

**Joint meeting of the Center for Economic and Community Engagement Advisory Board  
and the Virginia Tech Council on Vibrant Virginia**

Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center  
1900 Kraft Drive, Moss Research Building, Blacksburg  
Curiosity Conference Room  
September 11, 10:00 AM - 1:00 PM

CECE Advisory Board In-person attendance: Guru Ghosh (Chair), Susan Short, John Capps, Kiyah Duffey, Omar Faison, John Provo, Pam VandeVord, David Devan, Isabel Bradburn, Karen Sanders, Monica Kimbrell (proxy for Laura Belmonte), Leanna Blevins

CECE Advisory Board in Attendance via Zoom: Blair Durham, Steve Harrison, Marc Nelson, Christina Winn, Mike Gutter, Catherine Amelink, Sandra McCutcheon (proxy for Conaway Haskins), Richard Gibson (proxy for Elizabeth McClanahan), Erik Johnston, Leanna Blevins, Lisa McNair, Tracy Krauchun

CECE staff in Attendance: Barb Reibsamen, Dylan Andrews, Holly Carroll, Kim Gray, Julia Kell, Sarah Lyon-Hill, Makenzie Mann, Afrozeh Mohammed (virtual), Ashley Posthumus (virtual), John Register, Jemma Sabokrouh, Caroline Buttemere, Elli Travis, Emmalee Wagner, Katie Lee, Scott Tate

OTHER ATTENDEES: Allison Mays, Kaitlyn Bare, Diane Deffenbaugh, Rich Mathieson, OIA Director of Marketing and Communications, panelist John Accordino (virtual), panelist Pace Lochte (virtual), panelist Jon Porter

10:00 AM Guru called the meeting to order; self-introductions were made.

10:15 Welcome – Guru Ghosh, Vice President, Outreach and International Affairs

There were discussions on workforce development and demographics as an overview as it paralleled President Sands' September 11, 2025, Council meeting discussion.

10:18 Director's Report – John Provo, Executive Director, CECE

John discussed CECE's charge, which includes increasing the university's impact, elevating the Ut Prosim difference, maintaining a transdisciplinary focus, and addressing the urban-rural divide. He touched on the strategic funding landscape and the typical sources of CECE funding. CECE's immediate response includes economizing, continuing strategic partnerships with groups supporting some faculty positions, focusing on ARC, US EDA, GOVA, AM2 Hubs, and accepting new business opportunities. New opportunities CECE is focusing on are Return to Roots internships for VT, industry-driven pipeline programs, regional economic development board training programs, and the Vibrant Virginia (VV) program.

Program updates included regional transformation, talent development and experiential learning, community innovations, impact, design, and evaluation of current or completed projects, as well as talent development and experiential learning. John discussed projects that are under current review.

New CECE personnel were introduced: Barb Reibsamen, Program Coordinator and GAs Caroline Buttemere and Victoria Blackham.

Discussion was opened and John Capps asked about CECE's capacity to do additional work. John Provo talked of strategic planning for various positions. Susan Short spoke highly of Scott Tate, Afroze Mohammed, and Mallory Tuttle's work. Susan also spoke of Omar Faison's work with CECE and the communications department work on the Center's magazine. In addition, she acknowledged the work being completed by Allison Mays and Kaitlyn Bare in the SWVA Center.

Guru Ghosh questioned whether we are having regional and national discussions about the gaps in the needs of industry.

John Provo explained matching regional drivers with individuals in various communities. He expanded on CECE's work in Tazewell with a focus on those returning to the work force following addiction or incarceration.

10: 54 Minutes from 2024 were approved unanimously

10: 55 Panel discussion on the economic and policy landscape and its impact on our work

Panelists included:

- John Accordino, Professor of Urban and Regional Planning, Virginia Commonwealth University;
- Pace Lochte, Assistant Vice President for Economic Development, University of Virginia, Board Member, Virginia Economic Development Partnership;
- Jon Porter, Associate VP, Strategic Research Alliances, Virginia Tech;
- Pace Lochte, Assistant Vice President for Economic Development, University of Virginia, and Board Member with the Virginia Economic Development Partnership; and
- John Accordino, Professor of Urban and Regional Planning, Virginia Commonwealth University.

As part of his reflection portion, John Provo introduced the panel. John Accordino was asked what was different in his economic/community development for him now than it was for last year. John indicated that we should not rely on federal funds. The uncertainty at the federal level has forced convergent development. This concept is the intersection of traditional economic-based development to build traded sector competitive industries with community development in proximity. He expanded at length on the case study with Danville, Culpeper and Harrisonburg that has been working for 25 years towards convergence development.

Pace Lochte indicated that GO Virginia was created to have less reliance on the federal government. Talent, energy, and housing are the top three things that companies are mentioning that help make decisions about how to solve these issues. Higher education can be a participant in this work and needs to be a better partner to VEDP.

Jon Porter said what is different today than compared to a year ago is the funding cuts by the new administration. With every administration, there are funding cuts, private cuts, and changes in priorities. The immediacy surprised some people and workforce reductions seemed random. His network of contacts was decimated by such reductions in force. He indicated that developing new priorities and new initiatives are needed to capitalize on what the new landscape will look like.

John Accordino indicated the state must set markers and Go Virginia is doing that. Go Virginia focuses on traded sector industries. David Devan provided feedback on this topic. The universities can share applied research by solving a regional issue as CECE does. Long-term relationships like those between CECE and Go Virginia are critical.

Pace Lochte has seen lots of investment in life sciences, digital, IT, and national security. He indicated they are working on a strategic road map to focus on what they are good at and what assets they have. He emphasized that relationship building is a huge component. Discussion continued about the importance of such relationships.

12:00 Vibrant Virginia (VV), accomplishments, and plans; Scott Tate, Associate Director for Community Innovations, CECE

Scott spoke of the positive returns for the past year. OIA invested \$20K in Vibrant Virginia program initiatives, which resulted in nearly \$163K in additional funding for Vibrant Virginia program activities along with \$260K in leveraged funding for other community activities across the Commonwealth. Vibrant Virginia's vision is to encourage vibrant and flourishing places in every part of the commonwealth. The vision is carried out through place-based partnerships and exploration projects, faculty-initiated micro projects, and civic well-being initiatives.

Place-based partnerships and explanatory are in a specific place, including an anchor partner, issue or challenge of Vibrant Virginia –relevance, and sustained engagement opportunities.

Examples include Project 13Three in Tazewell County with a theme of recovery and re-entry into the ecosystem and the Harvest Foundation in Martinsville-Henry County with a theme of youth flourishing.

Faculty-initiated micro-projects helped over a dozen faculty explore Vibrant Virginia project ideas. Four projects were identified for \$10K seed funding awards. One of these awards went towards supporting the creation of community-focused exhibits and events along Route 76 in Virginia to promote recreation tourism along a historic cycling route.

The community well-being initiative has a working group, a landscape assessment and Gap analysis of community leadership and civic involvement programming in Virginia, and VCE program team development of program-related ideas and resources.

Discussion ensued to include the topic of the drone industry and how Radford now has a company collaborating with drone parts as 95% of drone parts are currently made in China. Guru Ghosh suggested we explore how to nuance and impact Virginia in different ways within this industry.

12:51 PM meeting adjourned

Respectfully submitted,

Kim Gray, Recording Secretary