



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: Prince William County
Program Title: The 2024 Virginia Women's Leadership Forum
Program Category: Community Development, Economic Development, & Land Use

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Trevor Johnson
Title: Deputy Executive Director
Department: Prince William Economic Development & Tourism
Telephone: 703-792-7452 Website: pwcded.org
Email: tjohnson@pwcgov.org

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Christopher J. Shorter
Title: County Executive
Signature:

Executive Summary

The 2024 Virginia Women's Leadership Forum addressed a critical challenge in economic development: the underrepresentation of women in the site selection industry, which narrows perspectives and impedes inclusive regional growth. In a field where leadership and deal-making have long been male-dominated, this first-of-its-kind initiative created space for meaningful mentorship, connection, and professional development for women across Virginia.

Prince William County Department of Economic Development & Tourism (PWCEDET), in partnership with the Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP) and Northern Virginia Economic Development Alliance (NOVA EDA), leveraged the prestigious 2024 LPGA Solheim Cup as a unique backdrop for this innovative three-day forum in September 2024. The exclusive gathering brought together 30 women leaders at the Archer Hotel in Falls Church, Virginia—including 18 regional economic developers and eight of the nation's leading women site selection consultants.

The Forum featured high-level programming including panel discussions, roundtables, and an immersive leadership session at Robert Trent Jones Golf Club that explored parallels between competitive sports and strategic business leadership. One of the most meaningful components was exclusive access to the Solheim Cup Opening Ceremony, where attendees networked with local elected officials and state leadership.

This program demonstrates innovation through its inclusive approach to economic development, promotes unprecedented intergovernmental cooperation across Virginia's regions, and provides a replicable model for other localities. The Forum's success was measured in depth rather than scale, with overwhelmingly positive feedback and documented follow-up meetings between VEDP and participating consultants. Most critically, the Forum positioned Virginia as an inclusive, forward-thinking destination for investment while empowering women leaders to drive community transformation.

VACo Achievement Awards

The 2024 Virginia Women's Leadership Forum



The Challenge

Prince William County, like many localities across Virginia, faces a persistent challenge: limited gender diversity in the site selection industry, which narrows perspectives in economic development strategy and impedes inclusive regional growth. To address this challenge, Team Virginia (a partnership between the Virginia Chamber Foundation and VEDP), the Northern Virginia Economic Development Alliance (NOVA EDA), and the Prince William County Department of Economic Development & Tourism (PWCEDET) collaborated to create an innovative event—The 2024 Virginia Women's Leadership Forum.

Background

The site selection process involves a strategic evaluation of various locations to identify the optimal site that aligns with an organization or corporations' goals, operational needs, and long-term objectives. Successful site selection requires a combination of data analysis, stakeholder collaboration, and on-the-ground research.

The site selection field has historically been dominated by men, with women representing a smaller percentage of professional site selection consultants as well as jurisdictional economic development leaders. While specific data on gender representation among site selectors is limited, broader industry trends indicate significant gender disparities.

- In the construction industry—a sector closely related to site selection—women comprise only 11% of the U.S. construction workforce, with just 4% working on-site.
- In leadership positions, the gender gap is also evident. Women hold approximately 31% of leadership roles globally, yet significant sectors such as energy, manufacturing, and infrastructure report even lower percentages of women in leadership, at 20%, 19%, and 16% respectively.

This underrepresentation extends to economic development organizations, where women often face challenges in ascending to leadership roles. Research indicates that organizations with higher women representation in leadership positions tend to perform better financially and exhibit improved governance. Women's unique perspectives can lead to more comprehensive decision-making processes, fostering innovation and inclusivity within the industry.

To address the gender imbalance and support women in these fields, it is essential to create opportunities for connection and collaboration among women professionals. Initiatives such as women-focused conferences, leadership forums, and mentorship programs can provide platforms for women to share experiences, build networks, and develop strategies to navigate the industry effectively. By fostering such environments, the industry can work towards greater gender parity, benefiting from the diverse talents and leadership styles that women bring to the table.



The Opportunity

Golf tournaments attract global audiences, creating a natural platform for networking, relationship-building, and the exchange of ideas. The 2024 Solheim Cup was the first major golf tournament hosted in Northern Virginia in almost a decade—and the first international golf tournament in almost 20 years. Hosted at the legendary Robert Trent Jones Golf Club (RTJ) in Gainesville, Virginia, Prince William County began working closely with Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) in early 2022 to take advantage of this unique opportunity.

