

# ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS



## SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2025.** Please include this submission form as the first page of your electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

### PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Fairfax County

Program Title: Talent Up Fairfax Fund

Program Category: Economic Development

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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### SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Bryan Hill

Title: County Executive

Signature:    
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## **Executive Summary**

The Talent Up Fairfax Fund (Talent Up) is helping local businesses successfully transform the ways they find and hire skilled talent. Talent Up was launched in late 2023 to offer a cost-free, low-risk way for local employers to onboard new talent through paid work-based learning. Designed with employers at the center, this innovative program connects employers with diverse and qualified talent pools and incentivizes them to modernize their hiring strategies. The program funds internships in high-demand fields to mitigate wage barriers for businesses that hire program participants and provides participants with the opportunity to develop skills in target industries. As of early May 2025, the program has enrolled 373 jobseekers, engaged 189 employers, and posted 193 internships with a median wage of \$25 per hour. The program is on track to place a total of 180 interns.

Talent Up is centralized around work-based learning. This method enables employers to onboard employees that may have less experience or credentials and increases worker retention and productivity once employed. Unique features of Talent Up that contribute to a successful program include:

- Reduced barriers for employer participation, including minimized administrative burdens and no financial requirements.
- Dedicated employer engagement specialists to support businesses, tailored internships to meet specific organizational needs, and competitive hourly rates.
- Prioritized "gateway" jobs in high-demand fields to equip worker participants with in-demand skills for long-term career success.

### **Problem, challenge, or situation faced by the locality**

Talent Up was established to address the number one challenge faced by local businesses: access to skilled talent. Talent Up directly addresses workforce development challenges by creating a vital bridge between job seekers and employers via an innovative work-based learning model. This approach focuses on incentivizing businesses to attract and retain effectively equipped individuals with resume-building work experience. Increasing the availability of these opportunities through Talent Up is easing pandemic-related employment hurdles and skill gaps while helping to defray the risk that prevents some employers from utilizing work-based learning programs.

### **Award Criteria**

#### **Innovative Solution**

Talent Up was created to bring a fresh, innovative approach to work-based learning within the public workforce system. While the concept of work-based learning isn't new, Talent Up stands out by reimagining how it's delivered. Key features that set Talent Up apart include:

- *Targets High-Demand Jobs:* The program focuses on "gateway" jobs – entry-level positions in high-demand fields like IT and healthcare. Research demonstrates that these types of jobs can create a pathway for career advancement.
- *Reduced Risk & Increased Access:* The program covers ancillary costs to employers while offering stipends to interns, reducing hiring risk for businesses. This incentivizes them to consider candidates from a previously untapped pool of diverse workers.

- *Not Your “Grandparent’s Internship”*: Most work-based learning programs are geared to youth with little or no work experience. Talent Up fills a gap in the work force development sector by focusing on adults with work experience with employment barriers and transferable skills.
- *Intermediary Expertise*: Utilizing a local workforce board, *SkillSource Group Inc. (SSG)*, as an intermediary streamlines the process for businesses. They provide program set-up, payroll, and rigorous candidate screening, which minimizes employer burden and risks. The program also features dedicated employed engagement managers to ensure success. Employers often learn about and utilize other workforce assistance resources as they engage with Talent Up.
- *Public Workforce Innovation*: Talent Up has piloted a new online job matching software – Marketgrabber – to advertise Talent Up internships. This tool gave employers the ability to post job descriptions and review resumes to identify promising candidates. SSG saw such significant success with this tool that they plan to retain the software for other work-based learning opportunities beyond Talent Up.
- *Untangled a Knot in the Labor Market*: Using labor market data, Talent Up identified a unique issue in the recovering economy – a disconnect between underutilized and untapped talent and businesses struggling to recruit staff for hard-to-fill jobs.

### Promoting Intergovernmental Cooperation

Talent Up is a partnership between economic and workforce development teams.

**Project Management:**

- Fairfax County Department of Economic Initiatives (DEI) partnered with *SkillSource Group* Inc. (SSG), a nonprofit arm of the Local Workforce Board, to develop and implement Talent Up.
- DEI initiated the program based on employer needs, working with labor market experts to identify targeted industries, securing federal funding, and gaining support from County leaders. DEI is responsible for leading communication about the program and monitoring project outcomes while SSG is contracted to serve as the program administrator.
- SSG handles fiscal responsibilities for wages during work-based learning; marketing campaigns; business and jobseeker recruitment; eligibility assessments; employer engagement and support; career coaching; and program recordkeeping.
- SSG is able to leverage their Local Workforce Role with Virginia Career Works Northern, providing WIOA-aligned workforce services to thousands of jobseekers.

**Marketing Support Partners and Technical Assistance Support garnered by Talent Up:**

- *Fairfax County Economic Development Authority (FCEDA)*: Provided marketing, employer referrals, and hosted job fairs.
- *Five Chambers of Commerce*: Advocated to employers and promoted the program, hosted events, and conducted marketing through their networks.
- *Society for Human Resources Management*: Hosted networking events.
- *Fairfax County Human Resources*: Facilitated internships within County agencies.

