Virginia's Employee Child Care Assistance Program

Frequently Asked Questions

As of September 8, 2026 (updates in red)

General

1. **What is Ready Together VA?**
   Ready Together VA is a new program that helps employers and the Commonwealth of Virginia share the cost of child care for working families. It was created through legislation passed by the Virginia General Assembly in 2026 to incentivize employers to contribute to the cost of employee child care. It is administered by the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation (VECF). The goal is to see how state funding and employer contributions can work together to expand access to child care in Virginia.

2. **Who is involved in Ready Together VA?**
   Senator Aird and Delegate McClure sponsored legislation to establish the Employee Child Care Assistance Program, Ready Together VA, administered by VECF. VECF is working with partners across Virginia, including employers, Ready Regions, child care providers, potential additional payors, and state leaders, to build a program that meets the needs of communities and works for families and businesses.

3. **When does Ready Together VA begin?**
   Right now, VECF is working with partners to develop the initial program design. VECF is planning a competitive process to identify which Ready Regions are prepared to participate in Implementation Phase I. in the coming months with a goal to begin enrolling families in spring 2027.

4. **How will Ready Together VA work?**
   Participating employers will contribute to their employee child care costs. The state will contribute to the child care costs, and families will have a copay based on their income. Together, this public-private partnership is designed to make quality child care more affordable and accessible for working families. The program is currently in the planning phase.

5. **Why are employers involved?**
   Child care impacts business every day. Just like schools, roads, and other essential services, child care is critical to supporting families, employers, and Virginia's economy. For employers, reliable child care is also a workforce issue: it helps attract job candidates, reduces employee absenteeism and turnover, and makes it easier for parents to remain in the workforce. Ready Together VA will help show how public and private investments can work together.

6. **How can my employer get involved?**
   Employers interested in participating in Ready Together VA should complete a brief interest form to let VECF know. Completing the form does not guarantee or require participation. VECF will provide program updates to employers that tell us they want to know more.

7. **Are all Virginia families eligible to participate in Ready Together VA?**
   Ready Together VA was created for working families whose employer participates in the program. Eligibility is income-based and dependent on employer participation. Households at or below 100% of state median income (SMI) at participating employers may qualify. For Implementation Phase I, participation may be focused on specific communities in Virginia to inform future rollout across the state.

8. **How will Implementation Phase I partners be selected?**
   VECF is working with Ready Regions to determine readiness of partners within their coverage area. VECF is looking at factors like employer interest, child care needs, local partnerships, and geographic diversity, to learn how this approach works in different areas with different types of employers.

9. **Will this program solve Virginia's child care shortage?**
   No. It is important to keep this program in perspective. Ready Together VA is not a solution to Virginia's child care challenges. VECF is grateful for the opportunity to test this promising idea, learn from it, and use those lessons to help shape future policy. Ultimately, Virginia's child care system needs the same kind of reliable, long-term investment that the Commonwealth makes in other essential public services.

Ready Regions and Mixed Delivery

10. **What is the role of Ready Regions in Ready Together VA?**
    During planning and upon completion of the competitive process, Ready Region lead agencies will serve as the primary point of contact for participating employers and child care providers as well as the third-party administrator (TPA) through which Ready Together VA funds flow in their region. This administrative role is similar to what Ready Regions already do for another program called Mixed Delivery.

11. **How closely will Ready Together VA follow Mixed Delivery requirements?**
    Because the legislation specifically references Mixed Delivery, Ready Together VA will be implemented in alignment with it. VECF and the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) are in the process of determining exactly which Mixed Delivery requirements will apply and where there may be flexibility. Ready Together VA will use cost of quality rates, require VQB5 participation, and use the Mixed Delivery Data Portal for data collection. Religious-exempt sites will not be eligible to participate, consistent with Mixed Delivery.

12. **Can Ready Together VA implementation vary by Ready Region?**
    Yes. Just as Mixed Delivery allows for some regional variation, VECF anticipates there may be value in testing slightly different approaches across Ready Regions participating in FY27 Implementation Phase I. One example already identified: Ready Regions will be able to choose whether and when to use a contract model (blocks of slots with designated ECCE sites) or a follow-the-child model (slots follow the family's choice of site) to allow for learnings from both approaches. Ready Regions may also propose variations in other Implementation Phase I choices, such as engaging a fourth payor to help offset or stabilize employer contributions. Core program design features, along with any areas open to regional variation, will be spelled out no later than the beginning of the competitive application process. VECF will also share updates on any additional design decisions as they are finalized through the Ready Together VA weekly emails and optional office hours.

13. **What resources and technical assistance will be provided to Ready Regions during the competitive application process?**
    Technical assistance will be provided in the form of FAQ, webinars, and phone calls throughout the competitive application process.
    - An introductory webinar was held for Ready Region Leads on August 14, 2026.
        - Click here to access the slides.
    - Questions can be submitted via email to ta@vecf.org to be considered for FAQ updates.
    - VECF will meet with leads from each Ready Region for a 1:1 conversation about this opportunity.
    - VECF is partnering with EPIC (Executives Partnering to Invest in Children) through December 2026 to build an employer readiness framework and other materials for Ready Regions use. EPIC will also be talking with interested employers to develop recommendations that strengthen program implementation.
    - VECF will share a list of employers in the region who have completed the interest form with each Ready Region.

