

August 2026

Virginia Youth Tobacco Projects

**Student Small Grants Program—Research on the
Causes and Prevention of Youth Tobacco Use**

Request for Applications

August 4, 2026

**Virginia Youth Tobacco Projects
Department of Psychology
Virginia Commonwealth University**

STUDENT SMALL GRANTS PROGRAM--RESEARCH ON THE CAUSES AND PREVENTION OF YOUTH TOBACCO USE

RELEASE DATE: August 4, 2026

Virginia Youth Tobacco Projects (VYTP), Center for the Study of Tobacco Products, Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU)

APPLICATION RECEIPT DATE: October 30, 2026

PURPOSE OF THIS RFA

The Virginia Youth Tobacco Projects (VYTP) is a statewide, multi-university effort to advance the prevention and treatment of youth tobacco use and nicotine dependence through an integrated program of basic and applied research. This effort is coordinated by the Department of Psychology at Virginia Commonwealth University, with funding provided by the Virginia Foundation for Health Youth (VFHY). The VYTP is implementing several initiatives to enhance Virginia's efforts to learn more about the causes and prevention of youth tobacco use. The specific goals of the VYTP are to:

- Build a statewide program of research on the causes and prevention of youth tobacco use;
- Create active multi-university collaborations in carrying out the VYTP research program;
- Attract new faculty scholars and students to work on problems of youth tobacco use;
- Use VFHY funding as a base for attracting additional outside funding for youth tobacco use research in Virginia; and
- Translate research findings into improved prevention services and policies.

The purpose of this announcement is to stimulate new student/trainee-led research into the causes and prevention of youth tobacco use and nicotine dependence. It is anticipated that awardees will use grant funds to support pilot and/or dissertation studies that will lead to larger grant applications to federal, state, and foundation sources. Like the VYTP small grants program, this program is intended to foster multi-university and multi-disciplinary research teams. This program is intended for graduate student investigators (i.e., master's-level and predoctoral students) and other trainees (i.e., post-doctoral fellows/researchers). We encourage applications from those who are new to the field of youth tobacco research to initiate their efforts in this growing and critical area of investigation.

AREAS OF INTEREST

The Student Small Grant Program may be used to support research covering the broad spectrum of methods and approaches related to increasing our understanding and improving the **prevention and cessation** of youth tobacco use.

Thus, research to be funded may include, but is not limited to, basic research including the biological and behavioral mechanisms associated with tobacco use and nicotine dependence; measurement research, including the development of new instruments to assess the processes and outcomes of preventive interventions; clinical research, including the translation of basic research into new interventions and testing the efficacy of interventions with new populations;

epidemiological research, including genetic epidemiology and studies to determine the incidence and prevalence of youth tobacco use and addiction in Virginia and among specific subpopulations; and services research, including the financing and organization of services, effectiveness studies, and the studies of effective methods for disseminating evidence-based interventions. Of particular importance are studies leading to effective efforts to reduce youth tobacco use in Virginia. Research involving secondary data analysis and/or primary data collection will be considered.

Given the current status of youth tobacco use research and the specific needs of the Commonwealth of Virginia, the VYTP is particularly encouraging applications addressing the following topics, although the full range of research topics described above are entirely appropriate and acceptable as research topics:

1. The effectiveness of existing evidence-based youth tobacco use prevention programs in new settings and/or with new sub-populations of youth (as defined by sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, race/ethnicity, SES, disability status, etc.). This would include research on what adaptations are necessary in applying these programs in new settings/populations.
2. Tobacco use cessation, including controlled laboratory experiments that can answer basic questions about the physiological, psychological, and behavioral effects of tobacco cessation in adolescents who use tobacco, and systematically evaluate the impact of various behavioral and pharmacological interventions on these effects; basic and clinical research that can evaluate theoretical causal mechanisms proposed to explain tobacco use and relapse in adolescents; preclinical research that can be designed to provide insights into the specific processes involved in tobacco use, quitting, and relapsing during adolescence; the development and testing of developmentally-appropriate behavioral and pharmacological interventions (and their combinations).
3. Human laboratory studies that are designed to bridge the gap between basic research on nicotine and the causes and consequences of tobacco use among youth. These might include studies related to the effects of nicotine and tobacco, the roles of genetic and environmental variables, the neurocognitive aspects of tobacco use and the influence of attitudes, expectations and social perceptions.
4. The development and testing of youth tobacco use preventive and treatment interventions in primary care settings, including epidemiological and behavioral research that would help to inform the development of new interventions or improve the effectiveness of existing interventions.
5. The use of new and emerging tobacco products by youth, including accessibility, patterns of use, health consequences and policy issues.
6. Dissemination and implementation research including research on the diffusion of youth tobacco use prevention programs beyond those funded by the VFHY, the level of and factors related to the fidelity of implementation of the VFHY-funded programs, and the

sustainability of the VFHY-funded programs.

7. Tobacco control policy/regulation, including the effects of pricing, tobacco outlet registration/licensing, and law enforcement on youth tobacco use.
8. Studies that use VFHY-funded prevention programs as research sites and/or that are collaborations between university-based investigators and community-based prevention programs.
9. Studies that are collaborations between university-based investigators and state and/or local policy makers (e.g., local public health districts, Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, local community services boards, and the Alcohol Beverage Commission).

FUNDS AVAILABLE

A total of \$40,000 is available for this program. It is anticipated that two awards will be made, with **each award not exceeding \$20,000**. Awards will be for a maximum of 6 months. The funding of these awards is subject to appropriations by the State or Master Settlement Agreement with tobacco manufacturers and appropriations approved by the VFHY Board of Trustees.

Special Requirements:

- One no-cost extension, not to exceed 6 months, may be granted at the discretion of the grantor. Requests for no-cost extensions must be submitted in writing at least 60 days prior to the initially agreed upon completion date and must fully document and justify why the extension is needed.
- Grant funds may be used only for expenses clearly related and necessary to conduct the research.
- Allowable costs will follow Uniform Guidance.
- Indirect/administrative costs will not be paid by this grant.
- Applicants should budget sufficient time to present a brief update on project progress at the April 2027 Virginia Conference on Youth Tobacco Use.
- Final invoice and written report are due within 30 days of the end of the award period

ELIGIBLE INSTITUTIONS

Applications are open to all public universities and colleges in the Commonwealth of Virginia, and applications from Virginia's historically Black colleges and universities are particularly encouraged. Special consideration will be given to applications from universities/colleges not currently receiving VFHY research funding and to principal investigators not previously funded by the VFHY or through a VYTP small grant.

Individuals affiliated with a community-based prevention program or other organizations are encouraged to use this as an opportunity to explore a possible collaboration with a local public university/college.

INDIVIDUALS ELIGIBLE TO BECOME PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS

Any master's/predoctoral-level graduate student or postdoctoral fellow/researcher with the skills, knowledge, and resources necessary to carry out the proposed research is invited to work with their institution to develop an application for this award. For the purposes of this application, a postdoctoral fellow/researcher is defined as an individual who holds a doctoral degree (Ph.D., M.D., or equivalent) and is in a temporary mentored research position. Student/trainee investigators with a new interest in youth tobacco use research are encouraged to apply.

PROTECTION OF HUMAN AND ANIMAL SUBJECTS

Grants funded under this program are subject to all applicable state and Federal laws and regulations regarding the protection of human and animal subjects. Applicants are solely responsible for securing appropriate institutional review board (IRB) and/or institutional animal care and use committee (IACUC) approval and ensuring the protection of human and animal subjects. If applicable, documentation of IRB and/or IACUC approval must be submitted within the first 6 months of the award.

APPLICATION PROCEDURES

Applicants must complete the attached *Research Award Application Form* and the *Project Budget and Budget Narrative Form*. A research plan must also be submitted which **shall not exceed 3 pages, single spaced**. Applications exceeding the page limit will be returned. Additional pages are allowable for relevant appendices. Appendices may not be used to merely extend the narrative.

The application package must be submitted as a pdf document sent by email to Dr. Caroline Cobb cobbco@vcu.edu. Please put "VYTP Application" in the subject line. Please send a pdf file with institutional signing office signature. Deadline for receipt of all applications is **October 30, 2026 at 5:00 pm EDT**. Applications received after that date and time will not be considered.

VYTP staff persons are available throughout the grant process to provide consultation on the preparation of the application. Please contact Dr. Caroline Cobb at cobbco@vcu.edu or at (804) 828-1867 with any questions.

APPLICATION CHARACTERISTICS

A complete application will include, **in the following order**:

- Research Award Application Form (see attached)
- Project Budget Form (see attached)
- Project Budget Narrative (limited to 2 single-spaced pages, 1-inch margins, 11-point font)
- If the applicant's university does not participate in FDP, the VCU entity form for non-FDP Expanded Clearinghouse Subrecipients (<https://thefdp.org/default/expanded-clearinghouse/>).
- Research Plan (limited to 3, single-spaced pages, 1-inch margins, 11-point font)
- Bibliographic References

- Biographical Sketches of Key Staff including the student/trainee PI and their primary faculty mentor(s). NIH Biographical Sketch Common Form is preferred but not required.
- Letter(s) of Agreement/Support from the primary faculty mentor(s; ideally 1 page or less)

REQUIREMENTS OF THE PROPOSAL RESPONSE

To assure that sufficient information is included for technical merit review, the **Research Plan** should include the following and be organized under the following major headings. This section is **limited to 3, single-spaced pages, 1-inch margins, 11-point font**.

Specific Aims

- List the broad, long-term objectives and what the specific research proposed in this application is intended to accomplish. State the hypotheses to be tested.

Background and Significance

- Briefly describe the background leading to the present application.
- Critically evaluate existing knowledge and identify the gaps which the project is intended to fill.
- State concisely the importance and relevance of the proposed research to the field of youth tobacco use.
- Relate the specific aims to the broad, long-term objectives.

Research Design and Method

- Research design
- A description of the research setting or context of the project, particularly note any relationship to existing VFHY initiatives
- Operational definition of the subject population, access to subjects, the number of subjects, sampling design, etc.
- Research materials, procedures, and measures
- Data analyses and how they will answer the research questions
- Potential obstacles or problems that may occur and how these would be addressed
- Project timeline with major milestones

Future Research and Capacity Building

- How the project will enhance the capacity of the student to conduct research on the causes and prevention of youth tobacco use?
- How the results of the research will be disseminated:
 - o What publications, grant applications, and/or other products are anticipated as a direct result of the research?
 - o What dissemination methods will be employed beyond the research community including channels and tools targeting clinicians, public health practitioners, advocates, policymakers and/or the general public?

Failure to submit any component of the proposal response may result in finding the proposal non-responsive.

PEER REVIEW PROCESS

Upon receipt, applications will be reviewed for completeness and responsiveness by staff of the VYTP. Incomplete and/or non-responsive applications will be returned to the applicant without further consideration.

Applications that are complete and responsive to the RFA will be evaluated for scientific and technical merit by a multi-disciplinary committee consisting of the VYTP co-principal investigators, at least three VYTP members each from different universities, and a representative of the VFHY. In addition, if proposals are received requiring expertise not possessed by members of the scientific review group, in order to provide a competent review, consultation from persons with appropriate technical expertise will be sought. Review committee members will not participate in the review of proposals from their own institution or from their research partners.

REVIEW CRITERIA

All proposals will be evaluated using the criteria below. Proposals will be ranked according to their accumulated scoring.

