

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

Attending in person: Guru Ghosh (Chair), Kiyah Duffey, Susan Short, John Capps, Erik Johnston, Deborah Flippo, Leah Fremouw, Karen Roberto, Laura Belmonte, Mike Gutter, Lauren Stuhldreher, John Provo (staff), Scott Tate (staff), Julia Kell (staff), Afroze Mohammed (staff), Anna Nagorniuk (staff), Ashley Posthumus (staff), Dylan Andrews (staff), John Register (staff)

Vibrant Virginia Council Members in Attendance: Karen Sanders, Tracy Krauchun, Catherine Amelink, Leanna Blevins

Attending virtually: David Devan, Bob Stolle, Blair Durham

Speakers: Chris Stephenson, Allison Ulaky, Jason Schwartz

Welcome and Introductions

Dr. Guru Ghosh welcomed attendees, board, and council members.

Director's Report and Board Actions

John Provo discussed why the CECE Advisory Board and the Vibrant Virginia Council have joint meetings. He gave an overview of CECE's mission statement and values and informed the board and council on current and recently closed projects.

On the national level, John highlighted the Precision Agriculture for a Resilient Vegetable Supply Amidst Climate Change project, which aim is determine how technology can help and be implemented by small-scale farmers to grow their crops and businesses. He thanked Mike Gutter for all his assistance and mentioned that Ashley is working on the second proposal for phase two.

At the multi-regional level is the VTCA Economic Impact Assessment project, where the Department of Mines and Minerals Engineering introduced us to the aggregate industry with an almost 2-billion-dollar impact on the Commonwealth of Virginia.

On the NRV, Roanoke, Alleghany, and Lynchburg levels, the V-TOP Region 2 Internship Collaborative program that SCHEV funds to help sustainably align education and industry.

On the Southwest Virginia and Southside levels, the YWCA of Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia Recovery Ecosystem Assessment, Scott Tate, Ashley Posthumus, and Dylan Andrews, assisted the YWCA in assessing the area's Ecosystem to help support people recovering from substance abuse. Deliverables combined with the YWCA assessment secured the YWCA a half-million dollars from ARC to launch some new programming.

On the Greater Washington level, the 4VA Program Development of the VA Alliance for Semiconductor Technology, aims to provide a team and a cloud platform with quick start programs to meet immediate educational needs in Northern Virginia. Additionally, the Arrowbrook Urban Extension Center Feasibility Study in Fairfax was noted, where CECE is partnering with the Virginia Cooperative Extension to create an Extension Center.

At the Hampton Roads and Richmond Region levels, the Tech Center Hydrogen Hub Development with VT Corporate Research Center is defining how Virginia enters the Hydrogen economy, with a focus on developing the Hydrogen industry's workforce.

On CECE's current Project Pipeline, the half-million-dollar Industrialized construction planning grant from ARC is currently under review, which, if won, would set CECE up for a 10-million-dollar implementation proposal down the road. John indicated that at the request of the New River Valley Regional Commission, we are helping them secure a Tech Hubs strategy grant from the EDA, which, if won, CECE may get the invitation to apply for an implementation grant down the road.

Mike Gutter inquired how the advisory board could be in a better position to provide advice than just receiving information. Mike would like to start the conversation about the board taking a more active role in identifying the organization's priorities and challenges to focus on. John Provo suggested that the group could have a conversation over lunch.

John then concluded his updates by introducing the new staff and the center's Graduate Assistants, highlighting our trip to Southside Virginia and finalizing the minutes.

John opened the floor to any final questions and comments.

Community Innovations/Student Engagement Spotlight: St. Paul's College for Life (SPC4Life and National Main Street Foundation and Virginia Main Streets, Remote Work for Virginia: College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences

Scott Tate introduced the guest speakers by highlighting how St. Paul's College and Main Street projects have involved students from various departments.

Chris Stephenson began by giving a brief history of St. Paul's College and the impact of its closing in 2013. Efforts are underway to reimagine and rebuild the college from a modern perspective. Recovery and reuse of the sacred land is a crucial aspect of moving forward. However, recovering the main campus has been challenging because the investor who owns the land is located in China, and there have been difficulties in obtaining a contract for the land. Chris has ensured that contract talks will take place. Deciding how to utilize the land has been moving forward thanks to Virginia Tech and the State Council of Higher Education board. Currently, two programs are under consideration: business and entrepreneurship and an exercise science focusing on physical therapy. Chris is also concentrating on the agriculture program as they want to recover the 400 acres of farmland sold during the closing.

Chris further explained that the closing of St. Paul's College could have been due to several different factors. They are currently exploring the possibility of implementing a re-entry program.

Chris thanked VT and Scott for their help and opened the floor to questions.

Lauren Stuhldreher commented that the Southern Virginia Innovational Hub is a terrific opportunity for the region and that there may be some collaboration opportunities moving forward. Chris stated it would be great if anyone could help them connect with the Southern Virginia Innovational Hub. Chris then concluded his time, and Scott Tate took a minute to recognize all the people who were part of this project.

John Provo introduced Allison Locke and Jason Schwartz, who were part of the 2023 MURP graduates Class of the College of Arts and Human Sciences. Both Allison and Jason were also research students with CECE and were in the Economic Development Studio.

Allison and Jason discussed their time on the Remote Work Virginia Study. Jason studied remote work in Virginia, analyzing the impact of COVID-19 on remote jobs and the motivations of people working remotely. The basic framework considered places (urban, suburban, rural resort, rural perennial) and people (urbanists, salary stretchers, nature lovers, boomerangs). The framework can be used for further analysis. Jason worked extensively on the quantitative piece. Allison spoke about her part of the research. Qualitative research for a project on remote work potential in various counties across the state was conducted. A survey was developed, and interviews with economic developers across different regions of the state were completed to understand their interest in remote work and any challenges they might anticipate. Jason and Allison worked remotely during the project, which was an excellent opportunity to learn more about remote work.