In 2023, PWCEDT Executive Director Christina Winn and Deputy Director Trevor Johnson began work on a women-focused site selection conference with the 2024 Solheim Cup as the backdrop. Later that year, the Prince William County Department of Economic Development merged with the Tourism Office, creating the new Prince William County Department of Economic Development and Tourism (PWCEDT), bringing Kevin Costello, Director of Tourism on to the leadership team.

The leadership at PWCEDT saw the opportunity to collaborate to showcase the region instead of just the county. After coalition building with NOVA EDA and VEDP in the fall of 2023, PWCEDT partnered with VEDP and consultants from Area Development to fully embrace an integrated approach to leveraging this global tourism event.

Planning and Coordination

In February 2024, VEDP took leadership of the coalition to begin the meticulous planning and coordination of the event—from venue selection and agenda development to speaker coordination and transportation. Through strong partnerships and consistent communication, the planning team ensured every aspect was a joint decision with leadership buy-in from across the coalition.

Although the Forum's agenda ensured high-level discussions through panel sessions, roundtables, and exclusive access to the Solheim Cup Opening Ceremony, the true draw of the event was the attention paid to curated networking, mentorship, and quality professional development opportunities for a specific audience.

By tapping into VEDP's statewide connections and personally inviting women economic developers from places like Roanoke and Richmond, the coalition brought together 30 participating attendees including:

Eight of the nation's leading women site selection consultants chose to attend, including:

- 18 Regional Economic Development (REDO) representatives from across Virginia
- 4 Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP) leadership team members
- 8 of the nation's leading women site selection consultants



Staffing and Financing

The event was a collaborative effort carried out by the Prince William County Department of Economic Development & Tourism (PWCEDT), the Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP), and supported by Team Virginia.

Collaborative Leadership Structure:

The event was jointly planned and executed by staff from PWCEDT and VEDP, demonstrating seamless intergovernmental cooperation. This shared staffing approach ensured buy-in from all partners while leveraging each organization's unique strengths and expertise.

Key Project Leadership:

- **Christina Winn**, Executive Director, PWCEDT - Strategic vision and county coordination
- **Trevor Johnson**, Deputy Director, PWCEDT - Operational planning and partnership development
- **Kevin Costello**, Director of Tourism, PWCEDT - Venue coordination and hospitality logistics
- **VEDP Project Team** - Lead coordination from February 2024, transportation, and statewide outreach

Financing Model:

The event utilized an innovative collaborative funding model with a total budget of approximately \$137,000, demonstrating true partnership while maintaining fiscal responsibility through shared costs and attendee registration fees.

Partner Contributions:

- Team Virginia funded the participation of invited women site selection consultants (\$24,000), covering their travel, accommodation, and event access
- Prince William County covered hospitality suite costs at the Solheim Cup and event coordination expenses, including venue rental, food and beverage, and welcome reception
- VEDP handled transportation logistics (\$1,500) and event programming costs not covered by attendee registration fees
- NOVA EDA provided sponsorship support (\$10,000) for event programming and materials

Revenue Generation:

Attendees were charged registration fees (\$87,500 from 35 participants at \$2,500 each) that offset nearly two-thirds of total event costs, demonstrating the program's value proposition and sustainability potential. The net cost to partners after registration revenue was approximately \$39,700.

Cost-Effective Programming:

With total expenses of \$137,000 for 30 high-level participants over three days, the cost per participant was approximately \$4,570, which included premium accommodations, exclusive golf tournament access, transportation, all meals, and curated programming with national industry leaders. This represents exceptional value for a program that delivered measurable relationship-building outcomes.

The shared financial model ensured no single partner bore the full cost burden while maintaining high-quality programming. This approach created a replicable framework where costs are distributed according to each partner's capabilities and strategic interests, with participant fees covering the majority of expenses.

Event Programming and Participants

Eight of the nation's leading women site selection consultants chose to attend, including:

- Lauren Berry – Senior Manager, Location Analysis and Incentives, Maxis Advisors (NC)
- Courtney Dunbar – Director, Site Selection, Burns & McDonnell (NE)
- Amy Gerber – Executive Managing Director, Business Incentives Practice, Cushman & Wakefield (GA)
- Ann Harts – Senior Vice President, Site Selection, Cresa (KS)
- Dianne Jones – Managing Director, Business and Economic Incentives, JLL (NC)
- Natalie Lynch – Manager, Real Estate & Location Strategy, Deloitte Consulting (DC)
- Brooklin Salemi – Senior Managing Director, Economic Incentives Advisory, Newmark (GA)
- Leah Scott – Director, Global Location & Expansion Services, KPMG (PA)

One of the most memorable sessions during the Forum was an educational off-site visit to Solheim Cup, organized by PWCEDT, featuring a panel discussion with women leaders in the sports industry that focused on the parallels between the competitive world of sports and the strategic maneuvers in business leadership.



