



**Joint meeting of the Center for Economic and Community Engagement (CECE) Advisory Board
and the Virginia Tech Council on Vibrant Virginia
Inn at Virginia Tech
901 Prices Fork Road, Blacksburg
Drillfield Conference Room
September 28, 2023, 10:00 AM - 1:00 PM**

- 10:00 AM Welcome and Introductions
- Guru Ghosh, Vice President, Outreach & International Affairs
- 10:15 AM Director's Report and Board Actions
- John Provo, Executive Director, CECE
- 10:45 PM Community Innovations/Student Engagement Spotlight
- St. Paul's College for Life (SPC4Life), Organizational Development: Pamplin College of Business, College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences
 - Chris Stephenson, SPC4Life
 - Scott Tate, Associate Director for Community Innovations, CECE
 - National Main Street Foundation and Virginia Main Streets, Remote Work for Virginia: College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences
 - John Provo, Executive Director, CECE
 - Jason Schwartz, Virginia Tech MURP Class of 2023, Presidential Management Fellow, US Office of Personnel Management
 - Allison Ulaky Virginia Tech MURP Class of 2023, Research Analyst, Center for Regional Economic Competitiveness
- 11:15 PM Vibrant Virginia Update and Proposal
- John Provo, Executive Director, CECE
 - Scott Tate, Associate Director for Community Innovations, CECE
- 12:00 PM Open discussion, future goals and objectives (Working Lunch)
- 1:00 PM Adjournment

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://virginiatech.zoom.us/j/81880842352?pwd=bWgwMDRBRIN0c2x4c0Y3WGpzTittZz09>

Meeting ID: 818 8084 2352

Passcode: 234112



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**Center for Economic and Community
Engagement**

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Moss Research Bldg, Suite 1200
Blacksburg, VA 24061
<https://cece.vt.edu/>

Links

Virginia Remote Work Study:

https://cece.vt.edu/content/dam/cece_vt_edu/projects/Virginia%20Remote%20Work%20Study.pdf

2022-2023 CECE Magazine: https://cece.vt.edu/content/dam/cece_vt_edu/cece-magazines/CECE%202022-2023%20Magazine.pdf

Collaboration with Southside community is reimagining a historically Black college:

<https://cece.vt.edu/about/news/saint-pauls-college.html>

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

Inn at Virginia Tech

901 Prices Fork Road, Blacksburg

Solitude Conference Room

March 10, 2023, 11 AM-2 PM

Attending in person: Lisa McNair, Elli Travis (staff), Holly Carroll (staff), Julia Kell (staff), Scott Tate (staff), John Provo (staff), Guru Ghosh (Chairman), Catherine Amelink, Omar Faison, Susan Short, Deborah Flippo, Karen Roberto,

Attending virtually: Quina Weber-Shirk (staff), Leah Fremouw, Erik Johnston, Matthew Hult, Afroze Mohammed (staff), Steve Harrison, Emma Brown (staff), Christina Winn, Bob Stolle, Anna Nagorniuk (staff), David Devan

Absent:

Speakers: Pam Vandevord, Brett Malone, Feng Lin, Masoud LAST NAME SPELLING,

Welcome and Introductions

Dr. Guru Ghosh welcomed attendees and board members and noted a strong commitment to economic development across the Commonwealth. In person and virtual attendees introduced themselves and their organizations.

Director's Report and Board Actions

John Provo thanked attendees for their service on the Advisory Board and Vibrant Virginia Board. Their role is critical to CECE executing their charge. John discussed CECE's internal strategic plan process over the last year and its impact on the mission and values of the Center.

John went through portfolio updates and highlighted a project for each geography and project size. The EDA University Center program and UC Cohort Project are aligned initiatives. As a University Center, CECE is invited to participate in UC Cohort program. The UC Cohort Program, a CECE contract led by Elli Travis, seeks to align UCs across the country and increase collaboration among UC programs. The EDA UC program is seen as a team building tool and asset to grow relationships with organizations like VSU and impacted areas in Virginia.

Around the urban crescent, there are a number of projects. Afroze Mohammed led the Greater Washington initiatives and works closely with faculty at the VT Innovation Campus, ECE faculty, and Space @ VT. There is also an opportunity to work with Black BRAND and Blair Durham on a developmental evaluation project.

Closer to Blacksburg and main campus, CECE started a strategic partnership with VERGE to amplify grant capacity and sort through a portfolio of projects. The Star Theatre Feasibility Study focused on the rehabilitation and re-use of a theatre in the Town of Stuart. This is an example of a flipped project where the graduate assistants led the project and faculty staffed it as needed.

There are currently six projects under review, including two multi-million dollar NSF proposals, a multi-million dollar DOE proposal on hydrogen with the CRC, and a multi-million dollar proposal to USAID with CIREC. Across these large proposals under review, there was tremendous team effort across the university, state, and internal VT team.

