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2026 VTC Grants Overview: Forward Focused to Amplify Virginia

VA-1 Governor's Tourism Summit – Danville, Virginia
2025

MEET THE VTC GRANTS TEAM!

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Presentation Agenda

- More People, More Money, More Jobs

- Spreading the Love Statewide

- On Time, Every Time

- The Four Rs

- Forward Focus

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VTC Grant Goals:
More Money, More People,
More Jobs

Instant Revenue Generation

Developing & Activating Partnerships

- Itinerary Focused Hub & Spoke

- Length of Stay Potential

- Revenue Potential

- Cross Promotion/Package Potential

- Leverage Potential

- Must be specific <u>brick and mortar</u> places. Exception food trucks.

Compelling and Compliant Programs

- Captivating Campaigns

- Research Driven Applications

- Leverage of 3:1

- Partnership Development

- Increased Visitor Spending

- Integration with VTC Services

- Program Compliance

- Statewide Support per state code

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VTC Grants Spreading the Love Statewide

2026 ALLOCATIONS

*Four programs are for DMOs **only.***
*With **$1.15M** set aside for DMOs only.*

- $815,000 SEF (80 awards @ $10K)*under review; awards Dec 5.

- VA250 (30 awards @ $10K)*closing 12/5/25

- $100,000 Arrivalist (40 awards @ $2.5K)*opening 12/7/25

- $750,000 DMO (50 awards @ $15K)* opening 2/10/26

- $1,000,000 MLP (50 awards @ $15K & $30K) *opening 2/10/26

- $300,000 MMLP (60 awards at $5K) * opening mid-June 2026

- *$200,000 Flagship DMO
  (40 awards @ $5K or 80 @ $2.5K)*TBD/increased allocation

- $200,000 Drive (10 awards @ $20K)*TBD 2026

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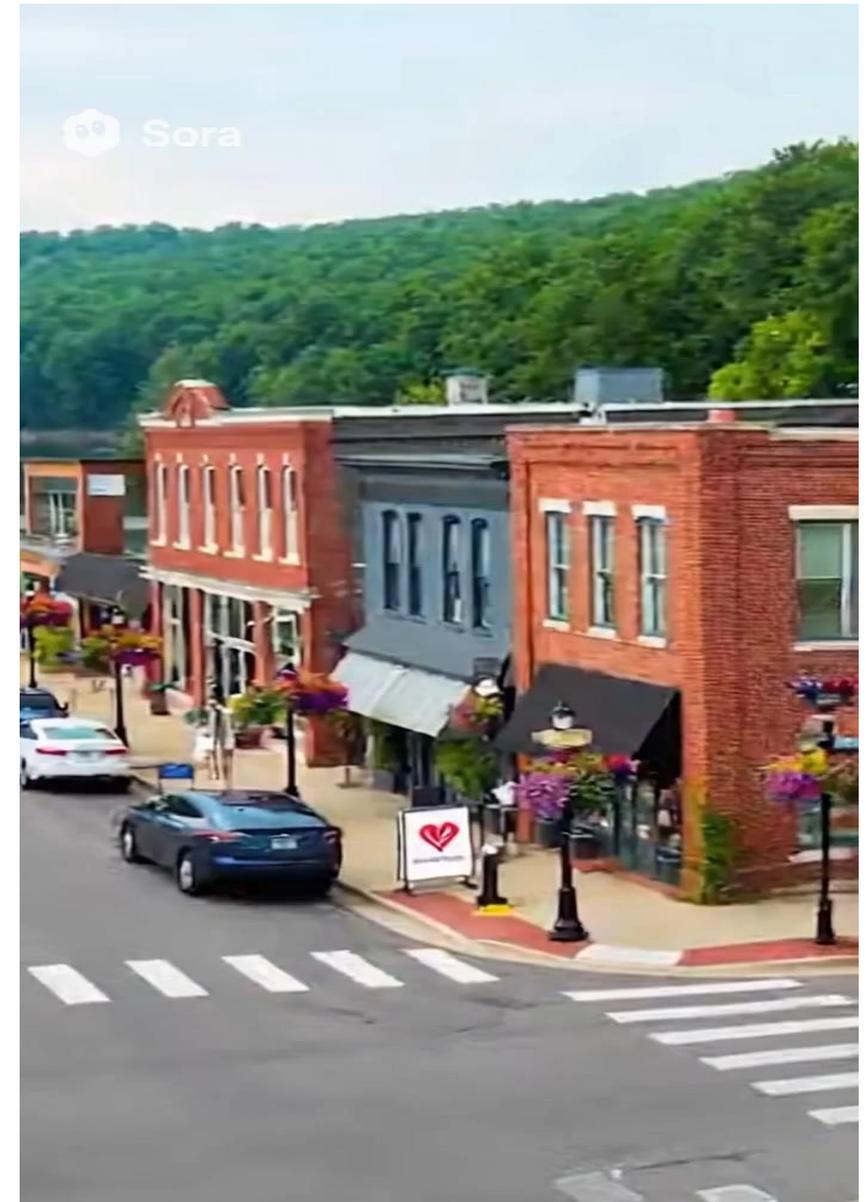
Created in Sora AI with 30-word prompt.