The panel was led by Di Stewart an English television sports presenter and comprised of

- Laura Diaz, Senior Director of Community & Inclusion for the LPGA,
- Penny Lee, President and CEO of Financial Technology Association
- Juli Inkster, 31-Time LPGA Tour Winner and Three-Time U.S. Solheim Cup Captain

After this final panel discussion, the Forum attendees were invited to participate in the Solheim Cup Opening Ceremony festivities as guests of PWCEDT's hospitality suite, where they had the opportunity to meet with local elected officials and appointed staff at the county and state level.

Program Results and Impact

Enhanced Professional Networks:

The Forum successfully created meaningful connections between Virginia's regional economic developers and leading national site selection consultants. The intimate setting of 30 carefully selected participants enabled deeper conversations and relationship building that would be impossible in larger conference settings.

Follow-up Business Activity:

VEDP has documented additional meetings arranged with participating consultants as a direct result of the Forum, strengthening Virginia's position in competitive site selection processes. These ongoing relationships represent long-term value for the Commonwealth's economic development efforts.

Cross-Regional Collaboration:

By bringing together economic developers from across Virginia—from Roanoke to Richmond to Northern Virginia—the Forum strengthened internal networks and promoted collaborative approaches to addressing shared challenges. This regional cooperation model demonstrates the power of state and local partnerships working together.



Participant Feedback and Outcomes

VEDP provided post-event surveys to event attendees and gained valuable insights into the effectiveness of the sessions and overall experience, with overwhelmingly positive feedback. Many participants praised the event's intimate size, noting that the smaller group setting allowed for deeper conversations and meaningful connections. Consultants also appreciated the event's well-organized communication, relaxed atmosphere, and opportunities to build relationships with economic developers. A recurring theme in the feedback was the appreciation for quality over quantity, with many urging organizers to maintain the event's personalized feel.

Long-term Impact and Sustainability

Enhanced Virginia Profile:

The Forum positioned Virginia as a collaborative, forward-thinking destination for investment while showcasing the state's commitment to inclusive economic development practices. This reputation building has long-term value for attracting business investment and talent.

Model for Replication:

The collaborative framework and event structure provide a clear roadmap for other localities seeking to leverage major regional events for professional development and relationship building. The shared cost model and partnership approach make this achievable for communities of various sizes.

Continued Momentum:

The success of the Forum has strengthened partnerships between PWCEDT, VEDP, and NOVA EDA, creating foundation for future collaborative initiatives and continued focus on supporting women's leadership in economic development.

Summary

- **Innovativeness:** *Inclusivity can be innovative.*

The Forum demonstrates innovative approaches to economic and community development by opening the doors to state-wide partnerships and incorporating regional voices. The Forum successfully bridged gaps in professional networks and strengthened Virginia's economic development ecosystem by serving as a model for creating impactful, sustainable growth while empowering diverse leaders to drive community transformation.

- **Replicability:** *Collaboration over competition.*

The Forum is a replicable framework for leveraging partnerships, including state-wide organizations like VEDP and regional organizations like NOVA EDA. Localities of all sizes could adapt this model by identifying major regional events as platforms for targeted professional development, pairing these with intentional collaboration across jurisdictions.

- **Community Commitment and Leverage:** *We are better together.*

The Forum exemplified how intergovernmental collaboration can be leveraged to achieve a greater impact in economic and community development. By bringing together state and local agencies, private sector leaders, and top site selectors, the event demonstrated the power of pooling resources and expertise to address shared goals.

- **Measured Objectives:** *Quality relationships over quantity.*

By creating a platform for meaningful interaction with eight top site selectors, the event ensured that Virginia's economic developers could better understand national trends, align strategies with industry expectations, and showcase the state's competitive advantages. VEDP has seen additional meetings arranged with these consultants and relationships strengthened because of this event.

- **Secondary Benefits:** *Women leaders are essential.*

The Forum addressed technical and institutional challenges in our industry by championing strategic dialogue among women leaders.