Karen Roberto asked for more information about the community-based research with CALS. Elli shared that this project has come out of a year-long partnership with CALS and other university stakeholders to work on connecting farmworker needs.

John shared five personnel updates. Emma Brown is new to the Center and assists the Region 2 Internship Collaborative. Scott Tate has a new title of Associate Director for Community Innovation. Elli Travis is newly the Senior Economic Development Specialist and is finishing her PhD this summer. Quina Weber-Shirk was promoted to program manager of the Region 2 Internship Collaborative and GO Virginia. CECE is hosting Joanie Willett, a Fulbright scholar focusing on rural development, particularly Main Street programs.

John shared that there are four new board members: Sara Dunnigan, Deputy Director Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, Michael Gutter, Director of Virginia Cooperative Extension, Lauren Stuhldreher, economic development representative for Virginia to U.S. E.D.A., and Christina Winn, Executive Director of Prince William County Economic Development and President of the Virginia Economic Developers' Association.

John asked attendees about additional questions they may have. David Devan commented he was glad to hear about Ashley working on grant funding capacity building because Virginia consistently secures less federal funding than some of our competitive states. David also asked who Afroze is partnering with on entrepreneurship initiatives at the Innovation Campus. Bob commented that Northern Virginia and entrepreneurship is a key industry cluster they are looking at developing. David noted that there is a lot of good activity in the area and wants to make sure Virginia Tech is tapping into existing programs and assets. John circled back to David's comment about grant funding and shared that Region 2 GO Virginia is planning a rural convening with key stakeholders, including PDCS, with the belief that partnering and scaling together is a strategy to secure additional funding.

Susan Short shared that Outreach & International Affairs is a new resident in the Corporate Research Center. CECE, Continuing and Professional Education, and Outreach Information Services will move to 1900 Kraft Dr in April. Brett commented that the CRC is a center for economic growth and will keep CECE busy with all the potential partners.

John shared that there's a connection between the CRC and Hampton Roads in their Hydrogen Hub. Brett shared it is helpful and valuable to have CECE as a strategic partner on funding opportunities.

Karen Roberto moved to approve the Fall board meeting minutes, Susan Short seconded. September meeting minutes were approved unanimously.

Virginia Tech and GO Virginia Panel Discussion

John asked panelists to describe their role and connection to GO Virginia. Brett Malone shared that GO Virginia has been critical to developing capacity and focusing on key industry sectors. Brett took over for the CRC in the middle of the pandemic and focused on what space and working would look like. During

the pandemic, the CRC focused on labs. Many companies were able to work from home, but labs needed space. Through GO Virginia, the CRC designed a start-up, commercial lab for entrepreneurs to use without making a full investment in their own space. GO Virginia helped the CRC map out the need, develop a pilot, and create a map for what growth will be.

Pam shared that she has been the Associate Dean for COE for a little over two years and met CECE through Build Back Better due to the focus on advanced manufacturing. In the COE, there has been a focus on manufacturing for years due to the desperate need. Through Build Back Better, Pam and her team met with industry partners in the region and discussed industry needs and skill sets. After losing the second phase of BBB funding, Pam was approached by John to scale the workforce and education section of the program to a GO Virginia grant.

Masoud shared he has been VT faculty since 2005 and his research focuses on chips. In VMEC, Masoud saw great potential in industry partnerships and proposed creating a nanotechnology network. It became the Virginia Nanotechnology Network Institute. Masoud met John through a webinar and started chatting about GO Virginia and connected Masoud with Susan Baker from the Northern Virginia GO Virginia region. After meeting with relevant stakeholders and generating supporting, Masoud applied for 3.2 million in GO Virginia state funding.

Brett shared that GO Virginia region 5 started a hydrogen hub mapping due to the potential to set up a hydrogen cluster in the Hampton Roads area. It has been a great collaboration between the Port, Jefferson National Labs, Hampton Roads Alliance, and local governments in the region. It will be reviewed on 3/14. This has led to the CRC and CECE's involvement in Hydrogen Hubs. The Mid-Atlantic Hydrogen Hub is a \$1.25 billion proposal to the Department of Energy with \$125 million coming to the CRC and CECE.

John shared that GO Virginia (Growth & Opportunity Virginia) has statewide funding and region-specific funding for its 9 region around the state. Other folks involved, Catherine Amelink, Omar Faison, and Matthew Hult, have all had GO Virginia grants. It can go beyond higher education and provides opportunities to chip towards positive growth for the Commonwealth.

John asked Masoud to share more about his partners. Masoud shares that many universities in VA have activity and facilities around chips and microelectronic packaging. This led to many resources across Virginia. By partnering with more than just Virginia Tech, there is a greater impact across the state and builds connections across the state.