Reducing the Reductions
Flowcharts Forthcoming

DMOs
Each calendar year must choose between
DMO program (max award $15K with 50% in-kind
match) **OR**
MLP program (max award $30K with cash match)

DMOs
Can apply for Special Events & Festivals Program,
but proposal can not be for same event as
Marketing Leverage Program.

DMOs
Can not apply for Microbusiness MLP. Instead, we
are increasing allocation to the Flagship program
for DMO participation.

Businesses, Attractions, Main Streets, EDAs
Each calendar year must choose between Marketing
Leverage Program (cash match)
OR
Microbusiness Marketing Leverage Program (in-kind
match.)

Microbusinesses
Are encouraged to apply for Microbusiness program if a
first-time applicant.

Special Events & Festivals
Must be minimum of two days with two-year history.
Focus is on **EXPANSION. More things to do, more
visitors, more days, more overnights..**

DMO Marketing Program, Arrivalist, Drive, and Special Events & Festivals Program are all subject to 20% GOVA limits.

Statewide Support
Spreading the Love

- Applicants who qualify may **NOT** apply for both the DMO Marketing program and the Marketing Leverage Program. Carefully review program requirements, award tiers and match requirements before applying.

- Applicants who apply for the Marketing Leverage Program and receive an award may **NOT** apply for the Microbusiness Marketing Leverage Program opening in mid-June. DMOs are not eligible for Microbusiness.

- Applicants who receive an award from the Special Events & Festivals Program grant for the **same event in 2026 may NOT apply** for the 2026 Marketing Leverage Program. Stay tuned for info in the SEF award letters.
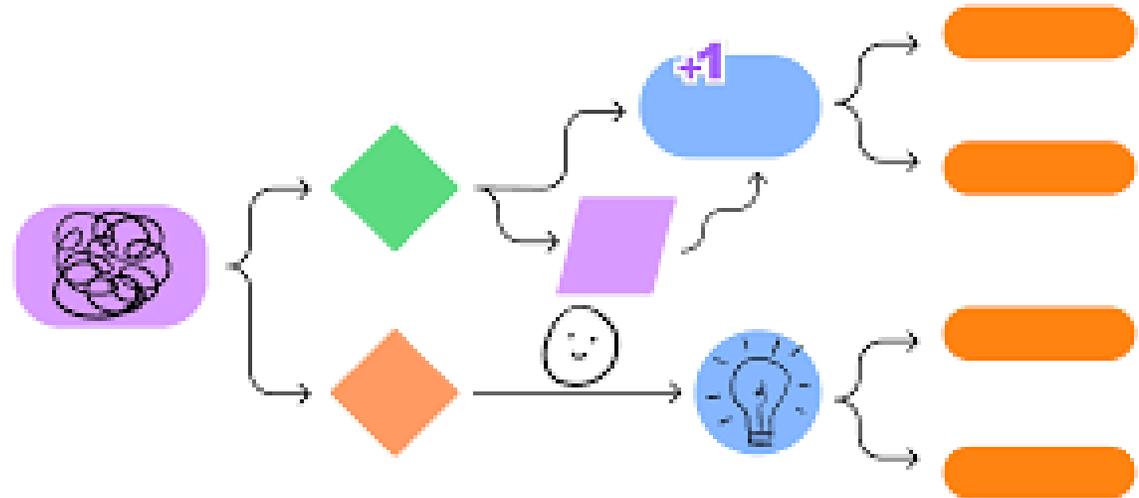
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VTC Grants
On Time, Every Time

Lather. Rinse. **Reimburse. Report.** Repeat.

Grant round prep:
Prior round debrief; development of documents

Application dates:
Driven by staff capacity; scoring capacity, press release

Scoring dates:
6-8 weeks to review with a team of 5.

