skills

Paid summer jobs & internships through subsidized & unsubsidized opportunities with both private-sector employers & government agencies



Encourages positive behaviors, supports academic success, and prepares youth for post-secondary education and long-term career success



## 2026 SYWEP PLANNED ACTIVITIES

**2026**  
\*Anticipates  
Serving:

**1034**

Total Cost: \$1,444,463.38

### Pre-Employment Workshops

Virtual Workshops - April 2026  
(Resume Preparation, Interview Preparation, Communication Skills and Positive Workplace Behavior)

### CAREER EXPLORATION

4-Week Career Exploration Program

Career Exploration Program for **youth 14-15 years old** focusing on the development of employability and soft skills

**150**

Cost: \$ 108,000.00  
(per student: \$720)

### WORK EXPERIENCE

5-Week Paid Work Experience

Paid work experience for youth **16-24 years old (In-School, Out-of-School, College & GRAD student)**

**844**

Cost: \$ 1,191,461.78  
(per student: \$1,356.39 - \$1,485.57)

### INTERNSHIP

8-Week Internship

Labor Investing for Tomorrow (LIFT) Internship Program for **eligible college juniors, seniors, graduates & Grad students.**

**40**

Cost: \$ 145,001.60  
(per student: \$3,625)



\*The anticipated number of youth served is contingent upon the availability of additional funding.



# 2026 SYWEP PLANNED ACTIVITIES



## Planned Placement:

Category	Participants
▶ Career Exploration Program	150
▶ Work Experience	
In-School Youth (ISY)	600
Out-of-School Youth (OSY)	170
College – 1st   2nd yr.	50
College – 3rd   4th yr.	20
▶ LIFT Internship	40
▶ Staff	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,034</b>



2026 SYWEP PLANNED ACTIVITIES |

# CAREER EXPLORATION

## Career EXPLORATION Program



Rate of Pay: \$400 Stipend | 4 weeks



Administered through Service Providers:

Service Providers will be solicited and ten (10) providers will be selected to provide career exploration activities. Each selected Provider will be funded at a maximum of \$4,800



Program Elements:

- Soft skills necessary for job success
- Career Interest Portfolio
- Entrepreneurial skills training
- Exposure to one or more occupational area preparation activities
- Labor market and employment information
- Leadership development opportunities
- Postsecondary education and training

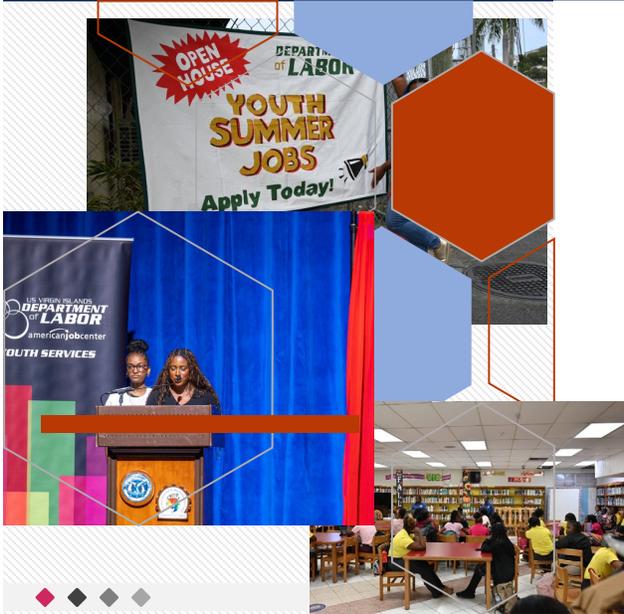


Program Period:

June 1, 2026 – June 26, 2026



# WORK EXPERIENCE



## 5-Week Paid Work EXPERIENCE

**Rate of Pay:**  
 ISY/OSY \$10.50  
 COL 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> \$11.00  
 COL 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> \$11.50