14. **What is the expected timeline for the program and the competitive application process?**
    Please mark your calendars with the following important dates. Note that some dates may be subject to change, and any changes will be communicated as soon as possible:
    - 9/30/26: RRs indicate intent to apply (email to ta@vecf.org)
    - 11/30/26: Application released
    - 12/4/26: Application webinar, 9:00-10:00am, webinar link
    - 2/5/27: Applications due at 11:59pm
    - Late-February 2027: Awards announced
    - March 2027: Implementation Phase I begins (continuing into FY28)
    - May 2027: Implementation Phase I enrollment begins (continuing into FY28)

15. **What role will EPIC play in helping identify participating employers?**
    VECF is partnering with EPIC to help build an employer readiness framework and other materials. EPIC will help assess readiness among interested employers. Ready Regions will be asked to share which employers they have already engaged and to identify employers that would benefit from an EPIC

presentation. Ultimately Ready Regions will need to build and retain relationships with interested employers, building capacity over time.

16. **Will Ready Together VA be limited to child care sites that currently participate in Mixed Delivery?**
    No. It may be valuable to use current Mixed Delivery providers in many cases, but the program will not be restricted to them. There may be cases where no current Mixed Delivery site is convenient for the families of a participating employer; therefore, Ready Regions will have the flexibility to work with additional sites as needed. Any site that does not already participate in Mixed Delivery will become a Mixed Delivery site for the purposes of participating in Ready Together VA.

17. **Can a participating employer work with more than one child care site?**
    The number of child care sites an employer works with will remain flexible and largely determined by each Ready Region. Ready Regions will need to consider factors such as existing site contracts; site capacity and location, and which sites are likely to meet family needs and preferences, including where families are already enrolled, as they design their local approach.

18. **Will Ready Regions receive a list of employers VECF has already been in contact with?**
    Yes. VECF will share a list of employers who have expressed interest, including any employers that cross Ready Region boundaries, by August 31, 2026. VECF will then regularly update Ready Regions as new employers complete the online interest form.

19. **How is "small business" defined for Ready Together VA?**
    For this program, § 22.1-289.05:2 provides the following definitions: "Small business" means an employer with fewer than 50 employees; "Employer" means an employer with at least one employee who works in the Commonwealth in each of 20 or more calendar weeks in the current or preceding calendar year. Small businesses are highlighted in the legislation as a priority, but the program is not limited to small businesses only.

20. **Can payors other than employers help fund the program?**
    Yes. The legislation also allows other payors, such as local governments or philanthropic partners, to contribute. Employers must be engaged as a condition of participation.

21. **Will there be a minimum number of employees or child care slots an employer must commit to?**
    No fixed, required minimum or maximum number of employees or child care slots has been established, meaning there is no set number that Ready Regions or employers must meet or stay under. A flexible approach has been approved for FY27 Implementation Phase I. Ready Regions should propose contract sizes and commitments they can reasonably manage as part of Implementation Phase I. Future decisions about minimum numbers will be shaped by Ready Regions through the competitive application process and refined based on learnings from FY27 Implementation Phase I.

22. **Can an employer limit which employees are eligible, for example by job type?**
    In initial planning conversations, VECF has leaned away from adding restrictions at the state level beyond income eligibility, since the pool of eligible families is already limited to employees of participating employers. VECF recognizes employers may want to target specific roles and will provide more guidance to Ready Regions through the competitive application process and will want to balance that with any concerns about narrowing the pool of eligible families. It is the employer's responsibility to ensure any eligibility criteria they set comply with applicable employment law requirements. Neither VECF nor Ready Regions are positioned to provide legal or tax guidance in this area. Ready Regions should bring specific scenarios or questions to VECF for discussion.

23. **Will families who have already enrolled their children in child care be excluded from participating in Ready Together VA?**
    No. There are no plans to require that children be new to child care to participate. Many families who are already paying for child care still cannot afford it. VECF is aiming to minimize additional restrictions.

24. **Will families be required to use only pre-approved child care sites, or can any provider become eligible based on family choice?**
    For this program, § 22.1-289.05:2 defines "eligible mixed delivery provider" as a "child day center or family day home that has been selected or identified to deliver mixed delivery services through a local agreement with the relevant regional entity..." See FAQ #11 for more information on alignment between Mixed Delivery and Ready Together VA.

25. **How many children will be served through Ready Together VA?**
    VECF does not anticipate Ready Regions will serve a large number of children during FY27 Implementation Phase I. Helping employers design and adopt new child care benefits takes time. VECF is intentionally starting small to build a strong foundation for this new and innovative program. The number of participating employers, Ready Regions, and children served will grow as the approach is refined and more employers choose to participate. For context, Missouri began a similar cost sharing initiative in September 2025, and, as of June 2026, they were actively serving 50 children (source: Early Progress Found with Cost-Sharing in Missouri, First Five Years Fund).