

Minutes for Center for Economic and Community Engagement Advisory Board Meeting

Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center

1900 Kraft Drive, Moss Research Building, Blacksburg

Curiosity Conference Room

March 30, 2026, 10:00 AM - 1:00 PM

Attendance:

In person:

Barb Reibsamen, CECE
Caroline Redell, CECE
Diane Deffenbaugh, OIA
Dylan Andrews, CECE
Emmalee Wagner, CECE
Guru Ghosh, Board Chair
Holly Carroll, CECE
Isabel Bradburn, Board Member
Jemma Sabokrouh, CECE
John Provo, CECE and Board Member
John Register, CECE
Julia Kell, CECE
Kim Gray, CECE
Kiyah Duffey, Board Member
Rich Mathieson, Virginia Tech
Sarah Lyon-Hill, CECE
Scott Tate, CECE
Susan Short, Board Member

Remote:

Allison Mays, CECE
John Capps, Board Member
Keith Holland, Board Member
Lauren Stuhldreher, Board Member
Mallory Tuttle, CECE
Marc Nelson, Board Member (attended the start of the meeting)
Mike Gutter, Board Member
Omar Faison, Board Member
Steve Harrison, Board Member

Alvaro Muniz (guest speaker) Association for Public and Land Grant Universities (APLU)
Ken Poole (guest speaker) Center for Regional Economic Competitiveness
Rebecca Robinson (guest speaker) Oregon State University

Welcome and Introductions

Guru Ghosh, Vice President, Outreach & International Affairs

10:06 meeting started by Guru and introductions made

Director's Report and Board Actions

- *John Provo, Executive Director, CECE*

Funding Landscape

John highlighted the differences between our average sources in FY 23, 24 and 25 versus current sources during FY26. Federal funds have decreased significantly while the state/local funds have nearly doubled.

Program Updates:

New Tableau Map

Work is being done on digitizing our files to a new database and clearing some hurdles for a new tableau map.

Regional Transformations

John spoke of specific regions within GO Virginia, the US Economic Development Administration, Roanoke Blacksburg Innovation Alliance, grant development for the ARC and US EDA industrialized construction project and the additive manufacturing and advanced materials initiative, as well as the Division of Research and Innovation at Virginia Tech. The University Economic Development Association's National University Center Cohort Program historically has funded projects in underserved locations. This program is closed for the foreseeable future and will no longer be part of CECE's funding.

Community Innovations

Includes work with Accomack County EDA, Alleghany Foundation, American Farmland Trust, Campbell County Recreation Opportunity Assessment, Hope and Home Task Force Facilitation, Courthouse Scenario Planning and Facilitation in Culpeper County, Feasibility Assessment for Maple Syrup Production Cooperative, Community Economic Programming Development with the Virginia Cooperative Extension, Cultivating Rural

Vitality in Virginia Food Systems, Housing Security and Landscape Assessment and Vibrant Virginia

Impact, Design and Evaluation

Includes the Evaluation of ARC Outdoor Tourism and Recreation Grants, Economic and Social Impact Study of a Possible Care Facility, Best Practices and Benchmarking Research, Blue Catfish Feasibility and Strategic Growth Study, EPIIC: Evaluation Capacity Building for Leveraging Innovation to Grow High Tech and University Partnerships (LIGHT UP) collaborative

Guru asked about AI and economic development, and the effects. Discussion ensued with Sarah, John Provo and John Capps contributing their thoughts.

Guru brought up the Virginia Tech Outreach and International Affairs funded childcare and housing projects. The housing project is now a part of Scott Tate's City of Roanoke funded Hope and Home project. Isabel asked about the cost benefits of a data center and wondered whether economic development was going to come out of building data centers. John Provo indicated that some centers are going to buy all the power needed. Isabel asked about benefits since she knew that the centers do not employ many after construction. Sarah indicated that the tax revenue is typically the benefit associated with the data centers. While centers are helping with power capacity, Sarah was not certain about how they will address the water capacity portion. John Capps indicated that they have a data center proposed in Appomattox County. Guru discussed a transient work force such as traveling nurses and pondered whether electricians and plumbers would become similar in that they would temporarily relocate to build projects such as data centers. Guru discussed workforce availability, affordability, and livability. Along the childcare topic, John Provo indicated that adult recreation cannabis proceeds may be funneled to the childcare industry.

Talent Development and Experiential Learning

John Provo highlighted the two Wellspring projects.

Pipeline – Under Review

John Provo updated the slide indicating CECE was just awarded a \$4 million grant through GO Virginia Regions 2 and 3 which will fund our implementation of our Additive Manufacturing and Advanced Materials initiative. We have a \$40 million EDA grant under review. John Provo referenced this as our “summer of manufacturing”. Some items under review include ARISE Implementation Grant, Virginia's Additive Manufacturing and Advanced Materials Tech Hub Implementation Grant, Cooperative Institute for Reducing

the Seafood Trade Deficit Through Focused Strategic Development for Domestic Aquaculture, the USDA Participatory Food System Planning, Farm labor Sustainability and Resilience, and SWVA's Regional Youth Workforce Assessment and Strategic Road Map.