John asked Pam to share about her network. She is partnering with Virginia Tech, New River Community College, Central VA Community College, and Liberty University. At a convening in Roanoke, Pam will pull together industry stakeholders and education partners to discuss industry-driven education.

John shared that the 2023 State Budget may include \$40M for industry-education partnerships and dialogue. John asked Brett about how he navigates partnership on the university side of things. Brett shared they only pursue projects that benefit Virginia Tech. With shared labs, the CRC is working to engage entrepreneurial faculty in the labs. GO Virginia requires matching funds and it drives applicants to build strong, engaged partnerships. GO Virginia funding is considered the spark and catalyzing force behind programs.

Pam shared that, from COE's perspective, a key goal is to have an interdisciplinary focus and connections. Dr. Chris Williams, for example, is a leader in advanced manufacturing and pushes his students to discuss the need for the skillset in the community. Chris has been working MELD, based in Christiansburg, on growing competencies needed for work with her organization.

Masoud shared that he has not received GO Virginia funding yet, but he read the full growth and diversification plan for Northern Virginia, read all of Chips and Science Act documentation, and many other national sources to gauge where the national is going with semi-conductors. There are many jobs coming down at various education levels, and Northern VA has a lot of work on how to grow new business in chips, nanotechnology, and quantum. Brett commented that the growth and diversification plans are an excellent resource in understanding your GO Virginia region and determining how to align your project with the goals of the GO Virginia board.

Karen asked how receptive are faculty to getting engaged and what strategies have you used. Pam answered that faculty tend to be very receptive and excited about new opportunities. Matt Earnest had an award already at the time Pam was recruiting for her proposal. Now, Pam is getting pinged about network building and building partnerships in the departments. Karen followed up to ask how many students are engaged in the process. Two graduate assistants are assigned to the new projects. They envision the modules will be completed by 300 learners by the end of year two and they have targets for industry involvement as well.

Lisa asked what the trajectory and connectivity is between the stages of learners engaged in Masoud's proposal. Masoud shared that many undergraduate students are interested in AI and software, but there is no AI or software without chips. High schools are engaged in software, but not hardware. There is a push to educate students about what hardware does in technology, visit facilities, and show them what is happening. Adult learners and veterans already have strong soft skills, so providing technical skills is the main focus. Brett shared that talent retention is a clear and vital aspect of running these programs.

John asked Stephen what are the key questions about partnering in Hampton Roads from the other side of the state. Newport News Center is an excellent opportunity for Hampton Roads to get involved with Virginia Tech. Stephen shared that the Hydrogen Hub proposals are the best example of partnerships in Hampton Roads from another part of the state. Stephen is excited about future collaborations and the connections VT provided.

John asked Christina what VT may want to think about for connecting with Prince William County. When Christina was still in Arlington, Afroze was a really powerful resource for connecting a specific proposal topic to university expertise. She acted as a one-stop person to go to who could deliver. As the Innovation Campus grows, Prince William is interested in working with Virginia Tech. George Mason applies for GO Virginia region 7 grants and would love to see more of that collaboration with Virginia Tech. When businesses are being brought together, Prince William would like to see Virginia Tech at the table.

Scott commented that CECE is proud to lift up non-Virginia Tech entities, particularly in GO Virginia region 2, to access GO Virginia funding. GO Virginia Region 2 has 40+ projects in the region, including many non-education partners.

The Board breaks for 15 minutes to get lunch and will reconvene at 1 PM.

Vibrant Virginia Panel Discussion

Scott Tate led the VV panel discussion. Vibrant Virginia started as a charge to address how higher education can help bridge the urban-rural divide in Virginia and understanding how folks across the state can work together. Seed funding was distributed for 2018-2020 and 2021-2023. Scott provided a description of previous VV seed funding programs. Vibrant Virginia also led to the completion of a book covering rural-urban divide issues in the Commonwealth. In 2020, for VV 2.0, a large priority was a large in person conference that was converted to a virtual conference series.

John and Feng Lin discussed the impact fund grantee program for 2021-2023. Feng Lin has been with the Dept of Chemistry since 2016 and has been developing advanced battery technology to make electric vehicle batteries more affordable. John shared that impact fund grantees had a breadth of topic areas and charges. Making batteries more affordable and using existing carbon materials to do so is a major focus in Feng's work. Coal waste is another resource for carbon retrieval. If it can be harvested and converted to battery grade materials, it will support cost reduction. The impact fund grant was used to support graduate students. The research product was used for Department of Energy grant to re-use low cost coal for batteries and received funding. Without the impact fund, Feng shared he would not have known coal would be a cost reducing tool. In 2021, there was a DOE workshop asking everyone to think about what the next step would be in natural vehicle batteries. Fast charging is a critical next step. The low temperature performance for electric vehicles is important for factories. Most batteries use nickel and cobalt, but the U.S. has a very small part of the reserve. A mismatch is seen in the number of vehicles Americans drive – we drive 20% of the vehicles and have a very small percentage of the needed materials for vehicle batteries. Feng is also the CEO of a startup participating in the RAMP program. Feng was tenured and promoted to associate professor early on, and had a focus on battery research since. Feng had a graduate assistant leaving his lab and received offers from major electric battery manufacturers. Around the same time, Feng was looking to start his company and they decided to partner together. Through the RAMP program, they've found a business model of making the most critical piece of the battery.