Awards:
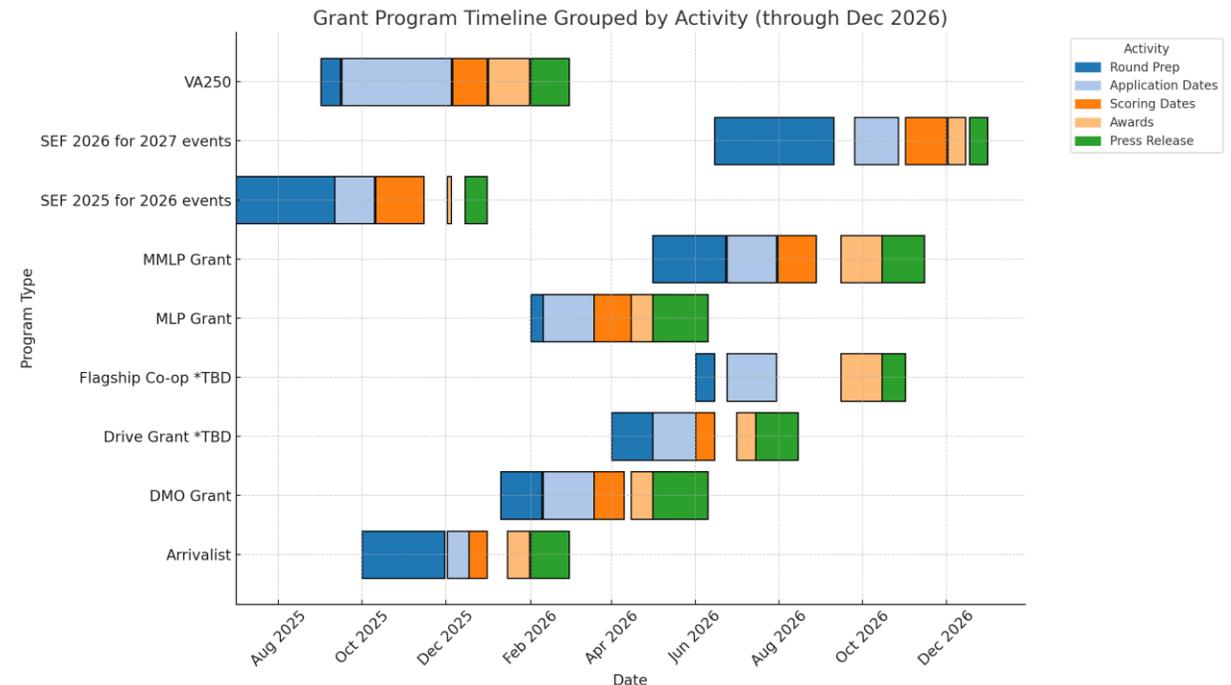Award conferences, approvals and notifications takes 4 weeks.

Press Release:
Can take 2-4 weeks.

Reimbursement & Reporting:
15-24 months

From 80 proposals a year to over 600 a year!

Grant Program Timeline Grouped by Activity (through Dec 2026)

75% of Proposals in Last Four Hours

20% of Proposals in Final 45 Minutes

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The Gut-Wrenching Grey Screen

Lifted Security Layers

Changed settings to reduce grey outs and html errors.

Attachments at End of Application

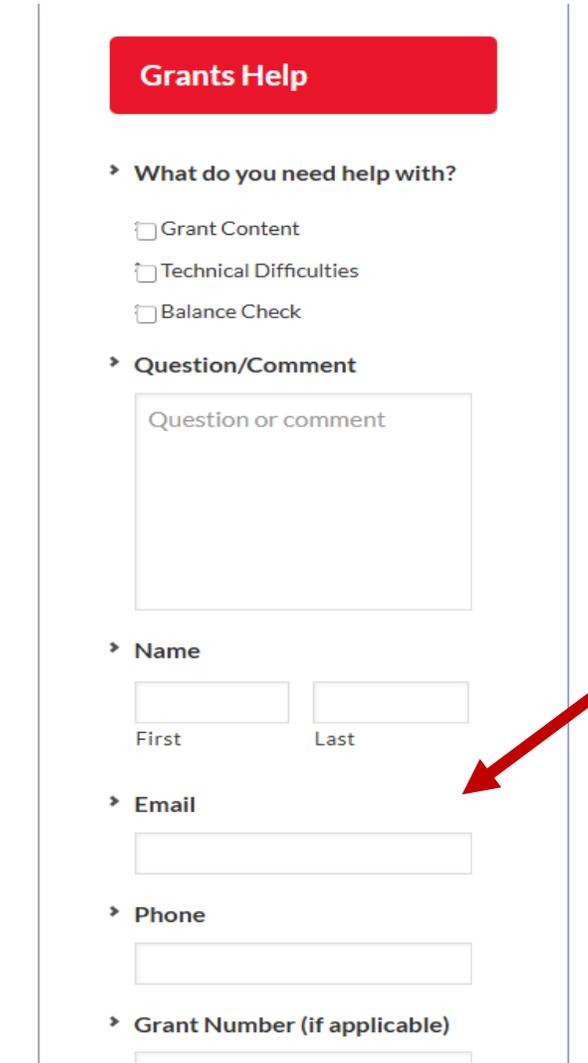Do not attach until ready to submit.

