

2014 CEDA Nomination Form

Name of Community: Virginia's Middle Peninsula and Northern Neck regions

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Community Population: In all approximately 133,000 people.
(Approximately 50,000 people live in the Northern Neck region according to the recent (Jan. 2014) Virginia Community Profile published by the Northern Neck PDC. According to the 2000 Census, the Middle Peninsula is home to approximately 83,000 people.)

Submitted for: Business Retention/Expansion; Community Development;
Community Involvement

Guidance: Please upload a brief description of the economic development efforts and accomplishments (projects and programs). Within this description, address the awards criteria of innovativeness, transferability, community commitment, measured objectives and secondary benefits. NOMINATIONS MUST BE LIMITED TO FOUR CONVENTIONALLY FORMATTED 8.5" x 11" PAGES and must be uploaded electronically as one PDF document. Please include any photographs, graphics, or other supporting information in the PDF document.

Virginia's wild harvest of fish and other seafood products has been in decline for several decades due to declines in Chesapeake Bay health, decreasing and often unreliable catches, and the ever-increasing costs of doing business. The average age of today's working waterman is over 60 years old and it is rare that younger watermen choose commercial fishing as a career option. As watermen leave the industry, their legacy and knowledge is lost. Local communities are also negatively impacted because these losses negatively impact local economies and their access to safe, local seafood. Rappahannock Community College's Workforce and Community Development office developed a program that capitalizes on the knowledge and earnings potential of commercial watermen and leverages that produce positive economic impacts for the local communities.

Virginia's Watermen Tourism Training Program provides training for watermen who wish to supplement their incomes by developing tourism-based businesses. In addition to providing a much-needed alternate source of income for Virginia's

working watermen, the program spurs economic development throughout coastal Virginia, connects the public directly with working watermen as educators and Bay stewards, and emphasizes the benefits of buying local seafood. This program was modeled after a similar effort in Maryland, Watermen Heritage Tourism Training Program, run through Chesapeake Conservancy. Chesapeake Conservancy staff and participating Maryland watermen provided guidance during our planning stages and initial training class. The three primary Virginia project partners have been Rappahannock Community College Workforce and Community Development, Virginia Waterman's Association, and Chesapeake Environmental Communications.

This program was developed to be consistent with principles of community-based tourism in that it strives to benefit local communities, preserve local knowledge and heritage, and maintain the character of the community. By providing interesting and engaging outdoor tourism opportunities for visitors, the program also builds on global trends in adventure travel. Since 2009, adventure travel markets have grown at approximately 65% per year since 2009 (George Washington University, 2013). Few adventure travel opportunities existed within the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula regions prior to the development of this training class.

RCC identified funds for two initial training classes, both of which were held in 2013. The first class was held in the Northern Neck in late February and the second class was held in the Middle Peninsula in November. The Northern Neck class trained 11 students, of which at least five have established tourism businesses (<http://northernneckheritage.com/>). We partnered with the Northern Neck Tourism Commission, Visions, and Coastal Heritage Alliance for this initial class. Virginia Tourism Corporation provided marketing support to help brand and market the Northern Neck Heritage Program.

Nine watermen students enrolled in the Middle Peninsula class. This spring three of those nine are pursuing captain's licenses through Chesapeake Marine Training Institute with grant funding we secured. We expect all of our program participants will launch tourism ventures this calendar year. Our training classes provide tools and resources for business development (customer service, liability, marketing, networking, community partnerships, etc.), storytelling and curriculum development, and ecosystem science. Our classes also include a final project where each waterman presents his/her outline for their business and detailed curriculum ideas to receive group feedback.

The program has been well received by watermen, their families, and the surrounding communities. On-water tourism offers the potential to involve not just an individual waterman, but also their wives/husbands and children. Families have been able to work together to handle different parts of the business development- website, bookings, marketing, etc. This program encourages cross-industry partnerships, for example watermen have partnered with local Bed & Breakfasts on packages, tour bus operators for trip planning, restaurants that can cook the day's catch, and charter boat captains to work with a watermen who may not have the

size vessel necessary for large tours. We receive regular requests from watermen who want to participate in future classes and from additional communities that would like to host future trainings.

The Watermen's Tourism Training Program has been developed to be a transferable program around other coastal regions of Virginia and could also be replicated in other states.

Measurable Outcomes:

1. Train 20 local watermen to become eco-tour guides in the middle peninsula and northern neck region.
Status: Objective met
2. Twenty percent (20%) of the 20 watermen trained have developed additional small businesses tied to ecotourism to supplement seafood harvesting revenue.
Status: Objective met
3. In 2014, at least 50% (10) of those trained will be leading tours focused on local history, ecology, and seafood harvesting.
Status: Under development and on-target
4. Produce a 4 minute online video to support the program and disseminate to individuals who are interested in participating in an eco-tour.
Status: Objective met
5. Develop and manage a website to gather eco-tour information connected to business provided by local watermen to be launched by March 1, 2014.
Status: Under development and on-target

Reference:

George Washington University. 2013. Adventure Tourism Market Study. Available: <http://files.adventuretravel.biz/docs/research/adventure-tourism-market-study-2013-web.pdf>