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March 9, 2026

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## Join us in Arlington to learn more about economic development trends



Join leaders in economic development at the University Economic Development Association (UEDA) conference, hosted at the Virginia Tech Research Center in Arlington on April 15-16, 2026.

The 2026 UEDA Washington Conference brings together higher education leaders, federal partners, industry allies, and regional practitioners focused on economic development. This event provides a powerful platform to build partnerships, navigate emerging funding opportunities, and showcase how universities drive talent, innovation, and place.

[Register for the conference.](#)

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## Project spotlight

Collaboration in Mt. Rogers region focuses on reviving maple syrup production



A partnership between Virginia Tech and Mt. Rogers Fire and Rescue is working to determine the feasibility of a co-op that sells maple syrup and other products. The region has a 50+ year tradition of making and selling maple syrup, and Mt. Rogers Fire and Rescue is interested in scaling up their production.

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## Study underscores Virginia Creeper Trail's role in Southwest Virginia economy



According to a new study developed by the Center for Economic and Community Engagement and the Southwest Center, the Virginia Creeper Trail generates more than \$61 million annually and supports hundreds of jobs across four counties, reflecting its vital role in the region's economy as communities rebuild after Hurricane Helene.

[Read more about the Virginia Creeper Trail.](#)

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## March trivia question

This issue's economic development trivia question is:

Where was the first commercial crop of peanuts in Virginia grown?

- a. Sussex County
- b. Southampton County
- c. Gloucester County

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

You can also submit your guess on our [Instagram](#) story!

### *November Trivia Question*

What is the biggest agriculture industry in Virginia?

- a. Cattle and calves
- b. Broilers
- c. Corn

Answer: B. [Broilers](#) are the biggest agriculture industry in Virginia.

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# Meet a CECE Advisory Board Member: Isabel Bradburn, Virginia Tech Institute for Society, Culture & Environment and Child Development Center for Learning and Research



*Isabel Bradburn serves as the research director of the Child Development Center for Learning and Research in the Department of Human Development and Family Science (HDFS) as well as the associate director of strategic and faculty initiatives for the Institute for Society, Culture & Environment (ISCE). She has worked at Virginia Tech since the fall of 2004. Before she worked at Virginia Tech, Bradburn held various roles in both clinical and research fields, working with children and families. Bradburn holds a master's degree in human development from the Harvard School of Education and a Ph.D. in psychology from the University of California, Berkeley.*

## **1. What was your first job and what did it teach you?**

One of my early jobs was babysitting in middle and high school. That taught me I liked kids and was interested in their development. My undergraduate work was in anthropology; I was curious about how personality development differs across cultures and societies. At the end of my undergraduate work, I was offered a position as a field manager in Africa, working with Pygmies. That was fascinating. There was a lot of literature there at the field site, and I started reading some of John Bowlby's work on attachment, which pushed me toward an interest in psychology.

## **2. What made you interested in working in higher education?**

I always gravitated toward clinical positions that were within an academic institution, and for a while, I worked at medical schools. I'm not doing licensed clinical work currently, but the Child Development Center and a lot of the projects I've worked on at Virginia Tech have focused on preventing later difficulties in life. Working in higher education appealed to me due to the myriad roles you can hold, the openness to new ideas, and working with students.

## **3. What is your favorite part of your role at Virginia Tech?**

The ability to continue growing and learning is my favorite part. In the HDFS department, my research team teaches undergraduates aspects of doing research with children and preschools and is concerned with how research on gesture might be applied in the preschool context.

I also bring in grant money to fund myself. Our projects are generally focused on early childhood, but they all take a slightly different lens. I also do a lot of program evaluation. I've worked with the state and localities, and I love learning about different communities and the problems they're working on.

With ISCE, I have some latitude to develop professional development programs for faculty. I run a policy group, which is full of wonderful and inspiring faculty members.

#### **4. What projects are you currently working on at Virginia Tech?**

I'm wrapping up a guide that puts free or low-cost resources into one place for early childhood center directors. We received a grant from the Davenport Charitable Trust for this and another project.

I'm working with Le Wang, professor of agricultural and applied economics and The David M. Kohl Chair in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, on a grant that's looking at childcare subsidies and benefits cliffs. A "benefits cliff" refers to when a family's increase in earnings results in a decrease in benefits, but they are unable to sustain their household and need continued support.

On the ISCE side, our +Policy Network recently received a grant focused on metricizing the societal value of research.

[Read more about Isabel Bradburn.](#)

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## **News roundup**

[Blue catfish brings new focus to seafood, farms, and tourism on the Eastern Shore](#) (VT CECE Blog)

[CECE's Elli Travis joins UEDA board leadership](#) (OIA Website)

[Road map charts new course for state Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission](#) (Virginia Tech News)

[Vibrant Virginia grant builds lasting partnerships to address opioid crisis](#) (Virginia Tech News)

[Virginia awards planning grant for Eastern Shore seafood, agriculture hub](#) (WBOC)

[Virginia Tech earns national recognition for community engagement](#) (Virginia Tech News)

[Virginia Tech faculty use Vibrant Virginia seed grant to host student workshop focused on decision-making in transportation](#) (VT CECE Blog)

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## **Support our work**

Your investment in the Virginia Tech Center for Economic and Community Engagement means more access to resources for communities across the Commonwealth.

CECE provides expertise, resources, and project support to catalyze action that benefits local communities and economies, specifically in economic, community, and workforce development. CECE's

evidence-based research and university connections help to address needs identified at the local level through strategic partnerships and direct services.

Every dollar you donate allows CECE faculty to bring their knowledge and experience to communities from Abingdon to Arlington, Covington to Chincoteague, Damascus to Danville, Melfa to Martinsville, New Market to Newport News, and Radford to Richmond, ensuring that every region in Virginia can thrive.

Together, we can build stronger communities and brighter futures across the Commonwealth.

[Visit our Giving Page.](#)

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