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UVI RTPark Earns Six Excellence in Economic Development Awards from the International Economic Development Council

ST. CROIX, U.S. Virgin Islands | August 24, 2026 — The UVI Research and Technology Park (UVI RTPark) has won a record six 2026 Excellence in Economic Development Awards from the International Economic Development Council (IEDC), including three gold awards. This is RTPark's largest single-year IEDC recognition since its 2020 Economic Development Organization of the Year honor.

The awards honor Virgin Islands-led models in STEM, entrepreneurship, community finance and clean-energy resilience. During IEDC's 100th Anniversary, the world's largest association for economic developers is highlighting transformative projects that strengthen communities and advance best practices.

"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."

The six awards are:

- **Gold Award, Economic Equity & Inclusion:** UVI RTPark STEM Enrichment Program
- **Gold Award, Best Use of Federal Resources:** RTPark Solar Farm Project and the SPARK Initiative
- **Gold Award, Innovative Financing:** RTPark Community Impact Fund (CIF) VI LEAP Fund
- **Silver Award, Innovative Economic Development:** UVI RTPark STEM Enrichment Program
- **Silver Award, Special Purpose Website:** UVI RTPark STEM Enrichment Program Platform
- **Bronze Award, Special Event:** Startup Battle VI

Three awards recognize the UVI RTPark STEM Enrichment Program's territory-wide expansion through after-school programs, summer camps, STEAM Days and outreach. Activities generated more than 2,000 participant engagements through culturally relevant, 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."



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The University of the Virgin Islands (UVI) is a central partner in two honored initiatives. The Startup Battle USVI created a pathway for a UVI student-led venture to receive investment and mentorship, while the SPARK Initiative connects renewable energy infrastructure with applied learning.

The Gold Award for Best Use of Federal Resources reflects a broad partnership. The 423-kilowatt solar array was funded through a Federal Emergency Management Agency 406 Hazard Mitigation Grant, with support from the VI Office of Disaster Recovery, UVI and the Caribbean Green Technology Center, Volt Energy LLC, the VI Energy Office and the VI 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.”

The Gold Award for Innovative Financing recognizes the RTPark Community Impact Fund (CIF), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, for its leadership of the VI LEAP Fund and the Crucian Christmas Festival Microloan Program. CIF expands access to capital and technical assistance for businesses and organizations across the Virgin Islands, with the UVI RTPark serving as the 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 will recognize recipients at its Annual Conference in New Orleans, Oct. 25-28. Read the [official announcement](#) and award profiles online.

About UVI RTPark

The UVI Research and Technology Park, affiliated with the University of the Virgin Islands, supports technology businesses and invests in entrepreneurship, workforce development, infrastructure and STEM education to build a more resilient U.S. Virgin Islands economy. Learn more at uvirtpark.net.

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