- *50+ nonprofit organizations*: Promoted the program to jobseekers in workforce readiness programs.
- *Fairfax County Department of Family Services – Business Solutions Team*: Collaborated on employer referrals, job matching, and onboarding for WIOA-aligned candidates.

### Providing a Model for Others

Talent Up offers a scalable model for communities seeking to bridge the gap between job seekers and employers while addressing local workforce needs. Originally launched in Fairfax County to tackle post-pandemic challenges, the program is adaptable—capable of targeting specific industries, dislocated workers, or underutilized talent based on regional priorities.

Talent Up is also repositioning to meet the impact of recent federal workforce reductions. As federal workers consider transitioning to the private sector, many face a skills mismatch.

Expanding Talent Up will support those affected, including career switchers, the unemployed, and the underemployed. Talent Up will broaden its reach beyond Fairfax County to the Northern Virginia region, aligning with the service delivery area of Virginia Career Works Northern Region.

Talent Up is a proven solution ready to be scaled up for Northern Virginia’s evolving workforce needs.

Key elements for replication should include:

- Experienced program leadership familiar with workforce systems;
- A skilled recruitment and engagement team to build business partnerships;

- Effective job seeker outreach;
- Strong branding and marketing; and,
- Competitive wages

Effective work-based learning requires financial support to incentivize employer participation, but securing these funds can be a challenge. Potential funding sources may include:

- State and local workforce development funds such as WIOA (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Funding) and Go Virginia.
- Federal resources: Leveraging current interest and investment in earn-and-learn models such as apprenticeships.
- Private sector: Engaging local businesses as partners may generate additional funding for internship stipends and program creation.

#### Innovative Approach and Customization

Talent Up is a transformative initiative addressing the gap between local employers and job seekers. Talent Up developed and implemented a win-win strategy by connecting untapped talent with employers facing labor shortages, resulting in mutually beneficial partnerships and filled critical job vacancies. This innovative model effectively addresses post-pandemic workforce challenges, promotes diversity, and strengthens the local economy. Additionally, this is in line with the Fairfax County Strategic Plan which advocates for “Developing and implementing a roadmap that enables residents to build fundamental workforce competencies”. The program reduces barriers, empowers individuals, and drives economic

growth. Its targeted approach, widespread engagement, and financial sustainability make it a replicable model.

Talent Up enhances services for Fairfax County residents and businesses by creating a dynamic ecosystem where local talent and employer needs can connect. The program empowers job seekers with the skills and experience necessary to secure employment while providing businesses with a pipeline of qualified candidates. By acting as a catalyst between these two essential groups and mitigating some of the risk from work-based learning to employers, Talent Up strengthens the local workforce, stimulates economic growth, and contributes to a more prosperous Fairfax County.

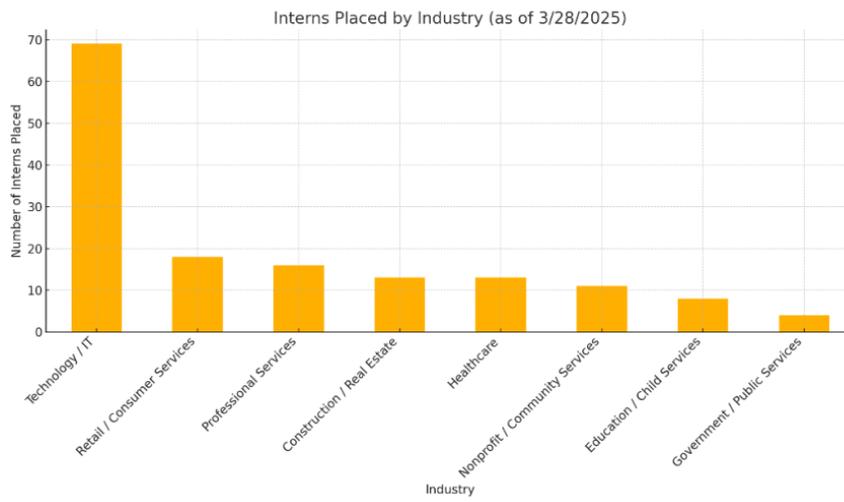
**Program Results**

The following presents Talent Up outcomes as of early May, 2025:

- Total Employers contacted/interested: 343
- Employers engaged: 189
- Enrolled Jobseekers: 373
- Internship Posting: 193
- Internship Placements: 166

The majority of Interns are placed in technology/IT firms.

### Interns placed by Industry:



### **PART III DIGITAL DOCUMENTATION -**

Success Stories videos: [Success Stories | TalentUp Fairfax](#)

Marketing Items: Flyers, social media, bus tails,

Employer Flyer

English [FairfaxCountyTalentUp Flyer Employers 120523.pdf](#)

Spanish [FairfaxCountyTalentUp Flyer Employers SPN 030824.pdf](#)

Jobseeker Flyer

English [FairfaxCountyTalentUp Flyer JobSeekers 120523.pdf](#)

Spanish [FairfaxCountyTalentUp Flyer JobSeekers SPN 030824.pdf](#)

“Northern Virginia work-based learning models look to scale statewide and national”

Washington Business Journal, April 21, 2025.

<https://www.bizjournals.com/washington/news/2025/04/21/northern-virginia-work-based-learning-mo.html>