**Workshops**  
 ○ Pre-Employment Workshops  
 ○ Career Readiness & Life Skills

**Program Period:**  
 May 18, 2026 – June 19, 2026  
 June 1, 2026 – July 3, 2026  
 June 15, 2026 – July 17, 2026



# INTERNSHIP



## Labor Investing For Tomorrow INTERNSHIP Program

**Rate of Pay: \$14.00**  
 8 weeks | 240 hours

**Workshops/Networking Opportunities**

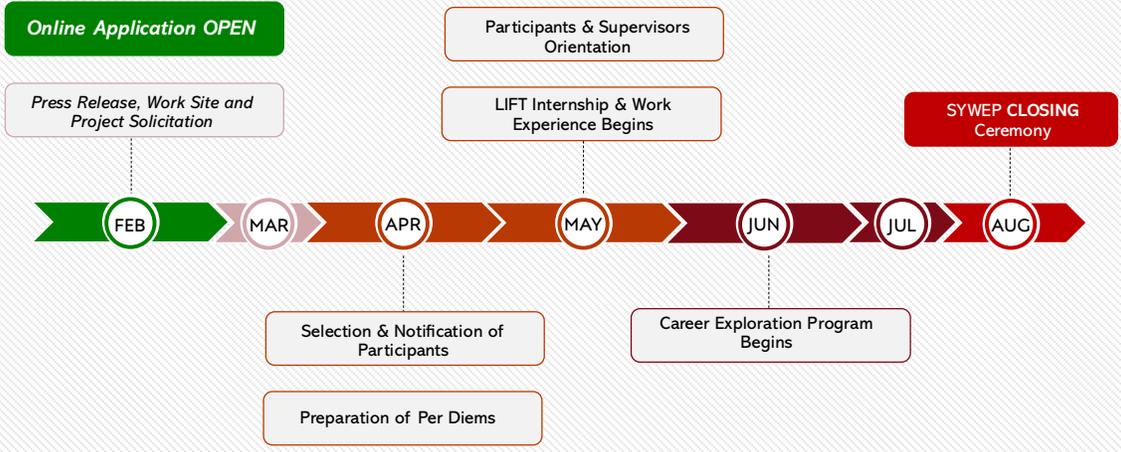
**Timeline:**  
 ○ Selection & Notification: April 20 - 24, 2026  
 ○ Internship Period: May - July 2026



# 2026 SYWEP TIMELINE

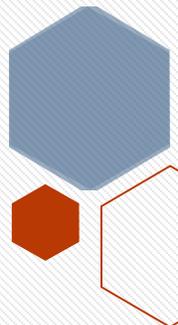


**Application Period:** February 16, 2026 - April 17, 2026



# MARKETING of Programs

- Press Releases
- Social Media
- Ads of Former LIFT and SYWEP Participants
- Presentations at High Schools and University
- Radio and Newspaper Ads
- Radio and Media Appearances



FLYERS

Launch Your Career

## Labor Investing For Tomorrow Internship Program



Gain Real Experience

**APPLY TODAY!**



[www.vidoi.gov/youth](http://www.vidoi.gov/youth)

Build Your Network

**8-WEEK PAID INTERNSHIP**

Gain real-world experience, connect with mentors, build your network, and sharpen your skills through hands-on work and professional development workshops—with the opportunity to earn college credit.

**APPLICATION DEADLINE: APRIL 17, 2026**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

340-773-1994 | ST. CROIX  
340-776-3700 | ST. THOMAS/  
ST. JOHN

litf@ddol.vi.gov

**Eligibility Requirements:**

- ✓ College Junior, Senior, or Recent Graduate
- ✓ Completed 60 credit hours or more
- ✓ GPA of 2.8+
- ✓ Ages of 18-25

Internship Period: May - July 2026

Experience Today. Lead Tomorrow.

THE VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF LABOR IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER WITH EQUAL OPPORTUNITY PROGRAMS. AUXILIARY AIDS AND SERVICES ARE AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST TO INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES.

SYWEP 2026  
SUMMER YOUTH WORK EXPERIENCE PROGRAM



## PAID SUMMER EXPERIENCE

Opportunities for youth ages 14 - 25

**YOUTH AGES 14-15**

**CAREER EXPLORATION**

EXCITE | EXPLORE | ENGAGE

- 4-Week Career Exploration Program
- Introduction to the world of work
- Hands-on activities and guided career exposure

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

340-773-1994 | ST. CROIX  
340-776-3700 | ST. THOMAS/  
ST. JOHN

**APPLICATION DEADLINE: APRIL 17, 2026**

**BETWEEN THE  
AGES OF 16 - 25?**

**WORK EXPERIENCE**

MEANINGFUL WORK EXPERIENCE

- 5-Week paid Summer Work Experience
- Hands-on learning & career exploration
- Earn income while building skills

**APPLY NOW**

[www.vidoi.gov/youth](http://www.vidoi.gov/youth)



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# VIDOL & EDA Present: Workforce Development Tour

Friday, Feb. 6, 2026  
UVI ACC First Floor  
Conference Room  
8:30 AM

KEYNOTE SPEAKER  
MARK C. PERNA



**Mark C. Perna**  
Speaker | Author | CEO

RSVP HERE:





# VIDOL & EDA Present: St. Croix Employer Round Table

Tuesday, Feb. 10, 2026  
UVI Great Hall  
12:30 PM

KEYNOTE SPEAKER  
MARK C. PERNA



**Mark C. Perna**  
Speaker | Author | CEO

RSVP HERE:





# VIDOL & EDA Present: St. Thomas Employer Round Table

Wednesday, Feb. 11, 2026  
My Brother's Workshop  
Campus  
(Estate Donoe)  
8:30 AM

KEYNOTE SPEAKER  
MARK C. PERNA



**Mark C. Perna**  
Speaker | Author | CEO

RSVP HERE:

