



# Southwest Virginia Regional Bristol Casino Pitch Contest

The Southwest Virginia Bristol Casino Pitch Contest was designed to open opportunities to small businesses led by women and minorities and drive lasting economic development within the Appalachian Regional Commission's Southwest Virginia Region.

Sandy Ratliff, Virginia Community Capital & Carl Knoblock, Virginia Small Business Administration

## Virginia Community Capital

Virginia Community Capital is a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI). VCC Social Enterprise (VCCSE), VCC's holding company, oversees VCC Bank and LOCUS, the impact investing consulting arm of the organization.

VCCSE provides commercial lending, consulting, and advisory services (including technical assistance and business development) to underserved communities across the country through partnership, innovation, and expertise.

Use the QR code below to visit Virginia Community Capital's website and learn more about the Bristol Casino Pitch Contest



## CONTACT

Sandy Ratliff, Virginia Community Capital  
 Carl Knoblock, VA Small Business Administration  
 Email: [sratliff@vccva.org](mailto:sratliff@vccva.org)  
[carl.knoblock@sba.org](mailto:carl.knoblock@sba.org)  
 Phone: 276-477-3999  
 804-986-8901  
 Website: [vacommunitycapital.org](http://vacommunitycapital.org)

## OPPORTUNITY

Virginia Community Capital and the Virginia Small Business Administration recognized the potential to better connect rural small businesses with a creative growth opportunity resulting from the opening of the Hard Rock Bristol Casino. A pitch contest was designed to generate sustainable growth opportunities for small businesses while meeting the casino's procurement needs. Partners included the Virginia Tourism Corporation, Friends of Southwest Virginia, the Southwest Virginia Small Business Development Centers, Virginia Highlands Small Business Incubator, and Hard Rock Casino in Bristol, Virginia.

## COMMUNITY CONTEXT

The ARC areas of Southwest Virginia have a diverse economic history dominated historically by below-ground assets, namely coal. The textile and wood industries dominated other parts. Over time, those industries either left the region or greatly reduced their workforce and production activities. Today, the area is diversifying with a focus on above-ground assets in tourism.

Local coal industry entrepreneurs Jim McGlothlin and Clyde Stacy had the idea to turn a vacant shopping mall into a casino. As the visionaries and engines that brought Hard Rock Casino to Bristol, they also led advocacy at the Virginia General Assembly to support the casino's existence, which was followed by public referendums in not only Bristol, but four other areas of the Commonwealth. Without their leadership, the casino would not be in Bristol today, and none of the associated economic opportunities for locals or small business development would exist.



## STRATEGY

To connect local business owners with the opportunities created by the large casino's procurement needs, VCC initially connected with the SBA VA Director about the idea and quickly brought together local community and economic development experts in business and tourism support to create an original concept and pitch the idea to the Hard Rock over a four+ month timeframe. The collaboration enabled partners to:

- VCC conducted an effective outreach to a wide variety of small business owners and potential applicants regarding Casino opportunities;
- VCC provided training in-person and webinar technical assistance sessions to contest entrants from start to finish and beyond and leverage collective relationships to bring necessary resources to bear
- Strengthen partnerships and working relationships to achieve a greater impact on future initiatives.
- Program Timeline 2022:
  - Met with Hard Rock Bristol and Partners – August 11
  - Promotion launched in early September
  - Training & Information Sessions September 19 - 22
  - Applications were due on October 21
  - Top 10 finalists revealed on November 4
  - Final judging and awards announced on December 8.

Table 1. Hard Rock Bristol Casino Economic Impact

First Six Months	Dollar Impact
Adjusted Gross Revenue	\$81.97M
Gaming Tax Revenue for 14 Localities	\$4.91M
Added Tax Revenue Per Locality	\$351,000 each
Number of Visitors to Casino	661,786
Amount of Winnings Paid Out	\$45.33M
Procurement/Vendor Impact	\$15M prior to opening, \$36.75M from June-Dec. 2023

## OUTCOMES

- All small business owners who entered the contest were taken into consideration to become vendors of the Hard Rock Casino in Bristol.
- Over 1,300 individual members of the community participated in the one-week online voting portion of the contest once finalist pitch videos were published.
- President of Hard Rock Casino Bristol Allie Evangelista recognized the pitch contest as an exemplary initiative that her colleagues leading other Hard Rock locations could participate in when developing new projects.
- All partners pursued future collaboration on potential economic development projects in the region. The President of Hard Rock Casino Bristol requested that VCC replicate the project on an annual basis.
- Several regions in Virginia are currently preparing for casino development and have reached out to learn about the pitch contest.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- Businesses benefit from assistance in identifying new sales channels.
- The casino welcomed the opportunity to connect with new vendors to source goods and services.
- The program can help the casino reach its SWAM goals with the Virginia Lottery.
- Our service area communities appreciated helping businesses grow within their communities, create and retain jobs, and generate new tax money.
- This was an all-around win for both VCC, Hard Rock Casino, the businesses that competed to grow sales, and the region.

## NEXT STEPS

- VCC will support similar upcoming initiatives in casino investment communities.
- VCC will serve as a resource for small businesses by providing technical assistance and training opportunities.
- VCC will continue to serve as a catalyst for innovative community development with efforts to advance job creation, tax revenue, and economic prosperity across the Commonwealth.