Virginia Growth and Opportunity Fund (GO Virginia)
Regional Site & Infrastructure Development Project Guidance

Section 1: Site Development Project Overview

In May 2019, the GO Virginia State Board adopted Board Policy #9, authorizing the use of both Regional (Per Capita) and Statewide Competitive funds for eligible site development activities. These investments are intended to increase the inventory of business-ready sites that support the expansion, retention, and attraction of businesses within targeted regional industry clusters. Business-ready sites are critical to strengthening regional competitiveness and positioning Virginia communities for future private-sector investment.

Business-ready sites are critical to supporting regional economic competitiveness, business expansion, and long-term private investment attraction. The purpose of this guidance is to provide direction on the development and submission of applications requesting GO Virginia funding for eligible site development activities. The guidance outlines eligibility considerations, application expectations, and key factors considered during the review and evaluation process.

Section 2: Core Requirements

All GO Virginia site development applications must propose activities that advance the development of regionally significant sites. A regionally significant site is one that has been identified by the applicable Regional Council as a strategic priority and is aligned with the targeted industry sectors and economic goals outlined in the region's Growth and Diversification Plan.

GO Virginia contracts for regional site development implementation projects will require that improved sites be actively marketed and/or developed for the commercial or industrial use identified in the approved application.

All projects must demonstrate meaningful regional collaboration involving at least two units of local government, political subdivisions, or public bodies. Applications should describe how participating entities will jointly support and advance the project through one or more of the following:

- Cost-sharing or revenue-sharing agreements
- Collaborative marketing and business recruitment efforts
- Joint workforce development or talent initiatives
- Shared infrastructure or utility investments
- Formal regional partnerships or governance structures, such as a Regional Industrial Facility Authority (RIFA) or similar agreement

The GO Virginia State Board may consider investments supporting both publicly and privately owned properties, including greenfield and redevelopment sites, when the following core requirements are met:

1) **Regional Site Prioritization**

   Applicants must demonstrate that the proposed site has been reviewed and prioritized relative to the region's broader portfolio of available sites using an objective, data-driven evaluation process. This process should assess factors such as site competitiveness, marketability, infrastructure readiness, and development potential.

   When prioritizing sites, applicants are encouraged to utilize methodologies similar to the statewide site characterization initiative used by the Virginia Economic Development Partnership's (VEDP) Virginia Business Ready Sites Program (VBRSP).

   If funding is being requested for a site that has not undergone a previous evaluation process by VEDP, applicants may request GO Virginia funding to support a strategic site prioritization effort (i.e., a GO Virginia Sites Planning application). Applicants may also coordinate with VEDP regarding site characterization assistance for sites not previously evaluated. However, consultation with VEDP does not constitute endorsement of a project or guarantee approval of a GO Virginia funding request.

2) **Local Commitment and Advancement Strategy**

   Participating localities must demonstrate a clear commitment to advancing and marketing the proposed site(s). Applications should describe prior investments, current activities, and long-term strategies supporting the site's development and competitiveness.

   For large-scale or multi-year site development projects, applicants should provide supporting documentation such as a conceptual development plan, publicly approved Capital Improvements Program (CIP), or similar documentation demonstrating both prior and anticipated future investments directed toward the site(s).

3) **Requirements for Privately Owned Sites**

   Site development projects involving privately owned property require a formal contractual agreement between the property owner and the participating local governing body, Economic Development Authority (EDA or IDA), or Regional Industrial Facility Authority (RIFA).

   The agreement must extend beyond a memorandum of understanding and clearly define the commitments and responsibilities of all parties related to the advancement, marketing, and development of the site. At a minimum, the agreement should:

   - Grant access to the property for evaluation, engineering, and study purposes
   - Identify the intended commercial or industrial use of the property

- Define the maximum per-acre sales price the property owner will offer to a prospective end user or developer

Where appropriate, agreements should also address future land use protections, zoning commitments, or development restrictions necessary to preserve the site for the commercial or industrial purposes identified in the region's Growth and Diversification Plan. All required agreements must be fully executed prior to execution of a GO Virginia grant contract.

GO Virginia does not fund vertical construction projects or public service facilities such as schools, libraries, fire stations, or similar facilities. In addition, GO Virginia funding for road construction or transportation improvements is limited to internal road infrastructure located within industrial parks, corporate parks, or similar employment-focused developments. Other state programs, such as the Virginia Department of Transportation Economic Development Access Program, are available to support direct site access improvements.