Scott discussed what is next for Vibrant Virginia and the relevance of the program for the university and the state. With a large rural-urban divide and Virginia Tech's commitment to the Beyond Boundaries initiative, it is very relevant. One piece of the new program is to have broad, community conversations across the state. From convenings, Vibrant Virginia would develop a faculty-community collaborative to address a narrow piece of a Virginia problem locally. Another piece of the program is identifying faculty affiliates who would want to be involved with a community solution.

Mary from the Allegheny Foundation shared about her experience working with Virginia Tech, particularly what the opportunities and pain points were. Mary's first experience with Virginia Tech was with 4-H and Extension agents. Mary shared her first lesson was when she came to work at the Allegheny Foundation and had a project with Virginia Tech about community-based architecture, which led to the Covington Farmer's Work and the Masonic amphitheater project. One key aspect of this program was a lack of housing and pipeline of opportunities in some rural areas. The program was eliminated after five years. During the five years, they were building trust and then, when the program ended abruptly, it left negative feelings. A tip going out of this is to set expectations appropriately and not end up at a hard stop unintentionally.

Mary also worked with Virginia Tech on a research based project and tried to assess lodging needs. Working with faculty on a defined research project has been a positive element. Alleghany had a need for a defined research problem, but didn't know where to go. A tip for VT would be to develop a portal or entry page. Anything Virginia Tech can do to market community problems and ability to address them. Alleghany had a rich history of manufacturing and technology in raw materials sector, and wanted a way to assess and evaluate opportunities. Despite coming to Virginia Tech to talk about the issue and receiving a few leads, this project didn't go anywhere. Staffing and personnel changes are a struggle.

Scott asked about criteria for selecting a community for deeper connections. Virginia Funders Network has a list of foundations, United Ways, and private funders that can be shared. Some people are not readily available to discuss their biggest issue – a useful facilitation tool might be what becomes additive, what already is underway in your community, what is an asset we can convene around. Equity and inequity with caveat that border counties tend to be overlooked, but that can be a tough conversation to have and a lot of work.

Feng shared that, in his experience, he was lucky to be introduced to many key partners. One thing they didn't realize was how important this work was in Virginia and SW Virginia.

Masoud commented that there is not a single place to get consolidated information in Virginia and hopes an outcome of his grant will be consolidating information and contact information. North Carolina used to have a data tool to search and find faculty doing aligned work. Scott shared that there are Vibrant Virginia opportunities: 1. Faculty can get engaged in Vibrant VA communities of practices, 2. CECE will be exploring additional convening through this year.

Open Discussion, Future Goals, and Objectives

Adjournment

Susan thanked the speakers, attendees, and staff for their candor and advice. Vice Chair Susan Short adjourned the meeting at 1:59 PM.



**CENTER FOR ECONOMIC
AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Director's Report
Fall 2023



OUTREACH & INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
**CENTER FOR ECONOMIC AND
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VIRGINIA TECH.

Our Charge

- Increasing the university's impact
- Elevating the *Ut Prosim* difference
- Maintaining a transdisciplinary focus
- Addressing the urban-rural divide



Mission

We advance economic and community prosperity through delivery of applied research, engaged partnerships, and targeted university expertise.

We value:

- Connecting communities
- Collaboration and teamwork
- Continuous learning
- Community-tailored research
- Promoting equitable development





PORTFOLIO UPDATES



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Current Highlights

National and Multi-state

- Appalshop, WMMT Impact and Expansion Feasibility Project (Southern West Virginia, Eastern Kentucky, Southwest Virginia)
- National Science Foundation, Economic Impact of VR in Unmanned Systems, with Virginia Tech Aerospace and Ocean Engineering
- National Science Foundation, Phase One Convergence Accelerator, Precision Agriculture for a Resilient Vegetable Supply Amidst Climate Change, with Virginia Tech Applied Research Corporation, and School of Plant and Environmental Sciences, Mid Atlantic Aviation Partnership, Sanghani Center for Artificial Intelligence and Data, Center for Educational Networks and Impacts, and Virginia Cooperative Extension
- University Economic Development Association, University Center Cohort Program

