Virginia Ready Initiative Incentivizes Retraining to get Virginians Back to Work

Coalition of Virginia businesses and community colleges to combat COVID-19 job losses by equipping workers for in-demand jobs

June 29, 2020 -- Alexandria, VA -- The Virginia Ready Initiative (VA Ready), a newly established nonprofit organization formed in response to the economic hardships created by COVID-19, today announced details of its plan to help thousands of unemployed Virginians access the training needed to get back to work.

VA Ready and its partners - 20 of the Commonwealth’s leading businesses - provide incentives for motivated, out-of-work Virginians to reskill for in-demand jobs in high-growth sectors. Upon achieving their new credential in one of 29 selected training programs, “VA Ready Scholars” receive a $1,000 Credential Achievement Award and are offered opportunities to interview at many of Virginia’s best companies.

Further partnering with Virginia’s 23 community colleges and their existing FastForward initiative, a state-sponsored workforce credential grant program, VA Ready marries Virginia’s business needs with high-quality, short-term training programs offered by community colleges. Funded through philanthropic donations and company contributions, VA Ready recognizes and rewards student initiative to gain new skills.

“Too many Virginians have lost their jobs, and they want to, and deserve help to, retool for in-demand jobs,” said Glenn A. Youngkin, co-founder and chairman of VA Ready. “The time is now to focus training efforts on equipping our workforce for Virginia’s dynamic sectors like technology, healthcare and the skilled trades. Virginia businesses in these sectors expect to hire tens of thousands of people in the coming years, and yet we have record unemployment. We need to get moving to get people ready.”
“This is an exciting new partnership to help people who are out of work because of the pandemic,” said Governor Ralph S. Northam. “We have people who need work and companies who need employees, so Virginia’s community colleges and employers are coming together to help. If you choose a high-demand field, our community colleges will train you and then Virginia Ready will help you find a job and give you a $1,000 achievement award. This is one more way that Virginia is demonstrating that helping workers also helps business and our economy.”

Since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, nearly 875,000 Virginians have filed for unemployment. Lower-wage earners and minority communities have been hit the hardest. At the same time, demand is projected to grow for specialized jobs in the fields of technology, healthcare and manufacturing/skilled trades.

VA Ready’s business partners represent the Commonwealth’s leading companies with projected hiring needs in the technology, healthcare, manufacturing and skilled trades sectors. They include:

**Founding Partners**
- Carilion Clinic
- Dominion Energy
- Ernst & Young LLP (EY US)
- Genworth Financial
- PwC
- SAIC

**Strategic Partners**
- Booz Allen Hamilton
- CoStar Group
- K12 Inc.
- Perspecta
- Sentara Healthcare

**Business Partners**
- 1901 Group
- Bon Secours Richmond Health System
- CNSI
- General Dynamics
- Harris Williams
- Huntington Ingalls Industries
- ManTech
- Maximus
- Northrop Grumman

In addition to supporting credential earners with financial incentives, VA Ready business partners, through the VA Ready Talent Task Force, will consult with college leaders to ensure that program offerings and curricula remain focused and relevant to rapidly evolving industry needs. They also participate in the VA Ready Job Exchange and provide job interview opportunities to VA Ready Scholars.

Out-of-work Virginians with ambition to gain new skills can enroll in VA Ready’s first cohort of VA Ready Scholars for Community College programs beginning after August 1.
“With an average out-of-pocket cost of just over $1,000, our FastForward training programs are the most affordable option in higher education today and the fastest way for someone to skill-up for a career that offers family-sustaining wages,” said Glenn DuBois, chancellor of Virginia’s Community Colleges. “But we know that price tag is still out of reach for too many people, especially the newly unemployed. We are pleased to work alongside VA Ready and its business partners to make those training opportunities more affordable and accessible -- and get people back to work.”

