



Virginia Housing

Housing Heroes in Training

Reimagining the Intern Experience within Virginia Housing's Experiential Learning Program

Management Innovation HR Category

May 2026



As a champion for lifelong learning, I see incredible value in our intern program. The participants gain real-world career experience with housing leaders and innovators as our organization prepares the next generation of housing leaders to take on the challenges of tomorrow.

Virginia Housing CEO Tammy Neale

Brief Description

Virginia Housing is proud to nominate our Intern Program, which falls within our Experiential Learning Program, for the HR Management Innovation Award. This past year marked a strategic pivot toward elevating our Internship Program. Because interns are a vital component for future talent and building connections in our community, we have transformed the intern experience by increasing structured support for both interns and their managers, defining project milestones in the intern process, and implementing a formal training and networking program.

To further strengthen the program's foundation, we expanded our definition of "intern" to better reflect today's diverse talent landscape. Moving beyond the traditional "college student" stereotype, we transitioned to a multi-generational demographic that spans from high school students exploring their first career interests to mid-career professionals pivoting into the affordable housing sector. We now employ a range of undergraduate students, graduate students, trade school students, active-duty military, military spouses, individuals exiting the military, and career-transitioning professionals as interns.

Our program provides hands-on substantive projects that expose interns to affordable housing issues where they develop industry-specific skills while contributing to Virginia Housing's mission. This innovative human resource management initiative is attracting a new generation of professionals with diverse backgrounds to Virginia Housing and strengthening our operations while also providing benefits to nonprofit partners in our Housing Delivery Network.

Why It Was Undertaken

Over 75 million Baby Boomers are retiring, creating a critical generational shift for employers across the United States. At Virginia Housing, the average age of our associates is 49, nearly 6 years older than the U.S. average age of 43.3. Younger generations must be prepared to take on leadership roles, and programs that build leadership pipelines are urgently needed.

Virginia Housing first addressed the opportunity for this type of learning in 2006, when we started accepting interns. We provided students interested in housing and community careers with valuable experience through our hands-on practical approach to learning.

Today, our Internship Program has evolved into a full experiential learning program. Experiential learning is a hands-on approach where individuals learn by doing and then reflect on that experience. It involves actively engaging with new concepts or skills in real-world situations rather than solely relying on traditional instruction. This method emphasizes the connection between theory and practice, fostering deeper understanding and skill development.

Launched in 2025, the Virginia Housing Experiential Learning Program is an umbrella that encompasses multiple opportunities to expose Virginians to entry-level opportunities in the affordable housing industry, such as the award-winning Virginia Housing Fellows Program, Virginia Management Fellows Program, and other training opportunities. This experiential learning initiative has revolutionized how we can attract a diverse population into entering the critical mission of affordable housing.

What We Have Accomplished

We have worked for years on improving our internship experience, and in 2025 we implemented a comprehensive new program that partners with several organizations, including local universities, high schools, and community non-profits. We expanded the definition and demographics of interns and created a program that provides a coordinated work experience coupled with a structured training program that provides monthly training and networking programming.

The Virginia Housing Intern Program is a paid internship providing experiential learning opportunities in various work areas during the fiscal year. Interns receive real-world hands-on work related to their field of study or interest, and take part in meaningful, mission-focused projects. They assist with conducting research, performing analysis, generating reports, and supporting business operations. Interns also learn about affordable housing and the business of Virginia Housing by shadowing subject matter experts and meeting and engaging with the business areas.

To ensure interns are successful, Talent Development & Learning (TD&L) provides support and training through the Intern Learning Series, which includes group coaching, workshops, book club, and TD&L coursework, helping interns to develop their business, professional, and leadership skills. Networking opportunities with other interns and Virginia Housing staff occur through facilitated discussions and breakfasts and lunch gatherings.

Our program design also provides intern managers with resources to use as they recruit, onboard, and manage interns that report to them. Managers are trained in supervising interns including performance metrics and feedback, and urged to create learning opportunities, use coaching techniques, and encourage interns to create portfolios.

Our work has been noticed! For four years in a row, Virginia Housing has been recognized as a top Virginia employer of Interns by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) through their Virginia Talent+Opportunity Partnership (V-TOP) program. This award recognizes employers across Virginia who provide high-quality internships to students.

Why It Is Meritorious and Meets NCSHA Award Judging Criteria

Innovative

The Intern Program within the Experiential Learning program introduces a comprehensive, structured approach to allow individuals to build work experience in affordable housing. By expanding our definition of “intern” and working with multiple partners, we expand opportunities and our reach into the community. The robust training program for both interns and their managers enhances the intern experience.

Replicable

The program’s model focuses on hands-on learning and leadership development and can be adapted by other organizations seeking to develop future leaders in the affordable housing industry. The investment of resources brought new and varied talent into Virginia Housing, sparked passion for affordable housing careers in the participants, and supported affordable housing efforts.

Responded to a Management Challenge or Opportunity

Leadership transitions, especially between generations, can be critical to organizational development. Having diverse staff across generations, demographics, and life experiences has been shown to boost employee satisfaction, reduce turnover, drive innovation, and enhance industry competition. Virginia Housing has already leveraged internships as a cost-effective, low-risk strategy to identify new talent, increase productivity, and bring fresh perspectives to the organization.

