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## Thank you CECE Graduate Assistants!

Please join us in congratulating our CECE graduate assistants. They have graduated with master's degrees and are stepping into new roles. CECE appreciates their hard work and dedication to the center and wishes them all the best as they continue their careers!



**Emma Brown** joined the center in November 2022 as a program assistant for the Region 2 Internship Collaborative. In August 2023, she began working as a graduate assistant with CECE. She graduated with a master's in urban and regional planning and will continue working for the center as a research associate.



**Rachel Inman** joined the center in August 2023. She graduated with a master's in urban and regional planning and has accepted a job in Fredericksburg with the Virginia Department of Transportation as a transportation planner.



**Bryan Jones** joined the center in January 2023. He graduated with a master's in urban and regional planning and will continue working as a research associate with the center as he prepares for a doctoral program.



**James Polhamus** joined the center in June 2023. He graduated with a master's in urban and regional planning and accepted a job as a transportation planner for the City of Harrisonburg.

[Read more about CECE's graduate assistants.](#)

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## Collaboration in action: The story of GO Virginia Region 2



CECE has released a new video to represent GO Virginia Region 2. GO Virginia is a statewide program focused on encouraging economic growth through the creation of high-wage jobs, and CECE serves as the regional support organization.

CECE Executive Director John Provo wanted to create a video to highlight grantees, GO Virginia projects, council members, and the impact the program has had in the New River Valley, Roanoke-Alleghany, and Lynchburg regions since it began in 2015.

Program coordinator Rachel Jones and program manager Quina Weber-Shirk coordinated interviews, developed questions, and collaborated with Aspire Marketing, which filmed and produced the video.

“GO Virginia Region 2 has been a labor of love for me for some time,” Provo said. “I’m so happy with how well this video tells the story of the effort and how it has enabled many opportunities for positive change. That happens because people with ideas step up, and the volunteers on our council work with them and my team to help launch their efforts. I’m deeply grateful for the effort and energy everyone brings and for the time of those we asked to sit and tell these stories.”

[Watch the video.](#)

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## July trivia question!

This issue's economic development trivia question is:

**What state has the oldest Main Street America Program?**

- a. Michigan
- b. West Virginia
- c. Louisiana

[Submit your guess here.](#) We'll reveal the correct answer in our next newsletter.

*April Trivia Question:*

"What is the average age of successful entrepreneurs?"

Answer: 45.

[Read more about entrepreneurs.](#)

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# Project spotlight

## Tech Hubs Consortium holds all-hands meeting



In April, members of the Advanced Manufacturing and Applied Materials Tech Hub consortium gathered for their all-hands quarterly meeting. Participants learned about additive manufacturing and what it means for the region through a Zoom panel with Nanci Hardwick, CEO of MELD Manufacturing, Alan Pearce, CEO of FasTech, and Christopher Williams, L.S. Randolph professor in Mechanical Engineering at Virginia Tech. The participants also toured MELD Manufacturing, an additive manufacturing company in Christiansburg, VA.

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## Office updates

### Welcome Adrian Dávila!



In May 2024, Adrian Dávila joined the center as a graduate assistant on the Talent Pathways Initiative planning project.

Born and raised in Webster, Texas, Adrian grew up about a mile away from NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston and credits school field trips, family visits, and his exposure to rocket science as a child with why he pursued engineering as a career. He completed his bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Houston and is currently pursuing his Ph.D. in materials science and engineering at Virginia Tech under the guidance of Dr. Alan Druschitz within the Virginia Tech Foundry for Research and Education (VT FIRE).

Leveraging his engineering experiences and background cooperating with multiple community and industry partners within the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers, Adrian is working to understand the skills and talent needs in Southwest Virginia to assist GO Virginia in closing the gap between the existing workforce and future employment opportunities in the region.

In his free time, Adrian enjoys spending time with his wife exploring different cultures and cuisines, playing water polo, swimming, and watching sporting events from around the world.

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Welcome Jemma Sabokrouh!



Jemma joined the center in June 2024 as program manager for the [Region 2 Internship Collaborative](#) and [GO Virginia Region 2](#). She earned a master's degree in educational leadership from the University of West Florida and a bachelor's degree in science education from the University of Central Florida. Jemma relocated to Blacksburg from Central Florida where she worked as a high school assistant principal. Prior to her role as assistant principal, she taught high school biology and mathematics. In her free time, Jemma enjoys the much cooler weather and beautiful landscapes of Virginia in outdoor activities with her daughter and two dogs.

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## CECE holds educational outreach open house



CECE invited partners from around the university and the community to visit its office at the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center on June 21. Partners got a chance to meet CECE faculty and staff and learn about the projects the center is working on. Featured guests included Guru Ghosh, vice president for outreach and international affairs, and Brett Malone, president and CEO of the VTCRC.