Precision Agriculture for a Resilient Vegetable Supply Amidst Climate Change



Current Highlights



State and Multi-regional

- College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Community-based Research and Outreach for Farmworker Wellness in Virginia, Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia State University
- USDA-National Institute of Food and Agriculture, Small business health and organizational wellbeing workshop with Virginia Tech's Agricultural and Applied Economics Department
- US Economic Development Administration, University Center Program with Virginia State University
- Virginia Economic Development Partnership, Impact of the Virginia Data Center Industry and a Review of Incentive Strategies, with George Mason University
- Virginia Transportation Construction Alliance, Economic Impact Assessment of Crushed Stone Quarrying in Virginia

Current Highlights

New River, Roanoke/Alleghany, Lynchburg

- GO Virginia Region 2 (Roanoke-Blacksburg-Lynchburg), Support Organization Services, Talent Pipeline Initiative
- Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce, Best Places to Work Survey
- New River/Mount Rogers Workforce Development Board: Strategic Plan, Early Childhood Education Career Lattice, Workforce Reports and Data Analysis
- V-TOP Region 2 Internship Collaborative, (Roanoke-Blacksburg-Lynchburg), Coordinator
- The Highland Center (Town of Monterey), Economic Impact Analysis Highland Inn
- VERGE Alliance (Roanoke-Blacksburg), Strategic Services
- Virginia Tech Economic Contributions Study (New River Valley)



The Region 2 Internship Collaborative held a career fair event in the New River Valley that included a young professional panel.



Chris Stephenson (at left) and Tiquan Goode, both of the nonprofit SPC4Life, stand along Academic Square on the former campus of St. Paul's College.

Southwest Virginia and Southside

- SPC4Life (Brunswick County), Organizational Development
- Town of Stuart, Star Theatre Feasibility Study
- United Way of Southwest Virginia, Evaluation of READY SWVA Early Childhood Education
- West Piedmont Planning District Commission, Agritourism Economic Impact and Strategic Planning
- Western Grayson County Music and Craft Museum, Feasibility Assessment
- YWCA of Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia, Recovery Ecosystem Assessment

Current Highlights

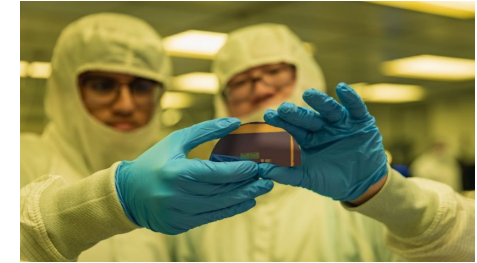
Greater Washington

- 4VA Program, Development of the VA Alliance for Semiconductor Technology (Northern Virginia)
- Space@VT, Industry collaboration and workforce development initiatives (Greater Washington)
- Urban Alliance, STEM internships development (Greater Washington)
- Virginia Cooperative Extension, Arrowbrook Urban Extension Center Feasibility Study (Fairfax), with School of Building Construction
- Virginia Tech Electrical and Computer Engineering, Major Design Experience, experiential learning program (Greater Washington)
- Virginia Tech Innovation Campus, Entrepreneurship Initiatives (Alexandria)

Hampton Roads and Richmond Region

- Black BRAND, B-Force Accelerator Evaluation (Hampton Roads)
- Hanover County, Industry Cluster Analysis
- Rappahannock Community College, Aquaculture Workforce Development (Northern Neck, Middle Peninsula)
- Tech Center Hydrogen Hub Development (Newport News), with VT Corporate Research Center
- VA Seafood Agricultural Research and Extension Center, Economic Impact Analysis (Hampton)

VAST



Arrowbrook Urban Extension Center



Aquaculture Workforce Development



Hanover County Industry Cluster Analysis



Pipeline – Under Review

- Appalachian Regional Commission-ARISE, Industry-led Innovation Engine for Production and Mass Deployment of High-Performance Affordable Buildings Using Industrialized Offsite Construction (Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Tennessee), with Virginia Tech College of Engineering
- Chimes, Cost-Benefit Analysis for Ability One (Washington DC)
- Partnership for Prosperity, Danville Regional Foundation, Childcare Analysis
- Hampton Road Workforce Council, Talent Pipeline Initiative
- National Science Foundation, Phase Two Convergence Accelerator, Precision Agriculture for a Resilient Vegetable Supply Amidst Climate Change, with Virginia Tech Applied Research Corporation, and School of Plant and Environmental Sciences, Mid Atlantic Aviation Partnership, Sanghani Center for Artificial Intelligence and Data, Center for Educational Networks and Impacts, and Virginia Cooperative Extension
- New River Valley Regional Commission, US Economic Development Administration Tech Hubs Program
- USDA, Development Investment in Food Supply Chains, with Virginia Tech Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation, Institute for Policy and Governance
- US Department of Energy, Mid-Atlantic Hydrogen HUB, with Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center