Set Server Reset Schedule

Server volume was causing grey outs. We have a regular reset schedule with Digital Marketing team.

Contact Us

Use the technical assistance box. Check your pdf right after submission.

Last Minute Volume

Do not procrastinate. Contact us if 4:30 crash.

Grants Help

❯ **What do you need help with?**

☐ Grant Content
☐ Technical Difficulties
☐ Balance Check

❯ **Question/Comment**

Question or comment

❯ **Name**

First   Last

❯ **Email**

❯ **Phone**

❯ **Grant Number (if applicable)**

This is your Grants Team 911 call---the issue gets sent to FOUR people all at once!

Flooding the Zone—Forward

MLP & DMO Lookback Period
90 days from when application opens.
This is a lookback reduction from 180 days

MLP & DMO Spend Down Period
Maximum 15 months from date of award. Can be shorter if doing shorter campaigns, like a capsule campaign.
This is a reduction from 18 months.

MMLP Lookback Period
To June 1 of application year. No change.

MMLP Spend Down Period
To May 31 of following year. No change.

SEF Lookback Period
December 1 of application year. No change.

SEF Spend Down Period
30 days after event. No change.
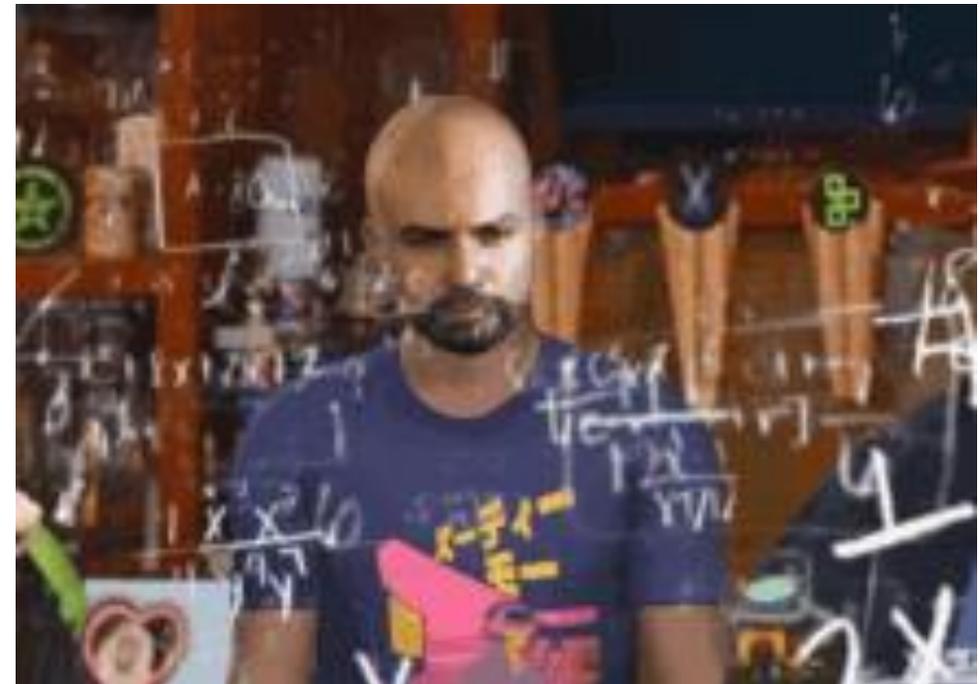
VTC Grant Compliance: The Four Rs

Reimbursements, Reports, Revisions, and Reversions

Reimbursements & Reports

- **VTC Reimbursement Request Form**

- **Completed W-9 with Most-Updated Address**

- **VTC ACH Direct Deposit Form (optional)**

- **Invoices for each expense (match & reimbursable)**

- **Proofs of payment for each expense (match & reimbursable)**

- **Screenshots/Links of Advertisement Placements (<u>match</u> & reimbursable)**

- **Interim/Final Report**

New Reimbursement Form

Documentation of Cash and In-Kind Match
Proof of in-kind match now required. Match must be segregated by match and reimbursement.
Documenting in-kind match is new. Screenshots and print outs are permitted.

Maximum Number of Reimbursements
Two; minimum of $1,000. Only third request if there is a major error/ineligible item.
This is a reduction from unlimited requests.

Reports Must Accompany Reimbursements
Interim reports must be with first reimbursement and must include progress toward performance metrics. Final report must be with final reimbursement. If missing, reimbursement will be held.
We have not required interim reports before.

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Tracking Success and Measuring Impact

Interim and Final Report Performance Metrics

Specific to campaign and campaign dates. Must report baseline, projected, and actual in final report. These are tracked closely and will become a measure of grant program economic impact.

Can be tax revenue, sales, # of customers/attendees, clicks, views, room nights. Must be measurable.

Interim and Final Report Narrative

Must include minimum of two paragraphs of narrative about successes and lesson learned.

Can include quotes, weather data, PR challenges/crises, overall thoughts on campaign, future goals, and future use of content paid for with grant funding.

Supplemental Campaign ROI Measurement Data

Encouraged to include additional data including dashboard reports, increases in followers, changes in analytics and insights.

Can include screenshots, agency reports, tax revenue reports, visitor log reports, earned media and share of voice reports, earned editorial links.

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Need to pivot? We got you!

New Flexibility in Application
Categories, not vendors. Awardees can move funds in same category without revision request.
Reducing revision requests is critical. You were awarded based on original submission.

Moving Funds Across Categories.
Major changes like moving from social media to a print expenditure will require revision form and approval.
We understand marketing dynamics, but we need to document changes.

Moving Funds from Out-of-State/Regional to Local
No. Don't do it. Put some local in your marketing plan if needed, but don't change targets after award.
Out-of-state visitation is critical to revenue growth.

Marketing Channel Categories

Radio | TV | Digital Streaming | Digital Ads
Digital Ads | Banner | Social Media Ads & Boosts | Agency Services
Agency Services | Print | Print | Other

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Extensions & Deadlines

SEF Report Period
Final reports due 60 days after event.
No report = No reimbursement.
No extensions permitted.

MMLP Report Period
All reimbursements and final reports due by July 31.
No report = No reimbursement.
No extensions permitted.

MLP/DMO
One 90-day Extension Only. Must be requested in writing.
No report = No reimbursement.

Disqualification & Reversions

No Signed DMO Letter of Support
Keeping DMOs in the loop is critical.

No Signed Lodging Letter of Support
Lodging partners can include hotels, campgrounds, and B&Bs.

Ineligible Items in Match Section
Don't do it. Ineligible items will be removed from match and reduce your potential award. If entire match is ineligible, then application is disqualified.

Fund Reversions
Automatic if program reimbursements and reports are not completed on time.

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VTC Grants
Forward Focus

Weaving it All Together
Crafting the Fabric of Visitor Marketing

Connecting Applicants with Research
Applications lead with research. Use VTC research if you don't subscribe to your own.
Don't just tell us sources; tell us what the data is telling you.

Connecting Applicants with Co-ops
Indicate if you are using Co-op opportunities.
Applicants should be stretching budgets and activating all options.

Connecting Applicants with PMAP/WCs
Indicate if you are activating PMAP and which services at which Welcome Centers.
We provide follow up lists to WC Managers. They may reach out.

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Building Scaffolds
Activating the Full Funding Pipeline

Creating Interest in TIDs
New question in applications. DMOs may get contacted by Business Development Division.
TIDs are a way to generate permanent match and additional budget dollars.

Connecting Applicants with Destination Development Team
Indicate if you have met with your DDM if you have one in the area. Indicate if you have talked to Richmond staff if no DDM in your area.
We want to be sure we are assisting you with locality specific information and advice.

Activating the Development Pipeline
Tell us if this is a product developed with Drive funding, DHCD funding, VDACS funding, or federal funding.
We want to show connections across agencies.

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All You Need to Know--When You Need to Know It
Get Out Your Calendars—Get on Our Calendars

Webinars
We are scheduling for 2026. Schedule with us
for your locality.

Updated Ts & Cs, Forms, Templates
End of January 2026.

Site Visits
Lunch & Learns, Chamber breakfasts, evening
brainstorming session, Main Street walk
throughs

One-on-One Virtual Sessions & Webinars
We can Teams, Zoom & Google Meet

Compliance Reminders:
Email & Postcards

Webinar Sign Up:

https://bit.ly/3KpPWR7

Or

www.vatc.org/grants
**Click "webinars" on right
sidebar**

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VTC Grant Proposals: Marketing Ideas

VTC Grants & Capsule Marketing Campaigns

- Boosting tourism with **focused** marketing approaches

Bite-Sized Campaigns

Capsule marketing breaks complex brand messages into concise, easily digestible campaigns for quick audience engagement.

Perfect for short seasonal campaigns.
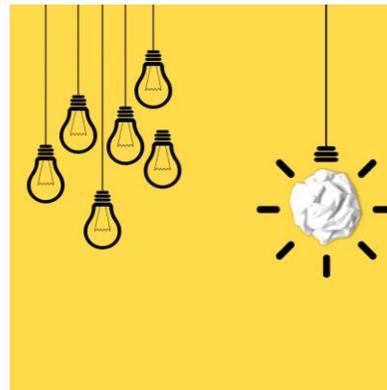
Emotional Storytelling

Using emotional storytelling helps create a strong connection with the audience, making campaigns memorable and effective.

Use universals—food, sleep, play, love, joy.

Clear Thematic Focus

Successful capsule marketing centers around clear themes, allowing the message to resonate and attract the target audience.

Template for your partners.

Benefits for DMOs & Tourism Businesses

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Increase Brand Recall

The approach enhances brand recall among tourists, making businesses more recognizable and preferred.

Use Virginia is for Lovers and your destination logo. We are stronger together.

Target Niche Audiences

Businesses can effectively target specific niche audiences to tailor offerings and marketing efforts.

Use POIs, Arrivalist, analytics, and insights.

Reduce Marketing Costs

The approach helps reduce expenses associated with marketing, improving overall profitability.

Use existing budget as match; try something new with VTC grant funding.

Drive Visitor Engagement

Creating memorable experiences encourages visitor engagement and boosts repeat visits.

Visitor satisfaction is key. Share the dream then make it a reality.

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Capsule Campaign: Crush Friday

Source: VTC

Focused Marketing Impact

Capsule campaigns concentrate efforts on targeted audiences to significantly increase destination visibility and appeal.

Crush Friday promoted the use of vacation days to specific millennial audience in DC Metro area

Innovative Storytelling

Creative narratives in capsule campaigns engage audiences emotionally and highlight unique destination features.

Crush Friday promoted long weekend activities.

Strategic Media Use

Utilizing multiple media platforms strategically amplifies campaign reach and visitor engagement. Long form, short form, templates, tool kits.

Crush Friday used video, social media, hashtags, and mailed tool kits to targeted influencers and trend leaders.

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Pinball Marketing: Multiply and Make it Stick

Exploring **dynamic** marketing strategies for tourism success

Nonlinear Consumer Interaction

Consumers engage with multiple marketing touchpoints in an unpredictable, nonlinear manner similar to a pinball's movement.

Bounce from Instagram to Facebook to X to Tik Tok to Streaming to Influencers.

Engagement and Adaptability

Pinball Marketing emphasizes continuous engagement and adaptability to changing consumer behavior and touchpoints.

Constantly pings the prospective visitor to keep brand top of mind.

Multiple Influence Pathways

Multiple marketing pathways simultaneously influence consumer decisions in a complex, dynamic way.

Multiple pathways to conversion.

Created on Sora AI with a 10-word prompt.

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Defining the Marketing Funnel Stages

Boosting tourism with incremental marketing approaches

Awareness Stage

This stage captures potential customers' attention through broad marketing efforts and brand exposure. Flood the zone!

Consideration Stage

Prospects evaluate different options and engage with targeted content to inform their decision-making. Sort prospects by driving them to websites, blogs, short reels, long from video.

Conversion Stage

Prospects take action by reserving, booking, and going. **Book Now!** Keep that conversion message front and center on all channels and on all content.

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FULL FUNNEL MARKETING
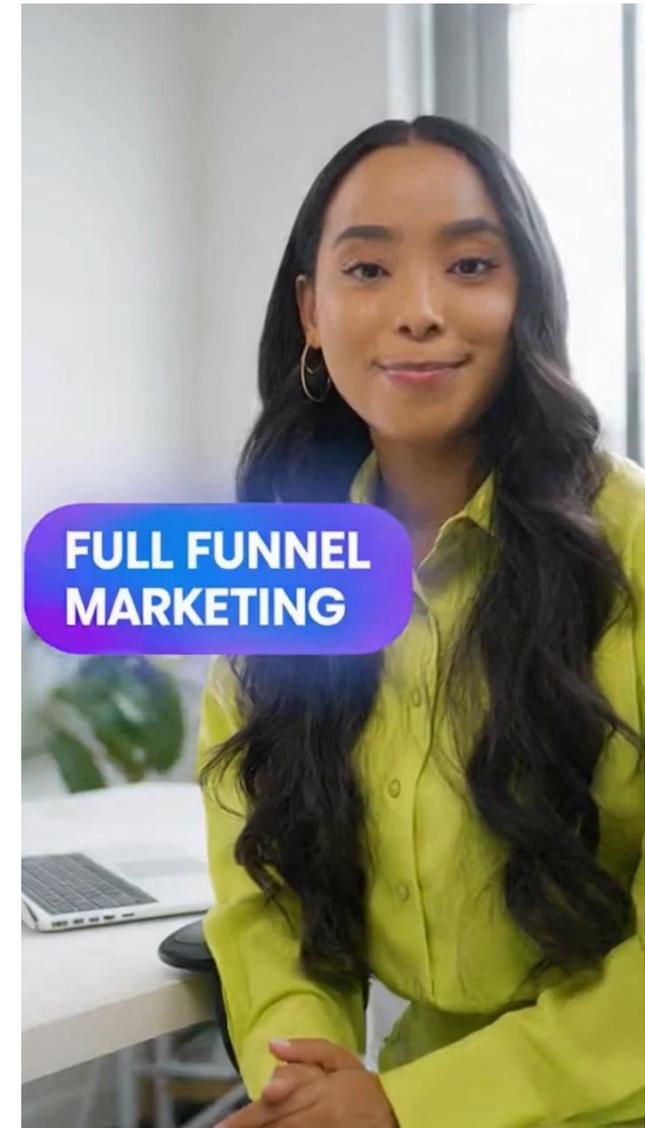
Created on Sora AI with a 10-word prompt.

Funnel Stages: Goals and Objectives

Conversion Path

Homepage
Your visitors land on your website and find the most relevant offers for them at a glance.

Information
Further information and a target group-oriented language will help your customers with their purchase decision.

Call To Action
Provide clearly defined calls for action that your customers can easily follow.

Target Page
On a target page customers get all the details and can book your offer directly.

Confirmation
Your customers receive a confirmation with all important details about their booking and further information.

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Awareness Stage Goals

The primary goal is to capture audience attention and increase brand visibility effectively.

Use your general destination marketing budget for awareness.

Consideration Stage Goals

Focus on educating prospects and building their interest toward the product or service.

Use VTC grant dollars to focus on this stage by featuring specific activities.

***Conversion* Stage Goals**

Aim to close sales and foster customer loyalty through personalized offers and support.

Close the deal by following up with e-newsletters and follower insider tips.

Measuring Success

Clear objectives at each stage help in tracking performance and improving marketing strategies.

Remain in compliance with VTC grants by following your performance metrics through the entire grant period to final reporting.

Adapting Campaigns to Shifting Tourist Interests

VTC grant marketing plans will now allow more flexibility by channel type and no longer ask for vendor name.

Product Promotion

Campaigns focus on very specific behavior, tourism product, or visitor dates.
Capsule campaigns hyper targeted with specific goals and measurables. Capsule campaigns are great ways to test new content.

Tourist Preferences

Tourist interests evolve quickly, requiring marketing strategies that can adapt without delay.

Pinball Marketing enables campaigns to adjust instantly to trends and emerging destinations.

Four Season Marketing

Campaigns respond in real time to seasonal changes and new tourism trends to remain effective.

Full funnel marketing allows you to focus on a specific stage—awareness, engagement, conversion-- or all three over the course of a grant spending period.

