



***BOOST!***

MAKING MENTAL HEALTH HAPPEN

## **Participant Guidelines**

*Last updated May 2025*



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## A. Background and Purpose

### Background

Virginia is in the midst of a mental health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, societal stressors and a shortage of licensed behavioral health (BH) professionals. Those who exist are overwhelmed and many Virginians are unable to get the help they need.

The shortage of BH professionals is not a new problem. Community Health Needs Assessments conducted by Virginia's nonprofit hospitals over the past twelve years have consistently identified availability of mental health services as top issue to be addressed. As of November 2023, all of Virginia became a federally-designated Mental Health Professional Shortage Area.

The gravity and nature of the BH workforce shortage is documented in an [Assessment of the Capacity of Virginia's Licensed Behavioral Health Workforce](#), released by the Virginia Health Care Foundation (VHCF) in January 2022. Not only are there insufficient numbers of needed behavioral health professionals, the race and ethnicity of those practicing is not proportionate to the population of Virginia. In addition, many are nearing retirement age and the pipeline to replace them is woefully inadequate. Demand is expected to outpace available behavioral health services for at least the next decade.

One significant barrier faced by many who want to become a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW), Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC), or Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT) is the financial cost of the clinical supervision hours required for licensure (*about \$10,000 and \$20,000, respectively*).

Many Supervisees in Social Work and Residents in Counseling must pay out-of-pocket for their supervision and are unable to do so given the high costs of basic living expenses and the obligation to pay back student loans. As a result, every year there are Masters graduates who want to become licensed therapists in Virginia, but are stymied by the massive financial roadblock of supervision costs.

To help address this barrier and increase the availability of basic mental health services, the General Assembly and the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) funded *Boost 200* in 2022. This special initiative has accelerated licensure of 200 Masters-prepared therapists in Virginia by paying for the supervision hours required for their licensure. Success and demand have helped the program grow and it is now *Boost!*.

*Boost!* is administered by VHCF ([www.vhcf.org](http://www.vhcf.org)), a public-private partnership, deeply invested in increasing access to basic mental health services for Virginians. To date, VHCF has invested more than \$16.5 million to make licensed behavioral professionals, tele-mental health services, sites providing basic behavioral health services to the underserved, and behavioral health best practices, such as integrated and trauma-informed care, available throughout the Commonwealth.

## Purpose

The purpose of *Boost!* is twofold. It will immediately result in Masters-prepared individuals providing mental health services under Supervision, to help meet the skyrocketing demand. Simultaneously, it will help accelerate licensure of LCSWs, LMFTs and LPCs throughout the state.

## **B. *Boost!* Eligibility Requirements/Priority Categories**

- The following types of therapists aspiring to be licensed are eligible to apply:
  - ✓ Masters-prepared Social Workers, Counselors or Marriage and Family Therapists, who have applied to the Virginia Department of Health Professions (*DHP*) to begin supervision
  - ✓ Residents in Counseling or Marriage and Family Therapy licensed by the DHP
  - ✓ Current Supervisees in Social Work approved by the DHP
- All applicants must be paying out-of-pocket for all or most of their licensure-required Supervision; and also:
  - ✓ Be eligible to work in the US for any employer without Visa sponsorship;
  - ✓ Be free from judgements arising from federal or state debt; and
  - ✓ Not have any existing service obligations with other entities loans or scholarships.
- Priority consideration will be given to qualified applicants who best address the needs identified in [\*VHCF's Assessment of the Capacity of Virginia's Licensed Behavioral Health Workforce\*](#).
- Preference will also be given to eligible applicants who are just starting their journey to licensure, however, applicants who have completed no more than 60% of the required clinical and Supervision hours to become licensed as an LCSW, LMFT or LPC in Virginia will also be considered. This is:
  - ✓ Up to 1800 Clinical hours/60 Supervision hours for Supervisees in Social Work.
  - ✓ Up to 2040 Clinical hours/120 Supervision hours for Residents in Marriage and Family Therapy.
  - ✓ Up to 2040 Clinical hours/120 Supervision hours for Residents in Counseling.

**Note: *Boost!* applicants must find and secure their Supervisor(s). If you need help finding one, the DHP posts approved supervisors on its website ([social work](#), [counseling](#)), and some DHP-approved supervisors have chosen to be on this [list](#).**

### C. Applicant Commitments

All *Boost!* applicants (*social workers, counselors and marriage and family therapists*) must commit to the following:

- A **2-year full-time** (*40 hours per week; 4,000 hours total*) **service obligation to practice in Virginia**, once licensed as an LCSW, LMFT or LPC;
- **Completing the clinical hours and Supervision hours** (LCSW: 3,000/100; LMFT: 3,400/200; LPC: 3,400/200) required for licensure in Virginia in a timely fashion and **without delay**;
- Reporting the number of clinical (*direct/ancillary*) and Supervision hours completed to VHCF monthly via a tracking tool provided by the Foundation;
- Participating in *Boost!* Orientation, evaluation of the initiative and marketing/promotion; and
- Taking the DHP-required licensure exam as follows:
  - ✓ Counselors should take their exam within six months of starting *Boost!* (Refer to the [DHP Licensure Handbook for Counselors](#), [DHP Licensure Handbook for Marriage and Family Therapists](#) for requirements and process).
  - ✓ Social workers must apply to the Board of Social Work for approval to test within two weeks of completing all required clinical and Supervision hours. They must also take the licensure exam within two weeks of obtaining Board approval to test or on first available test date, whichever comes first. (Refer to the [DHP Licensure Handbook for Social Workers](#) for requirements and process).

***In addition, Residents in Counseling and Marriage and Family Therapy must submit their application for LPC and LMFT Licensure by Examination within 2 weeks of completing all licensure requirements.***

### D. Applying for *Boost!*

Interested applicants must complete the *Boost! Intent to Apply Form*. Paper applications will not be accepted.

The *Boost!* Intent to Apply Form gathers the applicant's personal, contact, financial and demographic information; education and work experience; and Supervision information.

VHCF will review the information provided and invite those who meet the criteria to submit a full application to include a [Personal Statement](#); current

resume; and [Recommendation Form](#) completed by someone who has supervised the applicant for at least 100 internship hours and is familiar with the applicants clinical skills.

- Award decisions will be communicated to all applicants.
- Incomplete applications will not be considered.

Note: A .pdf preview of the application is available on the *Boost!* website.

#### **E. *Boost!* Enrollment**

To enroll in *Boost!*, all accepted applicants must provide:

- Copy of official DHP letter of supervision approval as a Supervisee in Social Work, Temporary License as a Resident in Marriage and Family Therapy; or Temporary License as a Resident in Counseling;
- Signed Supervisory Contract;
- Signed *Boost!* Contract; and
- Documentation of clinical and Supervision hours completed, to-date.

***Note: Boost! does not have sufficient fund to cover Supervision hours beyond the DHP's required hours (social work: 100, counselors: 200).***

#### **F. Continued Participation in *Boost!***

Ongoing participation in *Boost!* is dependent upon the participant:

- Making satisfactory progress on fulfilment of required clinical and Supervision hours;
- Maintaining good standing with the DHP;
- Completing required reporting of Supervision and clinical hours to VHCF in a timely manner; and
- Communicating changes in employment, Supervision, and other key information to the Foundation in a timely manner.

More details will be provided at Orientation and in the *Boost!* Contract.

*Boost! participants and their Supervisors must follow all Virginia DHP requirements to achieve and maintain licensure in the Commonwealth.*

#### **G. Service Commitment**

*Boost!* LPCs/LCSWs/LMFTs may fulfill their Service Commitment in any setting and with any patient/client population in Virginia. Participants must offer in-person counseling in Virginia, serving residents of Virginia. While it may include some telehealth services, the service commitment may not be fulfilled exclusively through providing telehealth services.

*Boost!* participants must work full-time as an LPC, LCSW or LMFT in Virginia for two (2) years or 4,000 hours after becoming licensed. With VHCF permission, *Boost!* licensed therapists may work part-time (*at least 20 hours/week*), completing the obligation in a maximum of 48 months, if necessary.

Participants are required to complete and submit VHCF's quarterly Report of Service Commitment Form, documenting progress towards the 4,000 hour Service Commitment.

## **H. Department of Health Professional (DHP) Regulations**

*Boost!* participants and their Supervisors must follow all DHP requirements and regulations to achieve and maintain licensure (*including Supervision requirements*) in the Commonwealth for the duration of *Boost!* participation.

Supervision approval is granted by the DHP. **VHCF/*Boost!* does not have the authority to grant Supervision approval for Supervisees/Residents or approve Supervisors.**

- For more information about the DHP Supervision requirements and how to apply for Supervision as a Resident in Counseling or Resident in Marriage and Family Therapy go to: <https://www.dhp.virginia.gov/counseling/>
- For more information about the DHP Supervision requirements and how to apply for Supervision as a Supervisee in Social Work go to: <https://www.dhp.virginia.gov/social/>

## **I. Application Process**

Completion of the Intent to Apply Form is required. All forms will be reviewed and those invited to submit a full application will have 2 weeks to submit the following:

- An up-to-date resume
- Personal statement
- Recommendation form from internship supervisor or current supervisor familiar with your clinical skills

## **J. Program Orientation Access to Technical Assistance and Support Services**

Those participants and supervisors accepted into the *Boost!* program will be required to attend a mandatory orientation session that will cover the program requirements and expectations.

VHCF will provide the following technical assistance and support services to assist you on your licensure journey:

- Clinical and supervision hours tracking software
- Exam preparation resources
- Licensure pathway resources