

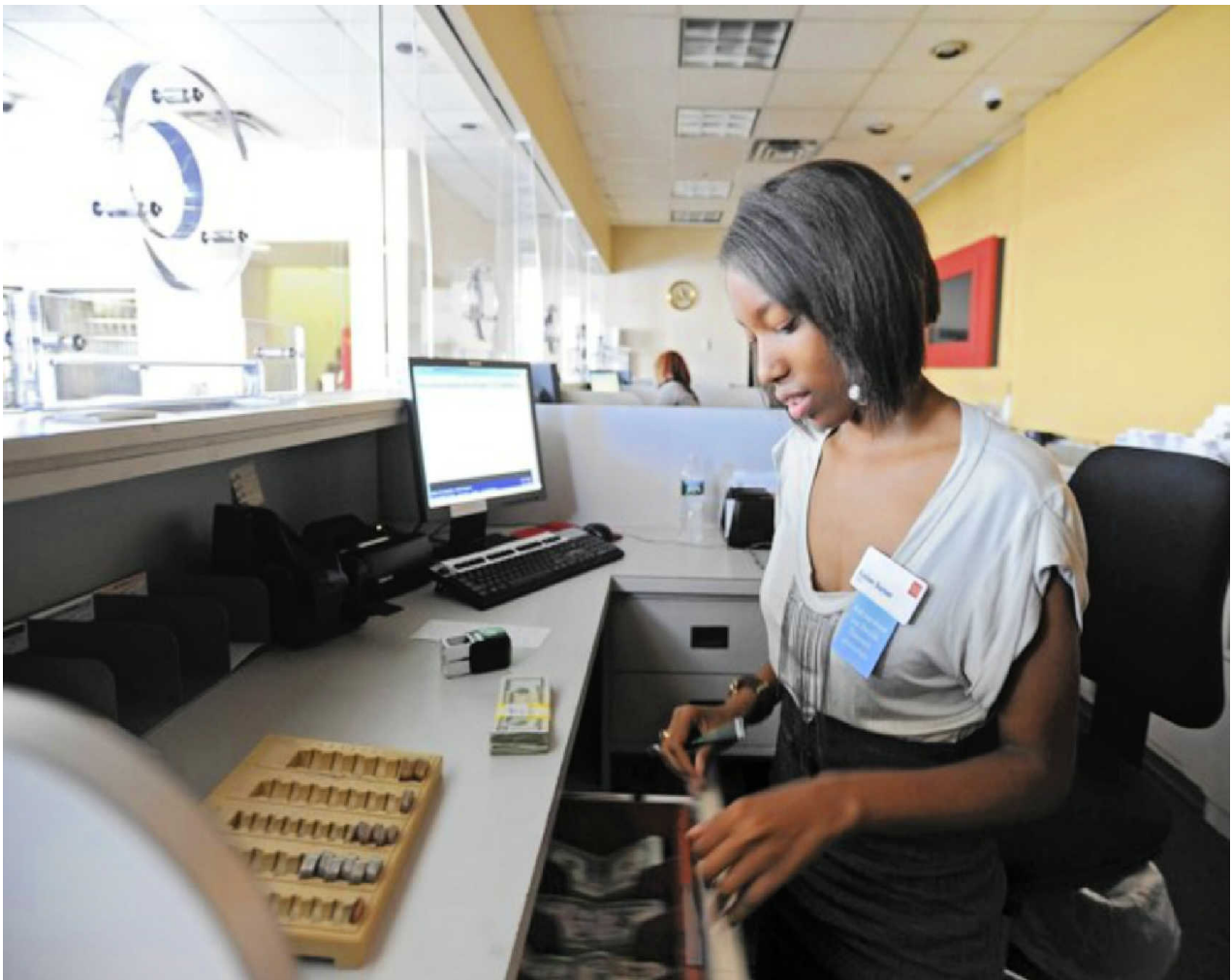
The Virgin Islands Consortium

VIDOL Expands Youth Summer Employment Program to Serve More Than 1,000 in 2026

With \$1.2 million in new local funding and added federal support, the Department of Labor aims to place over 1,000 young people in paid summer jobs this year, a significant increase from 2025, as applications open February 16.

Community Center / **Published On February 07, 2026 09:30 AM /**

Nelcia Charlemagne **February 07, 2026**



With demand continuing to outpace capacity in recent years, the V.I. Department of Labor is preparing to significantly expand its Youth Summer Employment Program in 2026, aiming to place more than 1,000 young people in paid work opportunities across the territory.

The projected increase represents a notable jump from 2025, when VIDOL placed 722 participants out of 1,420 applicants. Officials say the expanded reach is the result of additional funding secured during the legislative budget process.

According to Senator Kurt Vialet, chair of the 36th Legislature's Committee on Education and Workforce Development, lawmakers identified the need for increased funding during budget markup discussions. The Legislature worked closely with VIDOL to determine "how much money we would have to add to the budget to be able to increase the number of students that receive employment," Vialet said.

For Senator Dwayne DeGraff, a member of the Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance, the request was straightforward. The committee, he said, "agreed wholeheartedly."

The expansion is supported by \$1.2 million in local funding, which will supplement an additional \$244,000 in federal funds. The total program budget for 2026 is \$1,444,463.38, according to Labor Commissioner Gary Molloy.

"Every year we get more applications for students that we can serve," Molloy said. He noted that in 2025, VIDOL continued to receive applications even after the deadline had passed. "There is always a shortfall of about three to 400 students that apply, that we cannot serve."

With the added funding, Molloy and his team are hopeful that 2026 will narrow that gap. Applications for the upcoming summer programs will open on February 16 and remain open through April.

According to Shenika Sebastien, director of Youth and Apprenticeship, the full \$1.2 million legislative allocation will be used specifically to cover wages for youth participants enrolled in the summer employment programs.

VIDOL operates multiple summer initiatives tailored to different age groups and educational levels. The Summer Youth Work Experience Program serves participants aged 16 to 25. The Career Exploratory Program is designed for 14- and 15-year-olds. The Labor Investing for Tomorrow (LIFT) Internship Program targets college juniors, seniors, graduate students, and recent graduates who have completed at least 60 credits and maintain a 2.8 grade point average.

Collectively, the programs "engage high school students, out-of-school youth, and post-secondary participants in meaningful, work-based learning," Molloy said.

The commissioner emphasized that successful implementation depends on partnerships beyond government. According to Molloy, the programs rely on "collaboration with a broad network of community organizations, educational institutions, and private-sector employees." To "maximize access and equity," VIDOL plans to roll out a comprehensive outreach and marketing campaign aimed at encouraging both youth participation and employer involvement.

Given historically high demand, Molloy urged both applicants and employers to act quickly. This year, he advised, both groups are "encouraged to apply early due to the historically high volume of submissions."