1. **Significance/Relevance**. What is the relevance of the proposed study in helping to understand the causes of youth tobacco use and/or to improve youth tobacco use prevention and/or cessation services in Virginia? Does the study address an important problem in the field of youth tobacco use research? If the aims of the study are achieved, how do they advance scientific knowledge? Does the study help us understand youth tobacco use among the ethnic and geographically diverse populations of the Commonwealth? (Weight = 20 points)
2. **Approach**. Are the conceptual framework, design, methods, and analyses adequately developed, well integrated, and appropriate to the aims of the project? Are potential problem areas acknowledged and alternative tactics considered? Is the planned distribution of subjects by sex and if applicable race and ethnicity appropriate for the scientific goals of the research? (Weight = 25 points)
3. **Innovation**. Does the project employ novel concepts, approaches or methods? Are the aims original and innovative? Does the project challenge existing paradigms or develop new methodologies or technologies? (Weight = 10 points)
4. **Investigator**. Is the PI appropriately trained and well suited to carry out this work? Is the work proposed appropriate to the student/trainee PI's experience? (Weight = 10 points)
5. **Mentor and Environment**. Does the scientific environment including the project mentor in which the work will be done contribute to the probability of success? Is there evidence of mentor/institutional support? Is there a commitment of the resources, cooperation and/or collaborative arrangements needed to implement all components of the study? Is there demonstrated access to research subjects or databases to conduct the research? (Weight =

15 points)

6. Capacity. To what extent will implementation of the proposed research build the PI's capacity to engage in youth tobacco use research? Are the plans for the dissemination of research findings and the pursuit of future funding support adequate and inclusive of multiple outlets? (Weight = 15 points)
7. Budget. Are the proposed budget and the requested period of support in relation to the proposed research reasonable? (Weight = 5 points)

AWARD CRITERIA

In addition to scientific merit (as determined by the peer review), consideration will be given to the following factors in making award decisions:

- Representation of multiple public universities in Virginia.
- Representation of the broad spectrum of youth tobacco use research including basic, epidemiological, measurement, clinical/efficacy and services research, with a particular emphasis on the topics identified above.
- The use, when appropriate, of data obtained in Virginia.

RECEIPT AND REVIEW SCHEDULE

Application		Earliest Possible
<u>Receipt Date</u>	<u>Award Notification</u>	<u>Start Date</u>
October 30, 2024	December 16, 2026	January 1, 2027

SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS OF THE GRANTEE

- An interim progress report must be submitted in writing that describes the current status of the project including: challenges encountered, their likely impact and how they will be addressed; preliminary results (if any); and any publications, conference presentations and grant applications based on the project. A final progress report must also include final study results and public health impact. A template will be provided for these reports, and the recommended length of the reports is two pages. The interim progress report is due on April 1, 2027 and the final report is due within 30 days of the end of the grant period.
- An oral presentation on project progress at the April 2027 Virginia Conference on Youth Tobacco Use.
- The awardee is encouraged to prepare an article based on the project for publication; any publications related to the project must acknowledge the VFHY.
- Grantees must submit, on an annual basis for up to six years after the project period, a list of all publications, presentations, and grant submissions related to their study.

PRE-PROPOSAL MEETING

A pre-proposal meeting will be held via Zoom on **September 15, 2026 at 11:00am** for persons interested in responding to this announcement. A brief overview of the RFA will be provided and there will be an opportunity to ask questions. Participation is encouraged, but not required.

To register for the meeting, please use the following link to register (<https://us02web.zoom.us/join/8do-kR6GUpL8GDSs3zQ>) or e-mail Dr. Caroline Cobb at cobbco@vcu.edu by 5:00 pm on September 14, 2026.

WHERE TO SEND INQUIRIES AND APPLICATIONS

Caroline O. Cobb, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Department of Psychology
Director, Health Psychology
Virginia Commonwealth University
Email: cobbco@vcu.edu