ARC ARISE



Danville Regional Foundation



PERSONNEL UPDATES



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Faculty and Staff Updates



Dylan Andrews
Economic
Development
Specialist



John Register
Project
Coordinator



Brenna Valle
Region 2 Internship
Collaborative,
Program Coordinator



Student Researcher Updates



Emma Brown
Urban and
Regional Planning,
MURP



Rachel Inman
Urban and
Regional Planning,
MURP



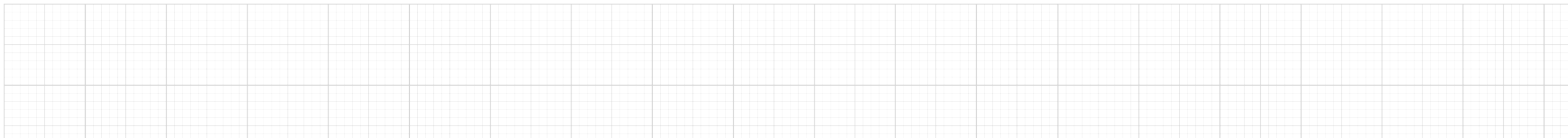
Bryan Jones
Urban and Regional
Planning,
MURP



Altan Mitchell
Business
Administration-
Analytics, MS



James Polhamus
Urban and Regional
Planning,
MURP



OTHER BUSINESS



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Other business

- Minutes
- Open discussion



(At left) President of IALR Telly Tucker speaks with members of CECE at their staff retreat.



CENTER FOR ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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Vibrant Virginia Positioning Statement (internal use only)

Background:

Vibrant Virginia began in 2018 as Virginia Tech’s response to a state policy report that the University helped to craft along with other Universities in the Commonwealth. The report sought to better understand the disparities and differences across rural and urban parts of the state, and to identify ways that higher education could help bridge divides and advance broader prosperity. The full report is available at: https://cece.vt.edu/content/dam/cece_vt_edu/vibrantvirginiafinalreport.pdf

Vibrant Virginia, version 1, took place from 2018-2020 and included external community engagement and listening sessions, a campus community of project, a book project, and a series of small faculty seed funding for projects in Virginia regions.

Vibrant Virginia 2.0 took place from 2020-2022, and included a statewide virtual conference series (see <https://cece.vt.edu/VibrantVirginia/VVConferenceSeries.html>); the development of a formal governance body, the VT Council on Vibrant Virginia (<https://cece.vt.edu/VibrantVirginia/VTCouncilonVibrant.html>); and the establishment of a more significant funding stream to support faculty-led projects, the Vibrant Virginia Impact Fund (see <https://cece.vt.edu/VibrantVirginia/VTCouncilonVibrant/VVCFP.html.html>).

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Current Situation:

Vibrant Virginia is an established and recognized “brand” among key decision-makers and previously engaged faculty within the University. The book project, internal funding calls, and the establishment of the Vibrant Virginia Council provide an existing platform and high-level institutional legitimacy for Vibrant Virginia.

Vibrant Virginia is operating from a position of strength. It has brought recognition and resources to faculty work; strengthened connections among VT stakeholders and colleges doing community-engaged work; and enhanced faculty-community partnerships, Vibrant Virginia has become a visible and prominent symbol of the University’s commitment to economic and community development in Virginia, and our ability to respond to critical public issues in our state. The Vibrant Virginia book and news coverage and statewide webinars and thought-leader convenings have been visible examples of this.

Vibrant Virginia responded to state-wide needs and challenges that still exist and, in many ways, have intensified. Disconnectedness, divisiveness, and disparity are pressing challenges. The pandemic exacerbated social disconnectedness. Diseases of despair have also risen sharply. Political polarization and declines in civic trust and social capital have been much discussed and increasingly apparent. By some measures, Virginia leads the nation in the extent of the disparity between our more affluent and less affluent counties.

Vibrant Virginia had two successful prior phases and we need to define and more quickly implement its third iteration to capitalize on these past successes. CECE functions as the lead entity for VV implementation and has laid important groundwork for Vibrant Virginia’s third phase. Still. This work needs to be accelerated and raised as a higher priority within CECE, OIA, and the University as embodied by the Vibrant Virginia Council.

The University “will” to establish ongoing funding support for the Vibrant Virginia Initiative is questionable. At least three reasons contribute to this: 1.) the internal competitive landscape for funding and the need to support other more established outreach initiatives; 2.) the lack of a specific ask and clarity of what the ongoing Vibrant Virginia initiative will entail and what the outcomes would be, especially in terms of ROI to the University; 3.) the relative absence of greater investment and ownership in the success of Vibrant Virginia from the Vibrant Virginia Council.

CECE has the personnel, positioning, and prior experience to effectively implement a new Vibrant Virginia (VV) phase but needs greater internal support and start-up funding to do so. This internal support includes funding but also means support for VV activities as a core part of the OIA and CECE mission. VV should be a core pillar of the CECE strategic goals for the next 3-5 years. CECE faculty should have VV activities included in their plans of work and should be recognized for their contributions to the initiative. OIA leadership should help champion VV and should also help re-inforce VV through the Engagement Leadership Council and other platforms.