“Virginia’s strength lies in its people, and so many people have come together over the past few weeks to stand up this new initiative so quickly,” said Caren Merrick, CEO of VA Ready. “I want to thank all of our partners in the business, education and government communities whose enthusiasm, expertise and eagerness to help have made this possible. By working together, thousands of our out of work Virginians will be able to secure new jobs, and Virginia businesses will find more of the skilled workers they need.”

VA Ready is also grateful for professional partners McKinsey & Co., Pinkston, McGuireWoods and KPMG, whose in-kind contributions of research, strategic consulting, legal and communications expertise have made establishing the coalition possible.

For more information on VA Ready, including how to apply, visit [www.vaready.org](http://www.vaready.org).

**About The Virginia Ready Initiative (VA Ready)**

VA Ready, a newly established nonprofit organization formed in response to the economic hardships created by COVID-19, is a dynamic partnership with 20 of the Commonwealth’s leading businesses and the Virginia Community College System’s 23 community colleges, to retrain and equip out of work Virginians who want to gain the required skills for in-demand jobs in high-growth sectors.

**About Virginia’s Community Colleges**

Since 1966, Virginia’s Community Colleges have given everyone the opportunity to learn and develop the right skills so lives and communities are strengthened. By making higher education and workforce training available in every part of Virginia, we elevate all of Virginia. Together, Virginia’s Community Colleges serve more than 280,000 students each year. For more information, please visit [www.vccs.edu](http://www.vccs.edu).
WHAT VA READY BUSINESS PARTNERS ARE SAYING

Ernst & Young LLP Vice Chair, East Region Managing Partner Rich Jeanneret:
“Unprecedented times like these require innovative and impactful approaches. VA Ready will strengthen the resiliency of Virginia’s workforce, in particular in underrepresented communities. EY is proud to stand with this commitment to retrain unemployed Virginians and stimulate the economy.”

SAIC Chief Human Resources Officer Michelle O’Hara:
"SAIC is very proud to take part in the VA Ready program to help address the growing unemployment in Virginia resulting from these times of crisis. By retraining unemployed Virginians in skills that fill in-demand jobs, VA Ready will benefit our communities and economy while giving companies like SAIC access to a broader and more diverse talent pool."

Genworth President and CEO Tom McInerney:
“Genworth is proud to be a part of Virginia Ready. As an ally of people who need long term care and their families, we see a unique opportunity to not only make a tangible difference in the lives of newly unemployed Virginians, but also to help meet the increasing demand for professional caregivers that has challenged the long term care industry during the past several years.”

Booz Allen Hamilton Talent Strategy Officer Aimee George Leary:
“Training and employment opportunities -- particularly for racial minorities, who have been disproportionately impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and the systemic injustices of our society -- are more important than ever. We have focused for many years on training and reskilling our employees to meet the changing needs of our clients and business. We are honored to partner with VA Ready on this vital initiative and to help fill the growing demand for skilled technology jobs.”

K12 Inc. CEO Nate Davis:
"The VA Ready program stands to make a high-demand, high-potential career accessible to the many Virginians who are out of work and in need right now. With career readiness education being one of K12's top priorities, we are so proud to be supporting this program, and look forward to seeing how its upskilling opportunities will help empower people and get the state’s economy moving again.”

1901 Group CEO Sonu Singh:
“1901 Group looks forward to working closely with VA Ready to strengthen our economy, support career pathways, and fulfill thousands of open positions by identifying, training, and employing Virginians impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. VA Ready’s vision aligns closely with 1901 Group’s 10-year track record of developing sustainable IT jobs in regions such as Southwest Virginia.”
Harris Williams Managing Director and Co-founder Hiter Harris:
“Harris Williams is proud to be a part of this innovative, impactful effort and is committed to supporting our community. We applaud Glenn and the corporate partners for creating the cause, and supporting Virginians during these trying times. This model provides an exponential impact in helping people get back on their feet and back to work.”