Personnel Updates

CECE is in the process of hiring an Economic and Community Development Specialist. That employee will spend 40% of his/her time in the Alleghany Highlands.

Other Business

We doubled our previous donations through Giving Day. Such donations help CECE build capacity in those areas with limited capacities.

Approval of September 11, 2025, Board Minutes - Guru asked for motion or amendments. A motion was made by Susan Short and was seconded. All in attendance approved last year's minutes.

John Provo began with a segue to the panel discussion and introduced the panel members.

Panel Discussion: Your year in economic engagement

- *John Provo (facilitator)*
- *Alvaro Muñiz, Director in the Office for International, Community, and Economic Engagement, Association for Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU)*
- *Ken Poole, CEO/President, Center for Regional Economic Competitiveness/University Economic Developers Association*
- *Rebecca Robinson, Associate Vice President for Economic Development and Industry Relations, Oregon State University*

APLU is a major trade group that Virginia Tech is a part of, and CECE has participated in – APLU manages an economic engagement certification program that begins with a self-study. Omar Faison and Keith Holland have been through this (or are going through it) and John asked them to provide feedback on the program. Keith indicated that JMU has completed the program and has found advantages. Omar indicated that they have faced some challenges, but he sees the benefits from the process.

Alvaro explained the purpose of the program of the APLU. The panel discussed how each uses the words “economic development” differently. Ken provided a background to how

the program evolved and how the university aligns itself to produce economic development. The conversation spoke of translating research into solutions. Rebecca has done this at two different land grant universities. She said the APLU economic engagement framework has been a tool to advance economic development and is one of three pillars for Oregon State University. “What is economic development?” is what John Provo discusses with his studio class. John Provo asked Rebecca what goals she had when she arrived and if they had shifted over time. She stated that her goals have not changed, but the interest and intensity of those goals have in that her faculty now has a keen interest in engaging due to federal shifts. Federal opportunities look very different now, so she needs to engage more with industry and community partners. John Provo asked Ken and Alvaro if there are different asks of them now. Ken stated his first reaction is how they are going to fund their work since they relied so heavily on federal funding. Alvaro said his experience is like Ken’s. Omar’s perspective has changed on how they go over funding. As per Keith, economic engagement and workforce facilitation are critical as the needs must align for the community. Alvaro spoke of various awards in the industry and spoke of the University of Tennessee’s successes.

John asked the panel if there were other issues that they are facing. Rebecca indicated that the state of Oregon has been growing, and, previously, nothing had to be done for that growth. Oregon has had a reputation for not having a business-friendly environment. The state now must be more intentional to sustain their economic future and must focus on industries that they excel in.

- *APLU Innovation and Economic Prosperity reflection questions*

Working lunch – John Provo indicates that we are going to do some focus groups and surveys in the summer and emphasized that economic development is a process. He talked about how our most senior Virginia Tech dean has been here for approximately five years. John proposed that if there was a focus group on economic engagement, what would look like for Dr. Capps. Dr. Capps said that previously he associated economic engagement with money and he now, because of the board, realizes it has to do with community and quality of life and that you can’t talk about community college without talking about economic development. Allison Mays spoke of how she works with local partners to build a bridge or fill a gap as needed. Mallory has a broad prospective relayed to her through her advisory group. Guru stated that the idea of job creation leading to economic development is an old-fashioned approach to economic development. He said you need to look at the graduation rate as a key barometer.

Guru said Rebecca used phrase competitive advantage and challenged us to think of comparative advantage. He said tariffs are going to be a big challenge. CECE's self-study certification is going to take place this summer.

Open Discussion

Isabel said college engineering students these days are concerned with social impact. Isabel also indicated that they have partnered with various partners through seed funding.

Guru asked the education institutions to describe their budgets for next year. John Capps said his base budget is stable. They asked for \$30 million and got it in the house but not in the senate. They got some help with one of their programs - \$40 million for the Fast Forward program. Renovations of their oldest building at the community college were also approved. Omar said he will get funding answers in next several weeks, but they are proposing a tuition increase. Keith said it wasn't a bad budget year, and they are trying to preserve and not ask for much more. JMU's applicants and enrollment numbers have been healthy, and they have a healthy number of proposals being sent off. Guru is optimistic capital investments will be funded. Virginia Tech has told departments to preserve resources and brace for cuts.

The APLU document will be in final draft form in September. CECE will ask some board members to read and react to that document. Some members will be contacted for focus groups and interviews. In closing, Guru reflected on CECE's charge and said we will be well served.

12:51 PM meeting adjourned

Respectfully submitted,

Kim Gray

Office Assistant, CECE