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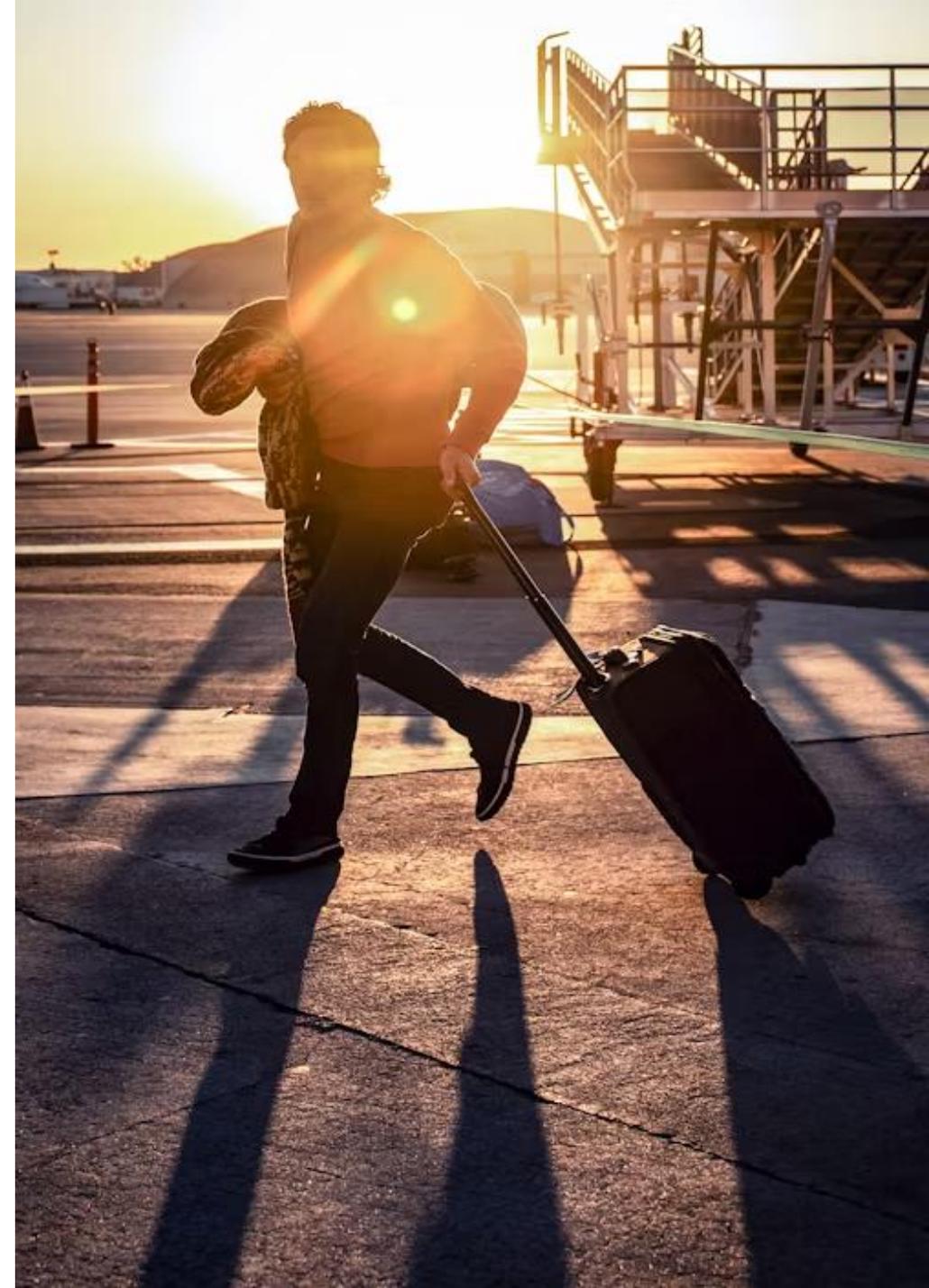
Promote Core Experiences

Signature Experience Focus

Concentrating on a select few experiences creates a clearer and stronger promotional message.

Laser focus and pinpoint unique authentic experiences and products.

Historic Tours

Historic tours showcase Virginia's rich heritage and attract culture and history enthusiasts.

VA250 Commission is investing $7M in marketing; piggyback on it. Tell the under told stories.

Outdoor Activities

Outdoor activities highlight Virginia's natural beauty and offer adventure tourism opportunities.

This is our bread and butter. Use drones and GoPros to get those breathtaking views and first-person adventures.

Cultural Festivals

Cultural festivals celebrate local traditions and engage visitors in unique experiences.

If you don't have one, create one and use MLP to market it. Then in Year 3, apply for SEF to expand it.

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Wrap Up

INVESTING IN TOURISM
POWERS VIRGINIA'S ECONOMY

Marketing Principles

- Understanding marketing principles helps in creating focused and effective tourism campaigns for Virginia.

- Use VTC grants to target new markets and produce new creative.

Virginia's Tourism Strengths

- Virginia's unique attractions and cultural strengths provide a strong foundation for tourism growth.

- Use VTC grants to feature product that will drive conversion.

Strategic Partnerships and Measurement

- Forming strategic partnerships and measuring campaign success ensures effective tourism development.

- Use VTC grants to leverage match and partnerships to take the message further.

Thank You!
Questions?

Google Drive Folder:

https://bit.ly/3XOKpXn