Section 3: Eligible Projects

Regional Site Development Planning

Applicants must demonstrate meaningful outreach and engagement throughout the planning process. At a minimum, applicants should engage relevant stakeholders, including:

- Public and private utility providers
- Utility cooperatives
- Local governments
- Regional planning organizations
- Local and regional economic development organizations
- Other stakeholders relevant to the proposed site or targeted industry sectors

Regional site development planning activities are intended to help regions identify, evaluate, prioritize, and prepare regionally significant sites for future economic development investment. Eligible planning activities include the following:

- *Site Characterization Report*:
  Characterization of properties not fully characterized previously by the VEDP (or similar assessment process). For site characterization projects, applicants should use the criteria and methodology established by VEDP's Virginia Business Ready Sites Program (VBRSP) to allow for objective, data-driven evaluation of priority sites within a region. The site characterization activities should include the following:
  - Assessing the site to establish current level of existing development;
  - Evaluating the addtional development required to bring the site to higher Tier Levels (through Tier 5) and estimating the costs of such development;
  - Designating the site to one of the Site Characterization Tier Levels established by VBRSP;

- Creating a Site Characterization Report containing the required elements set forth by VBRSP.

- *Site Identification and Prioritization*:
  Studies and assessments conducted to identify available regionally significant sites and evaluate their development potential, competitiveness, and alignment with regional economic priorities. These efforts should include objective, data-driven methodologies to support regional site prioritization and future investment decisions.

- *Collaborative Cost/Revenue Sharing Agreements*:
  Define and develop multi-jurisdictional organizational structures, such as Regional Industrial Facilities Authorities or establish contractual or option agreements with landowners.

Regional Site Development Implementation

Regional site development implementation activities support the advancement of regionally significant sites toward business readiness and market competitiveness. Eligible implementation activities include the following:

- *Due Diligence (soft costs):*
  Due diligence activities include engineering, architectural, environmental, and other professional services necessary to evaluate a site's suitability and readiness for development. These activities are intended to assess potential risks, development constraints, and infrastructure needs associated with a site. Applicants should demonstrate how the proposed due diligence activities advance the site toward future business recruitment, expansion, or development opportunities aligned with the region's targeted industry sectors.

  Eligible due diligence activities may include engineering, environmental, infrastructure, and site evaluation services necessary to assess a site's development readiness and suitability for future commercial or industrial use. Examples include environmental reviews, utility and infrastructure assessments, engineering studies, site planning activities, and evaluations related to physical, environmental, historic, or development constraints.

- *Infrastructure Enhancements (hard costs):*
  GO Virginia funding is intended to support infrastructure improvements that directly increase site readiness and competitiveness for targeted industry sectors.

  Eligible infrastructure enhancements may include improvements to utility, telecommunications, stormwater, and internal transportation systems necessary to support business-ready site development. Examples include water and wastewater infrastructure, electrical and natural gas service, broadband infrastructure, stormwater management facilities, and internal road infrastructure within industrial or business parks. GO Virginia contracts for regional site development implementation projects will require that the sites improved will be marketed and/or developed for the use indicated in the application.

Section 4: Project Budget & Matching Funds

Site development applications, including both planning and implementation projects, must include a detailed project budget outlining all sources and uses of funds associated with the project. The budget should clearly identify the investments and activities proposed for each site and demonstrate how those activities will enhance the site's marketability, readiness, or development potential for targeted industry users.

Projects must provide match in accordance with the applicable GO Virginia match requirements in effect at the time of application (Per Capita or Competitive). Match may include both cash and eligible in-kind contributions.

Previous public or private investments in a site may be considered eligible match under the following conditions:

- One-time investments may be eligible if incurred within the previous two years; and
- Ongoing or regularly occurring investments may be eligible if documented as part of a continuing site advancement strategy within the previous five years.

Eligible prior investments may include, but are not limited to:

- Site acquisition activities, including easements and rights-of-way
- Due diligence and environmental assessments
- Engineering, planning, and infrastructure design activities
- Infrastructure construction and off-site improvements
- Site preparation activities, such as clearing, grading, or demolition of obsolete structures

Additional prior investments may be considered on a case-by-case basis. Applicants should refer to the GO Virginia Match Guidance for additional information regarding eligible match sources, documentation requirements, and match restrictions.

Section 5: Additional Requirements and Restrictions

GO Virginia as a Pre-Prospect Investor: GO Virginia funds may only be used to make investments into sites with the goal of promoting the marketability of the site. GO Virginia does not provide incentive funding and shall NOT make investments into sites that have been acquired by an end-user or that have contract options held by an end-user.

Minimum Acreage Requirement: GO Virginia shall make investments into sites that are at least 25 contiguous acres or more. However, a waiver may be requested for this requirement in cases where an applicant is able to demonstrate that a given, individual site is of regional significance or when development of a given site would represent an extraordinary regional opportunity.

Properties smaller than 25 acres and within the boundaries of an existing regionally significant business park or industrial/commercial corridor aligned with a regional Growth & Diversification Plan may also be deemed as regionally significant and considered for the waiver when the majority of park properties have already been developed. Please refer to the definition of regionally significant sites outlined in Section 6 for additional information.