The Vibrant Virginia Council has the membership, status, and positioning within the University to advocate, promote, and secure funds for a new iteration of Vibrant Virginia. The Council needs a clearer sense from CECE and OIA of what the VV phase 3 would entail, its ROI to the University, and what the funding and resource needs are. To feel real ownership, the VV Council needs to be able to make real decisions and provide real guidance as to VV and new directions.

Likewise, the CECE Board is well-positioned to help advocate, promote, and help guide the next VV phase. The Board also needs a clearer sense from CECE and OIA of what the VV phase 3 would entail, its ROI to the University, its impact and benefit to the Commonwealth, and what the funding and resource needs are.

Vibrant Virginia holds great promise for attracting external funding from federal, state, and foundation sponsors, as well as private donors. The successes to date, in prior VV phases, highlight this potential. For example, the seed funding rounding supported VT faculty to work together and then secure a \$300,000 federally-funded grant awarded to Virginia Tech, which supported the Connection to Care project designed to reduce opioid overdose and connect individuals to treatment through proactive engagement and community partnerships.

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Vibrant Virginia 3.0: The Path Forward

The vision and mission is hopeful and aspirational. Vibrant Virginia’s ongoing vision is hopeful: *Vibrant and flourishing places in every part of the Commonwealth.* And the mission is aspirational: *to advance and champion a transformative, replicable, and generative model for higher education engagement in place-based community problem-solving.*

Virginia Tech has an opportunity to attain national and global distinctiveness in helping bridge divides and advance broad prosperity across our state. Over the past few years, Vibrant Virginia has become a significant Virginia Tech initiative and a part of the University’s Beyond Boundaries Strategic Plan. However, there is a need to build on this momentum and on the even greater potential for the University to help address economic disparity in Virginia, in meaningful and visible ways.

The next phase of Vibrant Virginia includes a three-pronged approach:

- *Vibrant Virginia Community of Practice*: Developing a Vibrant Virginia community of practice, by building and engaging a broad network of university faculty and community-based affiliates.
- *Vibrant Virginia Stories and Scholarship*: Collecting and sharing stories of those working on the frontlines to advance a more vibrant Virginia, while also sharing resources, best practices, and discussion of the intricacies and complexities of this work. We will share these as we go, in web-based media, but also use these as a launching pad for a new book project focused on place-based community innovation.
- *Vibrant Virginia Community Exploratories*: A **Community Exploratory** is marked by:
 - Place-based collaboration; focused on one locality; a city/county region; or an urban neighborhood or district. The collaboration includes multiple university and community participants.
 - Pressing community challenge; a single thematic challenge or question that is complex, requires learning, has some level of urgency, and is explored collaboratively over time;
 - People-focused concern: an emphasis on individual and family experiences and impacts;
 - Possibility-oriented conversation; a process that includes a diverse range of interests in open dialogue.
 - Path-finding; strategies or approaches that generate involvement (widespread and inclusive engagement); ideas (creative approaches, experiments, and projects); and impacts (tangible and beneficial change or social good).

The Virginia Tech Center for Economic and Community Engagement (VTCECE) works with interested communities and faculty members to develop and support Community Exploratories. Teams develop customized plans of work, to include regular meetings (virtual, in-person, or some combination) and expected deliverables. Participants co-explore a place-specific challenge, framed as an affirmative goal or question to explore. The teams identify existing assets and possible partners; and work together to better understand the nature of the challenge and identify possible responses. Exploratories produce one or more tangible deliverables, such as a community plan, a research report, or as project-based intervention or pilot program.

Exploratories are interdisciplinary (engage VT faculty from different disciplines) and resource-generating (focused on securing state, federal, foundation, or other funding to support on-going work). VTCECE will assist and support the Exploratory teams with coaching, funding plans, sponsorship requests, and grant applications. One or more VTCECE team members will be embedded in each Exploratory.

All Exploratory members (VT faculty as well as community partners) become VV affiliates and participants in our larger Community of Practice. This may include resources, workshops, special events, and other opportunities for shared learning. The Community of Practice will also be open to the larger universe of VV affiliates and community-engaged faculty and community partners.

The third phase of Vibrant Virginia will be implemented from July 1, 2023 – July 1, 2026 and requires VT funding support in the total range of \$75,000-\$150,000 for the entire three-year period. Half of this funding will serve as seed-funding, competitively awarded, to Community Exploratory teams. The other half will go to support CECE faculty time, travel costs, VV marketing, and the professional development and Community of Practice activities.

