



Updates from the Office of Economic Development

Ready To Work Is Now Skills Builder

New Year, New You. Ready to Work is embracing that sentiment — **Ready to Work is now called Skills Builder.**

While the name has changed, everything else about the program remains exactly the same. Skills Builder continues to offer the same free, high-quality workforce training focused on building in-demand soft skills, preparing participants for employment, and connecting jobseekers to local employers through guaranteed interviews.

The name change was necessary because *Ready to Work* has been trademarked. To avoid confusion and ensure we can continue offering this program without interruption, we've moved forward with the new name **Skills Builder**, which better reflects the program's core mission: helping individuals build the skills they need to succeed at work and grow in their careers.

Local businesses interested in participating as a Skills Builder employer — including providing guaranteed interviews, connecting with program graduates, or learning more about how the program can support your hiring needs — are encouraged to reach out to bichej@charlottesville.gov to learn more.

Jobseekers looking to strengthen their workplace skills, earn a certificate, and connect with employers, Skills Builder is a free program and open for enrollment. Click [here](#) to learn more.

We're excited to continue this impactful program under a new name and look forward to supporting both jobseekers and employers through Skills Builder.



Building Skills, Confidence and Opportunity Through Youth Workforce & Entrepreneurship Training



The City of Charlottesville's Office of Economic Development (OED) recently partnered with the City of Charlottesville Department of Human Services and Rappahannock Goodwill Industries to pilot an eight-week youth workforce and entrepreneurship initiative through the Community Attention Youth Internship Program (CAYIP). The program launched after the CAYIP Coordinator convened key partners, including Lugo McGinnis Academy at Charlottesville High School, to create new pathways for local youth.

Led by OED's Entrepreneurship Program Specialist Keith Groomes, Workforce Development Program Manager Jenny Biche, and Virginia Career Works Charlottesville Center Manager Brookes Sims, alongside CAYIP staff Latara Ragland and John Thompson, the pilot blended entrepreneurship education with workforce training—helping students build practical skills, confidence, and career awareness.

Students participated in OED's GO Start-Up: Intro to Entrepreneurship curriculum, adapted specifically for youth. Through hands-on activities such as interactive cash-flow games and pitch practice, participants explored how businesses are built, how financial decisions are made, and how to communicate ideas clearly and confidently. Each student developed and presented a simple business concept, strengthening problem-solving and presentation skills.

Alongside entrepreneurship training, students completed Skills Builder, OED's workforce development program formerly known as Ready to Work. While the program name has changed, the training itself remains the same, continuing to focus on building essential, in-demand soft skills. Participants completed 12 modules covering topics such as Active Listening, Effective Communication, Conflict Resolution, Time Management, Teamwork, and Self-Motivation. The program concluded with résumé development and mock interviews, giving students the opportunity to apply their skills in real-world scenarios.

Reflecting on the program's impact, Latara S. Ragland, CAYIP Coordinator and Senior Family Services Specialist, shared, *"What began as a vision became an opportunity for our students to see themselves first and foremost in a positive light. Interns showed up at work sites to receive hands-on experiences, set goals, wrote and confidently shared their business pitches, practiced and applied work-based skills, created resumes, built professional references, and earned certificates that extend far beyond life after high school. We witnessed mindset shifts, confidence growth, and real preparation for life beyond high school. We are so incredibly proud of them."*

John Thompson, Family Services Specialist II, added, *"It was an incredible experience working with the interns during this CAYIP session. The fact that they had no prior work experience was never a concern—that's exactly what CAYIP is designed for. Because of the collaboration with Lugo McGinnis and our city partners, my role was made easier, and I made it my mission to be their biggest cheerleader every step of the way."*

Brookes Sims noted, *"The Skills Builder workshop equipped four CAYIP interns with the skills, confidence, and career readiness needed to move into fields as diverse as real estate and nursing. Their success reflects the power of intentional workforce development and strong community partnerships."*

Four students successfully completed Skills Builder and earned soft skills certifications, while also receiving GO Start-Up certificates. Through CAYIP, participants also gained paid, on-the-job experience with local employers — reinforcing professionalism, accountability, and confidence.

OED is proud to support partnerships that invest early in Charlottesville's talent pipeline and create meaningful pathways for youth success.

Charlottesville: A Hub for Clean and Renewal Energy

Did you know Charlottesville is building a strong reputation as the Mid-Atlantic's hub for clean and renewable energy innovation? Over a dozen such companies call the City of Charlottesville home, doing cutting edge work in solar power generation, wind power, energy storage, and energy management systems, from utility scale projects all the way to the residential level.



