



Virginia Rural Leadership Institute
PRESENTED BY THE VIRGINIA RURAL CENTER

VIRGINIA RURAL CENTER'S

VIRGINIA RURAL LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE INFORMATIONAL PACKET

2026

Background

The Virginia Rural Leadership Institute (VRLI) is a rural leadership program that develops and supports highly-skilled, highly-motivated leaders who are committed to revitalizing their communities across the Commonwealth. VRLI addresses the need for high-quality, professional leadership and economic development training that equips community leaders with the skills they need to lead long-term economic advancement in their community and region. The program also seeks to increase cooperation, collaboration, and coordination across a broad array of organizations and sectors. Each year, VRLI will accept up to 30 applicants.

VRLI provides opportunities for participants to hear from economic development and leadership experts, engage with and learn from peers, apply knowledge through classroom exercises, and learn about community successes. VRLI Cohort Members will:

- Increase understanding of leadership, data, and issue trends in Virginia
- Increase understanding of community & economic development
- Teach skills in effective collaboration at the local, regional, and state level
- Increase knowledge of resources available to their community and how to access them
- Build a regional network of community leaders to encourage peer learning, resource sharing and collaboration
- Become part of the Center's leadership alumni network, which will provide annual professional development, mentoring, and peer networking.





2026 Program

The program consists of four sessions, each spanning three days, typically on a Wednesday (half day), Thursday, and Friday (half day).

SESSION 1: SOUTHSIDE **April 22, 23 & 24**

SESSION 2: MIDDLE PENINSULA AND NORTHERN NECK **June 10, 11 & 12**

SESSION 3: SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA **August 12, 13 & 14**

SESSION 4: SHENANDOAH VALLEY **September 30, October 1 & 2**

"Every rural experience is unique. The blend of distinct communities, industries, and individuals makes the Virginia Rural Leadership Institute a one-of-a-kind program you won't find anywhere else in the country."
- 2024 Cohort Member

"If you want to gain great insights into rural Virginia opportunities, challenges, and potential – and the key people and resources, which can help – this program is for you. You will leave the program armed with great knowledge and connections to bring to bear in your own communities!"
- 2023 Cohort Member

How to Apply

The application will be on the www.cfrv.org/vrli website and the Institute fee is \$3,500 which includes training, materials, lodging, and meals. Applications for the 2026 Cohort are due by February 13, 2026.

By completing an application, you are committing to attending all sessions.

Financial Aid

Tuition

Tuition for the 2026 VRLI Cohort is due in full by June 1, 2026. Acceptance to VRLI is need-blind.

Requests for financial aid or scholarships will be considered on a case-by-case basis by the Advisory Committee of the Rural Leadership Institute, once the selection process is completed. Participants are responsible for their own travel expenses, but meals, lodging, and program materials are covered by the tuition.

Financial Aid Process

Financial aid requests are managed after applicants are accepted to programs. The financial aid process usually consists of filling out a short application describing a participant's financial needs and planned contribution toward their program fees.

Financial Assistance Payment Plan

As a form of financial assistance, accepted applicants may choose our payment plan. The payment plan for the 2025 VRLI Cohort are 4 payments of \$875, due on April 22, June 10, August 12, and September 30.

Fundraising

In many instances, participants may find it necessary to fundraise to pay the program deposit and/or supplement their financial aid awards. We are happy to provide guidance and advice based on successful efforts by previous program participants in locating financial support, but the responsibility of any necessary fundraising lies solely on the participant. Prior to engaging in any fundraising activities, accepted cohort members must notify VRLI staff of these activities and the cohort member's fundraising plans.



Our Story

The VRC is the established voice for rural localities throughout the Commonwealth and recognizes the demonstrated lack of mechanisms specifically focused on rural Virginia. VRC has long recognized the need for this opportunity and plans to address this with the creation and implementation of the Virginia Rural Leadership Institute.

Our Team

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