Allison indicated that learning how to communicate with clients in project management has been invaluable. Working on the Star Theater feasibility study as a graduate assistant at CECE provided a real-world experience that prepared her for her current role. She managed multiple projects, communicated with clients daily, and met deadlines, which has been beneficial for her professional development in urban planning.

Jason mentioned that in addition to the technical skills required for urban planning, GIS, mapping, and data analysis, the key to success lies in working effectively with teams, overcoming challenges, collaborating with clients who may present unexpected requirements, being adaptable and flexible, taking on leadership roles, and handling situations where team members may not be in alignment. Jason strives to develop his leadership skills, which are an excellent foundation for future growth.

John Provo thanked Allison and Jason for their time and opened the floor for questions or comments.

Laura Belmonte shared updates on the School of Public and International Affairs (SPIA). Laura plans to take the Institute for Policy and Governance (IPG) out of SPIA and establish it as a university-wide center. The college aims to expand project-based work that is community-engaged and focused on creating a positive impact. They have a relatively new center called the Center for Rural Education, which they want to partner with economic development opportunities. With the new dean in place at Pamplin, an accelerated degree program where graduates will receive a master's in either leadership or entrepreneurship is in the works. There is an interest in finding more places where their arts majors can get hands-on experiences, as their students are more likely to get unpaid internships or no internships at all. The college has 42 majors, so they have many skills to offer.

Mike Gutter added that there are many opportunities for students to gain valuable experiences, such as internships funded by the CALS extension program.

Tracey Krauchun shared news about a \$1,000,000 endowment for student internships in government agencies, which will become available next year.

Susan Short made a comment on Allison and Jason's experience. She believes conducting a study on the work they have done over the past 20-25 years with our graduate assistants in the studio and the Capstone project is necessary. Susan believes there might be another research study that can be conducted. The people who were part of our project are making a significant impact in the communities they serve, not only in Virginia but across the country. Susan indicated this should be explored further.

John Provo offered Chris Stephenson, Allison Ulaky, and Jason Schwartz the opportunity for final thoughts.

Jason expressed interest in experiential learning and discussed receiving emails on weekend modules he would like to attend.

Allison expressed she appreciates that this conversation is taking place. She and Jason were invited to share their thoughts because she believes her time at Virginia Tech and CECE impacted her professional development and helped her find her current position.

Chris expressed his pleasure and excitement about continuing the relationship with Virginia Tech, as they significantly impact a rural community.

Vibrant Virginia Update and Proposal

Scott Tate began by expressing that CECE wants the board, council, and individuals present in the room to have a say in shaping and endorsing the direction of Vibrant Virginia as it moves into its next phase name, 3.0.

Scott provided background on Vibrant Virginia. He then explained that there is still a need for Vibrant Virginia, since the state-wide needs and challenges still exist and, in many ways, have intensified. Scott explained in more detail that Vibrant Virginia 3.0 will involve building a community of practice, reactivating existing networks, providing continuing education and networking opportunities, sharing stories from partners, and activating energy around a new book project. The model being explored is called community explanatory, which involves engaging faculty in exploring a question in a specific place.

Scott indicated that CECE would like to accelerate the CECE timeline for the next steps. He explained the different funding sources that could be leveraged to accomplish that goal. Plans include a three-year phase of Vibrant Virginia, where co-investment opportunities around the university can be identified. There has been interest from local foundations and regional entities and there is a possibility of exploring national support with Tracy and others at the foundation. Our experience with state, federal, and other funding sources can help faculty members secure project funding. Scott finished and asked for questions.

David Devan then asked how the return on investment is defined. John Provo suggested that leverage would be the best approach since Virginia Tech is in a position to invest internal funds in external projects in the near term.

Following up on John Provo's response, David Devan rephrased his question from return on investment to how CECE might measure success. John Provo and Scott Tate respond by saying that these projects are measured by recourses gained by VT to perform the work and economic/community benefit to the area the project directly affects. David Devan explained that there is a need to be better at tracking the all-around benefits of these projects. John Provo indicated that we have an underlying logic model that answers some of what David is expressing, but more work could be done to meet the asks put forward by David.

Mike Gutter announced that the southern region extension had established standard core measures that all states can use to capture the benefits of their healthcare efforts. The measures are divided into social and economic impacts. Extension is interested in understanding the effects of their efforts on the community and creating jobs at the local level. The focus is on the community's goals rather than the campus's bottom line.

Tracey Krauchun suggested that it may be more beneficial to collaborate with a community partner to seek funding from a foundation. The community partner would be the primary entity seeking financing, with Virginia Tech playing a secondary role. John Provo noted that his next step for Vibrant Virginia is identifying pledges for the Vibrant Virginia program.

John Provo offered the last comments.

Catherine Amelink commented how both CECE and Vibrant Virginia have done an excellent job of not making this a Virginia Tech-centric effort. She believes that Virginia Tech should lead in research-focused environments; however, when it comes to workforce development, it is better to collaborate with other organizations that could respond better and are in a better position to think about how to react and be engaged in those conversations from the beginning. It was suggested that higher education partners like community colleges and other four-year institutions be found to think about how to respond to workforce development needs. Catherine believes it would be great to include these partners in the conversation. Laura Belmonte commented that there is a need to be more intentional about integrating alt-ag jobs.

Open Discussion, Future Goals, and Objectives

Adjournment