The seed funding from VT will total \$6,000-\$12,000 per team. Seed funding to support Exploratories will be matched (1:1) with contributions (cash and in-kind) from local and regional partner organizations. We anticipate supporting 3-6 Exploratory teams over this time period. Exploratories that receive seed funding must identify 1-3 external funding proposals that will be submitted as a result of their work.

CECE, with the aid of OIA communications, will re-vamp the Vibrant Virginia website, list-serv, and social media. The web-site will include stories, videos, tools, and resources and become a trusted source of resources and information for community partners related to community-based work to address pressing challenges, especially those related to disconnectedness, disparity, and divides.

Beginning in 2025, VV will establish an annual “moniker” or “linchpin” event, such as a seminar, symposium or forum. The event will reinforce the VV brand and mission with VT faculty and leaders but also with community partners and stakeholders around the state, as well as funders and donors in the state, and nationally. Each event will have a key question or theme related to disparity and disconnectedness and the promising responses to it in Virginia, and beyond. The target audience will be thought leaders, practitioners, researchers, and funders.

VV will offer high-quality monthly or quarterly learning and networking events for its community of practice around the state. These will include guest speakers, best practices, resources, tips and sharing around community-engaged work.

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Vibrant Virginia Third Phase Implementation - Recent Work and Next Steps

CECE has laid the groundwork for three Community Exploratories. This has included community site-visits, engagement with anchor partners, and outreach to VT faculty. The first three Exploratories are expected to be in Martinsville-Henry; Alleghany-Covington; and Hopewell-Prince George.

In Martinsville-Henry, the community anchor partner will be the Harvest Foundation and the Exploratory will focus on education, youth development, and life-long learning. VT partners engaged to date include the Community Access Collaborative; the Reynolds Homestead (OIA); the VT Center for Rural Education; and ICAT.

In Alleghany-Covington, the community anchor partner will be the Alleghany Foundation and the focus will be on community planning, capacity building and leadership development. We are in exploratory discussions with a number of VT partners including faculty from CPAP and CLAHS.

In Hopewell-Prince George, the discussions are more preliminary but the work will be conducted in conjunction with VSU faculty and the focus is expected to be economic resilience, sustainability, and environment. We expect to include VT faculty from CNRE, OIA, VCE, and other areas.

VV will work with internal and external partners to pursue other pressing or high-potential challenges for new Exploratories, in areas such as *innovation and entrepreneurship; public health; or technology-based gaps or needs.*

Our next steps include formalizing plans of work and finalizing the team members and goals for each Exploratory. The initial plan of work will be 9-12 months and include on-the-ground community engagement; the production of one or more specific deliverables (plan, report, study, white paper) and the identification of external funders and funding sources to sustain and grow the work.

We have begun collecting resources, identifying possible funding sources, and considering marketing strategies for the next Vibrant Virginia phase. Funders that may be engaged in this work include not only regional foundations but national foundations, state agencies, and federal sponsors. Natural fits might include EDA, EPA, VDACS, DHCD, GO Virginia, VDOE, USDA, the US Dept of Education, HUD, Ford, Kellogg, MacArthur, Kauffman, and others.

The implementation hinges on internal VT and OIA support for the VV third phase and securing the desired budget to support this three-year work (\$75,000-\$150,000).

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Vibrant Virginia Phase Three Expected Outcome and ROI to the University

One source of ROI is local or regional match and we conservatively estimate the generation of \$150,000 in local match or regional match during the three year period. By supporting 6 community exploratories, we estimate a minimum initial local match of \$10,000 per exploratory, for \$60,000. We anticipate that at least half of those Exploratories would receive additional support from regional and local partners to continue work or pilot a project beyond year one. We anticipate that to be \$90,000 (\$30,000 per each of three exploratories).

A second component of ROI is external funding, and we estimate the generation of at least 10 grants or proposals to national or state sponsors resulting in at least \$750,000 of secured funding. We anticipate supporting 6 Community Exploratories and each exploratory submitting 1-3 external funding proposals. That is a maximum of 18 funding proposals. We conservatively estimate that 10 funding proposals will be submitted at an average of \$150,000 each. That would produce \$1,500,000 if all are funded. We conservatively assume a 50% success rate, meaning \$750,000 in secured funds.

A third component of ROI is private funds or direct donations and we conservatively estimate \$100,000 in contributions. Funds will be solicited to sponsor our inaugural VV statewide forum event, to sponsor individual workshop and training opportunities as part of our Community of Practice, and to support the overall initiative.

The new funding generated from the three sources above would total \$1,000,000, representing a 566% ROI on VT investment of \$150,000. This is conservative investment and the final ROI could be much, much higher if even one of the six exploratories results in securing a larger six figure grant award.

Beyond this financial return, VV would create numerous additional opportunities for scholarship and publications, student learning, institutional visibility, and new partnerships. The annual forum-type event would prominently position VT as an even more visible thought-leader on state-wide challenges, with policy-makers and key strategic partners