[View photos from the event.](#)

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# Meet a CECE Advisory Board Member: Steve Harrison, Hampton Roads Alliance



*Steve Harrison started his career in economic development as the research director of the Hampton Roads Alliance. He later became the business development and research manager for Virginia Beach Economic Development before returning to the Hampton Roads Alliance as the vice president of business intelligence. He was promoted to chief operating officer of the Alliance in 2022. He has a bachelor's degree in government and a master's degree in public policy from William & Mary.*

## **1. What made you interested in economic development?**

I've always been interested in helping Hampton Roads grow. I was born and raised in the region and wanted to find a way to serve Hampton Roads and use my public policy background. Economic development, for me, was a way to positively impact my community. I love the idea of the community, government organizations, and businesses coming together to create an environment where people can succeed. Economic development comes from a place of 'yes.' For example, if an entrepreneur wants to build something, we, as an economic development organization, can help them overcome hurdles and utilize government and private resources. If we're doing the job that we should be doing, then our neighbors, friends, and family all have opportunities for gainful employment.

## **2. What is your favorite part of your job as Chief Operating Officer of Hampton Roads Alliance?**

I love that every day is different. As COO, I oversee our operations, business intelligence division, and marketing division. I also work with our fantastic CEO, Doug Smith, to make sure the organization runs smoothly. Not only do I get to work on marketing Hampton Roads to the world as the place to live, work, and do business, but I also get to research why Hampton Roads is right for companies in our targeted industries. We represent 14 communities, and approximately 100 private sector investors work with us. Every challenge is a new opportunity.

## **3. What projects are you currently working on at the Hampton Roads Alliance?**

We are doing a lot of work in the defense space at the Alliance. Hampton Roads has traditionally strived to diversify the economy, but with the rising tensions in the world, we've found defense related contractors are needed now more than ever. There is a role for us to play, as a regional economic development entity, to bring suppliers here for major defense contractors such as Huntington Ingalls. This work dovetails well with what we have done in the past to recruit manufacturing suppliers. Australia, the UK, and the US (AUKUS) have made a pact for shared defense, which has created a lot of opportunities for the Hampton Roads region to bring in Australian and British companies that are looking to learn from our defense contractors, do business here, and potentially supply some of our

contractors. It's something new, because instead of diversifying, we are building on the core industry of Hampton Roads, which is defense. We feel there's a huge economic impact opportunity there.

#### **4. Can you share a memorable project or achievement from your career?**

I'm proud that we've turned the Alliance into a resource for more than just business attraction. Traditionally, the Alliance had been focused on recruiting new companies to the market, but we've been able to expand the offerings we provide to the community to include research, economic impact analysis, real estate and site readiness data, and marketing assistance. There's so many good tools and resources that the Alliance has at its fingertips. Turning resources that were inwardly focused outward and allowing our local partners to benefit makes the Alliance that much more valuable.

#### **5. What is your favorite part of serving on CECE's advisory board?**

I love learning about what Virginia Tech does. I think Virginia Tech is a world class university, and it's impressive to see the diversity of initiatives CECE is involved in across the commonwealth. I've seen CECE do so much in Hampton Roads. We've worked with Virginia Tech closely on quite a few initiatives, including the green hydrogen study taking place in Newport News. It's fascinating to learn more about how Virginia Tech leverages the resources of the university as an economic development ally. I'm proud to be a part of it.

#### **6. What projects would you like to work on with CECE in the future?**

We've done studies on data centers, aviation, energy, and more. We're trying to determine niche markets within our target industries that we could potentially bring here to solicit economic growth. Virginia Tech could be helpful in helping us determine what those niche markets are, and where there's room for growth. And if there is room, where can we play a role?

#### **7. What is the best advice you've ever received?**

When I was interning, I had a colleague tell me: "If you get asked to do something in your job, you just say yes." If you find a way to help in any way that you're asked, you become invaluable. Many people unfortunately get tied up in their job description and feel it is a box they can't get out of, but I think if you are willing to do anything in service of your team, you will find not only will you be valued, but you will be promoted and given new opportunities.

#### **8. What is your favorite place to travel?**

Disney World. We go a couple times a year. It's like if happiness were a place.

#### **9. What is the last book you read that you would recommend?**

*The New Localism* by Bruce Katz. Bruce Katz was the speaker for the 2024 Hampton Roads Alliance annual meeting. His book focuses on the idea that the power to make change and impact the economy has shifted from the federal government and states to regions. In order to institute change, regions work together with nonprofits and civic actors.

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## **News roundup**

[Child care challenges are threatening economic growth in Southside, study finds](#) (Cardinal News)

[Connecting Students and Local Employers Across Region 2: Internship Collaborative Looks Back on a Successful Year](#) (CECE Blog)

[Montgomery County Virginia: Small Town Charm at the Eastern Divide](#) (Pursuitist)

[Study: Lack of child care access impacts Dan River Region's economy](#) (Danville Register & Bee)

[The future is present at Virginia Tech](#) (KCBX News)

[Virginia Tech study addresses Southside childcare challenges; leaders discuss solutions](#) (WDBJ7)

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We're known for our work across the commonwealth with GO Virginia, the Region 2 Internship Collaborative, and with the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) as a university center, but did you know that we're also instrumental in training the next generation of economic development professionals?

Through our economic development studio class, "Urban Affairs and Planning 5774," as well as student-led projects, Virginia Tech graduate students are gaining hands-on experience helping towns prosper.

Here's your chance to help us support student work. Your donation will fund future student projects, helping students make a difference in their communities.

[Visit Our Giving Page.](#)

<https://cece.vt.edu/about/give.html>

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