Collaboration remains a key driver of the city's renewable energy momentum with **Charlottesville Renewable Energy Alliance** (Cville REA) bringing together companies, nonprofit organizations, local government partners, and community stakeholders to educate, inform, advocate, and further build upon the foundation that has been laid for this work. Through networking events, public education initiatives, and project partnerships, the Cville REA helps ensure that Charlottesville remains a leader in the clean-energy economy.

Together, these companies and partners are shaping a local ecosystem where innovation, environmental stewardship, and economic growth reinforce one another – creating jobs, facilitating growth, and investing in our collective future.

Launch Your Product Locally

LaunchPad, allows entrepreneurs to gain hands-on market experience designed to help owners test and grow their products in real time. Running from April 4 through November 21, with applications opening in March, the program gives participants access to four vibrant marketplaces across the city: Charlottesville City Market, IX Art Park Farmers Market, Farmers in the Park, and Star Hill Sunday Market.

Whether selling art, crafts, or food, LaunchPad serves as a low-barrier entry point for entrepreneurs ready to bring their products to market. Through the program, participants gain direct customer feedback, test pricing and packaging, and gather real-world insights across different audiences and environments. By experiencing multiple markets, vendors learn not only what sells, but where their brand fits best.



Beyond sales, LaunchPad builds community. Entrepreneurs connect with fellow vendors, strengthen their confidence, and become part of Charlottesville's local market ecosystem, all while validating demand before making larger business investments.

Applications open in March. For emerging business owners ready to move from ideas to action, LaunchPad offers the opportunity to test, learn, and grow right here in the city.

Celebrating the Next Generation of Entrepreneurs: Young Mogus Market

Youth entrepreneurship is more than a business opportunity; it's a powerful way to build confidence, creativity, and leadership early in life. This Black History Month, the **Piedmont District Baptist Association** Youth Department is hosting the Young Moguls Market as part of its celebration themed "Young, Black, & Blessed."

The Young Moguls Market creates space for youth ages 2–22 to showcase and sell their own businesses. Offering handmade goods and creative services to innovative products, this market highlights the brilliance and ambition of young entrepreneurs in our community.

Event Details

- Date: Saturday, February 28, 2026
- Time: 2:00–4:30 PM
- Location: Carver Recreation Center
- Theme: *Young, Black, & Blessed*

Community support makes moments like this possible. When you shop, share encouragement, or simply show up, you help plant seeds of confidence and economic empowerment that can last a lifetime.

Come out and support local youth entrepreneurs as we celebrate Black history, excellence, and the future being built right before our eyes.



Available Property Spotlight



Are you ready to “tap” into a new food and beverage venture in 2026? Does immediate proximity to the University of Virginia, The Corner, and the West Main Street retail corridor, sound like the right place for your business to be located? If you answer yes to these questions, you should check out the **Lark on Main retail space** available for lease. Located at 1000 W. Main Street, this 4,254 square-foot space comes outfitted with all the equipment needed for a brewery and taproom. Floor-to-ceiling windows allow for enhanced visibility and lots of natural light in the space. This opportunity is offered through Cushman & Wakefield |Thalhimer. For more information or to schedule a walkthrough, contact John Pritzlaff

(john.pritzlaff@thalhimer.com; 434-234-8416), Jenny Stoner (jenny.stoner@thalhimer.com; 434-234-8417), or Josi Willimas (josi.williams@thalhimer.com; 434-333-6991).

Information on this and other available properties in the City of Charlottesville is available on the Office of Economic Development's "**Sites & Buildings**" webpage. If you have commercial, retail, or industrial space available for lease or sale, let us know by emailing property information and any marketing flyer to ecodev@charlottesville.gov.

OED Fun Fact

February is Black History Month, which traces back to Carter G. Woodson and Jessee E. Moreland, who established Negro History Week in February 1926 to honor achievements of African Americans. It

expanded to a month in the 1960s and was federally recognized in 1976. Be sure to check out the planned events in Charlottesville in honor of Black History month.

Free Business Resources



The Central Virginia Small Business Development Center is a team of business and technical experts available to advise and assist entrepreneurs, confidentially and free of charge. They offer 1:1 assistance, curated research, access to technical experts and professionals, and timely events/training. To see upcoming SBDC events, click [here!](#)

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