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RTPark Surpasses FY2026 Tenant Goal, Weighs AI Apprenticeship for UVI Students and Local Tech Talent

RTPark has surpassed its FY2026 target with nine tenant agreements and is considering a tenth that would establish an AI apprenticeship for UVI students, recent graduates and local tech talent, while four additional term sheets remain under negotiation.

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The University of the Virgin Islands Research and Technology Park has surpassed its FY2026 goal for new tenant agreements and is considering a tenth deal that would establish an artificial intelligence apprenticeship program for UVI students, recent graduates and other local technology talent.

Executive Director Eric Sonnier told RTPark board members Monday that the organization has already completed nine tenant agreements during the current financial year, exceeding its target of eight. Four additional term sheets are also under negotiation.

“This one’s pretty exciting because it includes an AI apprenticeship program for UVI students, recent grads, and other local tech talent,” he said of the proposed tenth agreement.

The potential apprenticeship would become another part of RTPark’s broader effort to develop a local technology workforce, with programs ranging from elementary-level STEM education through UVI and into internships and employment.

Through its Professional Pathways program, students are being connected with internships and jobs through “RTPark clients and workforce partners,” Sonnier said.

Nine students have already secured confirmed internships or employment opportunities. One candidate has an offer pending, another is waiting to be scheduled into the workforce, and three additional students are awaiting the results of interviews. Five other employer opportunities are being developed.

RTPark is also preparing for another year of after-school STEM enrichment programming following the conclusion of its summer camp, which expanded substantially this year.

“We successfully served approximately 175 students across St. Croix, St. Thomas and St. John,” Sonnier said.

That represented an increase from the 120 students served last year. Sonnier attributed the growth to expanded capacity on St. Croix and St. Thomas and the introduction of the program on St. John.

The camp included training in web development and social and emotional skills. RTPark also introduced a new dashboard and digital learning program that will allow the organization to track several elements of the initiative, including program outcomes, “which we know is important and will become increasingly important over the years to come,” Sonnier said.

Demand for the summer program was evident when registration filled within minutes after opening earlier this year.

Following the camp, Sonnier said “feedback from the families and community stakeholders was overwhelmingly positive.”

Families and other stakeholders have requested longer camp sessions, an expanded program for high school students and additional capacity.

“Future planning will focus on expanding capacity, strengthening staffing, and sustaining community and corporate support. The more support we get, the more students we can continue to add to the roster,” he said.

Board member Henry Smock told Sonnier that he had received “nothing but rave reviews” about the summer camp and suggested that the organization may need to provide “triple or quadruple” the number of spaces next year to accommodate demand.

“I’m serious about that. You’re going to have to make it much bigger,” he remarked.

The expansion of the STEM camp to St. John coincided with RTPark's first official community engagement event on the island. The activity drew participation from current and prospective clients and other community stakeholders.

Dr. William DeLone, vice chair of the board, said RTPark's work has helped establish a pathway for students to move from early technology education into higher education and the workforce.

"We've made incredible strides in the last year to two years...creating a local pipeline of talented technology students, starting from elementary school programs all the way through UVI," he said.

DeLone described that responsibility as "one of the most challenging aspects" of the organization's mandate and commended Sonnier and the RTPark team for their work.

Following the executive director's report, the board entered executive session. During the closed meeting, members approved tenancy extensions and amendments and new tenancy agreements and received updates on a pending audit.