Economic Impact Documentation Requirements

- Tier 1-3 Site Development Projects

  For projects advancing sites to a Tier 1–3 characterization level, a formal economic impact or return on investment (ROI) analysis is not required. However, applicants must provide supporting documentation describing:

  - Additional, usable acreage that will be made available for business uses
  - Industry sectors being targeted for these sites
  - Future activities/costs that will be jointly undertaken by participating localities and partners to support the advancement of the site(s) to Tier 4 or 5 status and the timeframe for doing so

- Tier 4–5 Site Development Projects
  For projects advancing sites to a Tier 4 or Tier 5 characterization level, applicants should qualitatively describe the regional economic benefits once developed and an end-user has been attracted to the site.

  Applications should also include a strategy and timeline outlining efforts to attract targeted industry users or further enhance the competitiveness of the site within five years. Supporting activities may include public-private partnerships, targeted marketing efforts, local policy actions, incentive strategies, or additional infrastructure and site readiness investments.

Section 6: Definitions

Regionally Significant Sites: Any property designated as “regionally significant” should possess the following characteristics:

1) Properties deemed viable and developable based on the site characterization initiative conducted by VEDP in 2019, post-2019 site evaluations completed by VEDP, or another recent, comparable independent characterization study done by a qualified firm using the VBRSP criteria. A region may use GO Virginia funds to conduct a site characterization study (Sites Planning application) prior to an implementation grant request.

2) Development activities on the site(s) represent meaningful, ongoing collaboration of two or more localities. That collaboration may include activities such as:

   - Creation of a Regional Industrial Facility Authority, or other similar legal structure, that allows for defined cost/revenue sharing in the development of the property;

- Demonstration of a collective marketing effort for the site by two or more local economic development organizations and/or a regional economic development entity representing the partnering localities;
- Joint financial contributions in initiatives that would further increase the marketability of the site or the region, such as new workforce development efforts designed to support the industries being targeted in business attraction efforts.

3) Development of the site(s) will support a level of economic activity that will provide regional economic impact, specifically net gains in targeted sector employment and revenues coming into the Commonwealth.

Site Characterization: A tool used by the Virginia Business Ready Sites Program (VBRSP) to assess and designate a site's current level of readiness for economic development activity. A site development professional (e.g. civil engineer, architect, site location or land development consultant experienced with sector-based requirements) evaluates the property to classify the current level of preparedness and existing infrastructure, as well as outlines the additional steps (and estimated costs) required to bring the site to the next level of readiness – i.e. Site Characterization Tier Levels. For more information about Site Characterization, click here.

Site Tier Levels: A part of the Virginia Business Ready Sites Program (VBRSP) that describes the level of existing development of a potential site. The tiers range from Tier 1 (i.e. little to no prior planning, site assessment or development activity) to Tier 5 (i.e. site is ready for development). For more information on Site Tier Levels, see the VBRSP site.

Site Prioritization: A data-driven process used by a Regional Council to identify and rank sites for future development and investment within the region. Site prioritization should focus on properties with strong market potential, higher site readiness levels, and cost-effective development opportunities that support regional economic impact.

Previous Site Investments: Site investment and advancement activities recognized by GO Virginia include hard or soft costs expended within the last two years. These investments may be used as matching funds for site development planning or implementation grants requested from GO Virginia, if the costs previously incurred are directly related to the site(s) proposed for advancement in the grant application. Such investments include, but are not limited to, reoccurring site advancement investments consistently occurring over five years prior to when the State Board approves the application and funds spent on the demolition of deteriorated buildings by public or private owners for redevelopment sites.

Redevelopment Sites: Redevelopment sites are vacant, underutilized, or deteriorated properties within a city or county whose condition contributes to physical or economic blight and limits future economic opportunity. Projects supported with GO Virginia funds must demonstrate a net regional economic benefit, including increases in regional employment in traded sector industries, rather than a relocation of economic activity from one locality to another. To be eligible for funding, redevelopment sites must also meet the criteria of a regionally significant site.

Virginia Business Ready Sites Program (VBRSP): A discretionary program administered by the Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP) to promote development and characterization of sites (containing a minimum of 50 contiguous, developable acres) to enhance the Commonwealth's infrastructure and promote Virginia's competitive business environment. The program's goal is to identify, assess, and improve the readiness of potential industrial sites, using a pre-determined scoring matrix (e.g. Tiers 1-5) around the viability and development opportunities for a given site. More information can be found here.

Section 7: Application Required Attachments

Regional Site Development Planning Applications

Applicants requesting GO Virginia funding for regional site development planning activities must complete the Regional Site Development Planning Grant Application.

Regional Site Development Implementation Applications

Applicants requesting GO Virginia funding for regional site development implementation activities must complete the Regional Site Development Implementation Application.