The Virgin Islands Consortium

UVI RTPark Wins Record Six International Economic Development Awards, Including Three Golds

UVI RTPark earned six 2026 Excellence in Economic Development Awards from IEDC, including three golds recognizing its STEM program, solar and SPARK work, and Community Impact Fund, marking its largest single-year IEDC showing since 2020 overall in all.

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Students in UVI RTPark's STEM Summer Camp work with robotics and electronics kits alongside an instructor, illustrating the program recognized among RTPark's six 2026 IEDC awards.

ST. CROIX — The UVI Research and Technology Park has won six 2026 Excellence in Economic Development Awards from the International Economic Development Council, including three gold awards for initiatives spanning STEM education, renewable-energy infrastructure and community financing.

The six honors represent RTPark's largest single-year showing in the IEDC awards since the organization received the council's Economic Development Organization of the Year honor in 2020.

RTPark received a Gold Award for Economic Equity & Inclusion for its STEM Enrichment Program; a Gold Award for Best Use of Federal Resources for its Solar Farm Project and SPARK Initiative; and a Gold Award for Innovative Financing for the Community Impact Fund's VI LEAP Fund.

The organization also received a Silver Award for Innovative Economic Development for the STEM Enrichment Program, a Silver Award for Special Purpose Website for the program's digital platform and a Bronze Award for Special Event for Startup Battle VI.

"These awards belong to the people whose work can be seen, heard and felt across our islands," said Eric Sonnier, executive director of the UVI RTPark. "Our team, stakeholders and partners did the work on the ground — teaching students, supporting founders, financing organizations and building resilient infrastructure. We are grateful that IEDC has recognized our collective commitment and impact."

Three of the awards are connected to RTPark's STEM Enrichment Program, which has expanded territory-wide through after-school programs, summer camps, STEAM Days and outreach activities. RTPark said the initiative has generated more than 2,000 participant engagements through hands-on programming and a digital platform supporting STEM learning, digital literacy and workforce-readiness skills.

"This recognition validates our mission to advance economic diversification and opportunity for Virgin Islanders," said Ian Tomlinson, chair of the RTPark Board of Directors. "Our territory is developing models that other island, rural and underserved communities can adapt. I thank IEDC and every partner who made this possible."

The University of the Virgin Islands is a partner in two of the recognized initiatives. Startup Battle USVI created an avenue for a UVI student-led venture to receive investment and mentorship, while the SPARK Initiative combines renewable-energy infrastructure with applied learning.

The Gold Award for Best Use of Federal Resources recognized a 423-kilowatt solar array funded through a Federal Emergency Management Agency 406 Hazard Mitigation Grant. Partners included the V.I. Office of Disaster Recovery, UVI, the Caribbean Green Technology Center, Volt Energy LLC, the V.I. Energy Office and the V.I. Water and Power Authority.

"UVI is proud to see what our partnership with the RTPark is making possible for students and the territory," said UVI President Safiya George, Ph.D. "From the SPARK living laboratory and Renewable Energy Technology program to the student track in Startup Battle USVI, we are connecting academic learning with applied research, entrepreneurship and real opportunity. This is the kind of partnership that strengthens a university and equips our students to help lead the territory’s future.”

RTPark’s Community Impact Fund, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, earned the Gold Award for Innovative Financing for its leadership of the VI LEAP Fund and Crucian Christmas Festival Microloan Program. The fund provides access to capital and technical assistance for businesses and organizations across the Virgin Islands, with RTPark serving as its anchor partner.

“VI LEAP was built on a belief: strong businesses build strong communities,” said Patricia T. Morris, Ph.D., executive director of CIF. “This award recognizes a financing model designed for small-island economies and entrepreneurs underserved by traditional lending systems. We remain committed to expanding equitable access to capital across the Virgin Islands.”

IEDC is scheduled to formally recognize the award recipients during its annual conference in New Orleans from October 25 through 28.