Achieved Measurable Improvement in Agency Operations

Our award-winning intern program provides learning opportunities for interns and additional staffing for our departments. It has proven to be a successful entry-level pipeline for our Authority, which has hired five interns into full-time positions since 2019.

Provides Benefits That Outweigh Costs

Our interns not only provide valuable staffing for the departments that they support but also are bringing new perspectives and helping Virginia Housing understand how to better serve Virginians across a wide range of demographics. Our interns also serve as Virginia Housing brand ambassadors, sharing their newfound knowledge of Virginia Housing's programs and resources with other students, friends and family.

There are reputational benefits as well when Virginia Housing interns enter the affordable housing industry. The training and networking opportunities we provide are valued by hiring organizations. We also learn how to better hire and retain today's associates for our own workforce.

Demonstrates Effective Use of Resources

For a very small investment, we can leverage a cost-effective resource that enables our departments to have additional staffing. In addition, interns often seek employment at our Authority.

Achieves Strategic Objectives

This program is directly aligned with two key strategic goals outlined in our Strategic Plan. A guiding principle in our Strategic Plan is to "*Cultivate a culture of belonging among all constituents to have a sense of ownership in helping to develop the housing landscape in Virginia.*" By exposing a wide range of Virginians from high school students to mid-career individuals who want to enter the affordable housing industry, our intern program contributes to this culture of belonging and a sense of ownership.

As part of the Intern Program redesign, we also established a Vision and Mission statement.

Vision Statement: The Virginia Housing Intern Program serves to provide interns with rewarding experience in their area of interest or study while creating a pipeline of diverse talent into the affordable housing industry in Virginia.

Mission Statement: The Virginia Housing Intern Program provides a rich experiential learning environment for interns that supports Virginia Housing's current and emerging workforce.

By focusing on developing talent who represent the communities we serve, the Intern Program advances our mission, supports our Core Values, and serves the community at large.

Conclusion

The Virginia Housing Intern Program is a transformative initiative that builds work experience and exposure to the affordable housing industry. It ensures a pipeline of entry level professionals through its focus on engaged managers, hands-on experience, and a robust learning series. For its innovation, impact, and potential for long-term success, the Virginia Housing Fellows Program is a deserving candidate for the NCSHA Management Award.

Appendix

Awards

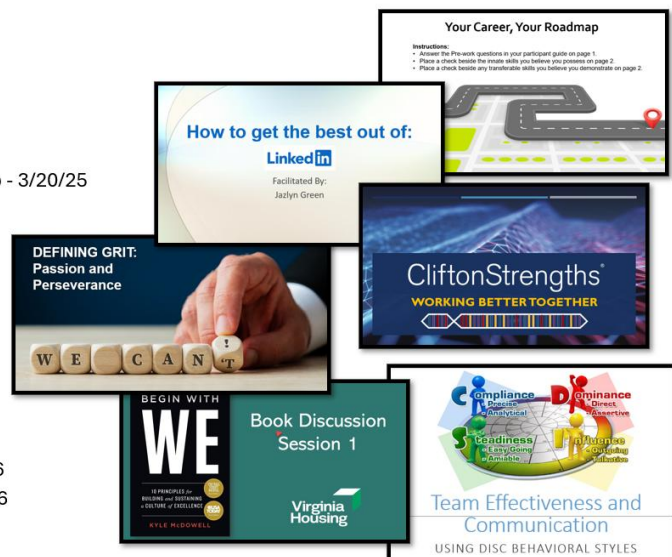


<https://www.schev.edu/Home/Components/News/News/458/16>

Training

Virginia Housing Intern Program 2025-2026 Workshops

1. CliftonStrengths - 1/27/25
2. Begin with WE Book Discussion (Session 1) - 2/3/25
3. Professional Mindset - 2/10/25
4. Begin with WE Book Discussion (Session 2) - 2/12/25
5. Overcoming Imposter Syndrome - 3/3/25
6. Resume Building and Behavioral Interviewing Workshop - 3/20/25
7. Defining GRIT - 4/16/25
8. Intern Group Lunch - 4/28/25
9. Seven Habits of Highly Effective People - 7/9/25
10. Graduation Lunch Celebration - 6/2/25
11. National Intern Day Breakfast Celebration - 7/30/2025
12. DISC Workshop - 11/5/2025
13. Your Career, Your Roadmap - 12/18/2025
14. Grow Your Future Through Goal Setting - 1/8/2026
15. How to get the most out of LinkedIn! - 3/5/2026
16. Resume Writing and Behavioral Interviewing - 3/19/2026
17. Appreciating Differences Using Myers-Briggs - 4/15/2026
18. The Power of Feedback - 4/23/2026



Events



Marketing



Internal Informational Resources

Learning Programs

- ▶ Manager Learning Guides
- ▶ Leadership Programs
- ▶ New Essentials
- ▶ Tuition Assistance (TAP)
- ▶ Experiential Learning Opportunities

Virginia Housing Experiential Learning Opportunities



Internships



leadership skills.

Virginia Housing Intern Program

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Intern Partnerships

- Partnership for the Future College Preparation Program ([Partnership for the Future](#))
- Cristo Rey Richmond High School Work Study Program ([Corporate Work Study Program Overview](#))
- VCU Kornblau Real Estate Program ([Real Estate - VCU Business - Virginia Commonwealth University](#))
- DOD Skillbridge Program ([DOD SkillBridge Program - Program Overview Page](#))