WHAT STATE AND LOCAL LEADERS ARE SAYING ABOUT VA READY

Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney
“The Virginia Ready program allows our city’s unemployed residents to leverage their talents and reposition their skills to compete and contribute in the high-growth sectors of technology, healthcare and manufacturing and skilled trades. Virginia Ready makes Richmonders ready, and I am pleased to support this timely initiative.”

Norfolk Mayor Kenneth Alexander, Ph.D.:
“Career Technical Education is a critical pathway that allows our young people to develop in-demand advanced skills. But the rising cost of postsecondary education continues to erect barriers to access for occupations that can elevate promising students into the middle class. We are grateful that VA Ready is helping us to take down barriers to fulfilling vocational careers and personal achievement. With this significant investment, they are supporting our students and preparing them to work across emerging industries in a rapidly evolving economy.”

Roanoke Mayor Sherman Lea:
“This is a tremendous opportunity for many of our citizens who have lost employment as a result of Covid 19. I want to thank Suzanne and Glenn Youngkin and Dr. Nancy Agee for making this program available to the Roanoke Valley. This effort complements the city’s partnership with Virginia Western Community College and the current Star City Strong Recovery fund initiative of City Council, which is intended to support our community’s economic recovery. As I have said on many occasions we are in this together.”

Sen. Thomas K. Norment Jr., Senate Republican Leader (3rd District)
“It is very encouraging to see businesses across the Commonwealth taking the initiative to help Virginians in this way. Retraining workers for available jobs in growing business sectors has a double benefit: It helps Virginians who have lost their jobs due to this terrible pandemic, and it helps Virginia businesses find the well-trained employees they need in order to grow. Great vision and execution by Virginia Ready.”

Sen. Janet Howell (32nd District):
"Virginia is home to hundreds of thousands of technology job openings, many of them located in the tech hub of Northern Virginia's 32nd District. VA Ready is the missing link in our efforts to rapidly provide employment to our unemployed neighbors and provide trained employees for Virginia businesses. It represents enlightened business at its best."
Sen. Stephen Newman (23rd District)

“VA Ready is an extraordinary plan to put Virginians back to work during these extraordinary times. The mission of Glenn and Suzanne Youngkin and the VA Ready board is simple, match living wage jobs with those hit-hard by the COVID-19 recession. Best of all it is a private sector solution from some of the best business minds in our Commonwealth. This will be a bi-partisan effort with a strong partnership with our Community College System that will pay dividends for years to come.”

Del. Luke Torian (52nd District):

“I appreciate the innovation and focus of Virginia Ready where businesses and our community colleges are working together to fill in-demand, high-paying jobs. I hope Virginians across the state will take advantage of this unique opportunity to be retrained with skills that will lead to rewarding careers and help grow our economy.”

Del. Kirk Cox (66th District):

"I'm excited for the launch of the Virginia Ready Initiative (VA Ready) in our state. As our economy begins to recover from the devastating effects of COVID-19, it's essential that workers have immediate access to the necessary skills that employers are looking for. VA Ready and their partners are giving workers the opportunity to set a new path for themselves and their families during these trying times.”

Virginia Economic Development Partnership President and CEO Stephen More:

“VA Ready is a timely initiative that will help thousands of Virginians to recover more quickly from the economic damage of the COVID-19 pandemic, while also enabling them to meaningfully increase their wages and/or explore new career opportunities. What Glenn and Suzanne Youngkin have launched is an exemplar of high-impact, well-designed philanthropy that builds on great work that already is underway at community colleges across the Commonwealth. I’m grateful to Glenn and Suzanne, as well as to all the other leaders and companies involved, for envisioning this exciting program and bringing it to life in record time.”

Virginia Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Barry DuVal:

“Increasing access to workforce training programs in high-demand fields helps to position our talent in Virginia to lead. Investments in talent development and training, like VA Ready, are crucial to our Commonwealth’s future success.”

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