



REGION 2

VIRGINIA INITIATIVE FOR
**GROWTH &
OPPORTUNITY**
IN EACH REGION

COLLABORATION
INSPIRATION
SUCCESS

February 6, 2025

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Next submission deadline: March 21, 2025 by 5 p.m

There is \$1.5 million available for Region 2 grants, with up to \$150,000 for planning grants.

[Learn more on our website.](#)

Mark your calendar for upcoming meetings

February 7, 2025: GOVA Region 2 Q&A Session, 10-11 AM

Register in advance for this webinar:

https://viriniatech.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_2AzRPqnqR4GRJ80f582z6Q

April 23, 2025: GO Virginia Region 2 Council Meeting, 1-3 PM, Roanoke VA.

July 24, 2025: GO Virginia Region 2 Council Meeting, 1-3 PM, Roanoke, VA

Project VITAL: Transforming Virginia into a biotechnology hub



GO Virginia will invest \$14.3 million to support Project VITAL: Virginia Innovations and Technology Advancements in Life Sciences, led in GO Virginia Region 2 by [Verge \(Roanoke Blacksburg Innovation Alliance\)](#).

A multiregional initiative between Region 2, Region 4, and Region 9, VITAL will establish new research cores, expand workforce development programs, and create a collaborative network connecting academic institutions with industry partners across the commonwealth's biotechnology corridor.

"This investment represents a pivotal moment for Virginia's biotechnology ecosystem," said Erin Burcham, president of the Roanoke Blacksburg Innovation Alliance.

[Carilion Clinic](#), Virginia Tech Innovation and Partnerships ([LAUNCH, the Center for New Ventures](#)), [Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine](#), and [Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC](#) will collaborate on the project, as well as [Virginia Western Community College](#), [Roanoke - Blacksburg Technology Council](#), and [Blue Ridge Partnership Health Science Careers](#).

[Read more about Project VITAL.](#)

Learn how GO Virginia Region 2 projects are making an impact!



Staff recently spoke with grantees and businesses to understand the impact of GO Virginia Region 2 talent-focused projects. The evaluation found the projects are attracting skilled talent, enhancing employer engagement, and fueling workforce growth.

[MOVA Technologies](#), a Pulaski based company that offers climate-smart air filtration systems, expanded their internship spots by 200% with support from GO Virginia Region 2's Experiential Learning in Tech Employment (ELITE) Internship Program, led by the [Roanoke - Blacksburg Technology Council](#).

"What we give them is the ability to get in and work side by side with our full-time engineers and make the most of it. The interns are immersed in it, and it's a phenomenal internship from that perspective," said MOVA.

[Read the full report.](#)

Meet a GOVA Region 2 Grantee: Spencer Marsh, GMP CLEAN



Spencer Marsh has a bachelor's and master's degree in bioengineering and a Ph.D. in tissue engineering and regenerative medicine from Clemson University. After completing his Ph.D., he began doing post-doctorate work in Robert Gourdie's lab at the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC (FBRI). Marsh now serves as the chief scientific officer for The Tiny Cargo Company and is transitioning into a chief operating officer role at the company.

His GO Virginia project, GMP CLEAN (Good Manufacturing Practices: Cleanroom manufacturing for Local Engineering Advancement in the New river & Roanoke valleys) is addressing the need for cleanroom space through planning activities that are surveying region-wide and statewide needs.

1. Over the course of your career, what is your proudest accomplishment?

The Tiny Cargo Company is focused on harnessing exosomes in cow's milk for both therapeutic and nutraceutical purposes. In December 2023, Tiny Cargo was successful in industrially isolating exosomes. Our company traveled to New Zealand, where we processed 3,000 liters of milk into 200 liters of exosomes. Scaling the technology from the lab to what I believe is a world first is our most significant accomplishment at this point.

2. What do you like most about working at The Tiny Cargo Company?

We're still small enough that every day we're doing something different.

I might be in the CSO role, but some days I'll be using a microscope for six-eight hours. Some days I'll be in meetings, writing proposals, working on manuscripts, or giving talks.

We're able to be nimble and readjust at a moment's notice because we're small. For many companies, it can take 12 to 18 months to start a new project whereas we can do that in 12 or 18 hours.

3. What was the inspiration behind your Region 2 project, GMP CLEAN?

At Tiny Cargo, we needed to scale up our manufacturing, and we were looking at local opportunities to install or lease a cleanroom. This experience showed me we lack the infrastructure needed for advanced biomanufacturing in the region. Tiny Cargo needed some sort of assistance with this challenge or we were going to be moving.

At Tech Night last year, I was talking to other RAMP companies, and they were experiencing the same problems. One person said they were looking at a place in Raleigh-Durham. Another said they were thinking they might outsource to a Contract Development and Manufacturing Organization (CDMO). I realized if we wanted to make a mark here in biomanufacturing, something would have to change.

That led to internal conversations at Virginia Tech and the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute. The FBRI led the submission for the GO Virginia project. We were able to create a vision of building our own infrastructure in the region as opposed to trying to relocate somewhere where infrastructure is already present or going with a CDMO.

The leadership at the FBRI, including Executive Director Michael Friedlander and Professor and Director of the Center for Vascular and Heart Research Robert Gourdie, put themselves out there and allowed for a cleanroom to be placed into what was a lab space.

The support of the FBRI on this grant and their provision of matching funds has been invaluable. My role at Tiny Cargo is what unearthed the need in the region. But my position at FBRI was altogether far more influential in being able to make this happen. FBRI's role cannot be overstated.

[Read more about Spencer Marsh.](#)

Meet a GOVA Region 2 Council Member: Douglas Agner, Graham White Manufacturing, Wabtec



Douglas Agner is the vice president and general manager for Graham White Manufacturing in Salem, Virginia. He has a bachelor's degree from Old Dominion University in mechanical engineering technology as well as certifications in lean manufacturing and Six Sigma.

Agner began his career in manufacturing as an engineer and transitioned to leadership roles in operations and general management.

He has worked in the valve industry, construction, power and energy, oil, and gas, and now transportation. He grew up in Danville, VA and has lived in many different locations across the U.S. He moved back to Virginia in 2021 and currently lives in Salem.

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

I worked in a Food World grocery store when I was in high school and college. What I learned was that hard work always pays off, but learning pays double.

At a young age, I worked every position in the grocery store. I leaped over people that had been working many years in the same position because I had an appetite for learning. I'm still that way at my age today.

Over the course of my career, I've realized how rewarding it is to have a passion for learning.

2. What is your proudest accomplishment over the course of your career?

Creating new jobs.

I've enjoyed a successful career where I've left past employers and businesses that I own in a much healthier condition. Earlier in my career I worked at a company named Royston. They had a company in their portfolio that manufactured equipment for convenience stores.

They had two plants; one made cabinetry, and one made shelving. The company was on a downturn, so they sent me there to determine how to move forward.

The leadership and owners had it in their mind that they were going to close a facility.

I learned about the business, and in the process of working through the order they gave me, I started cross-training and developing better methods for manufacturing.

We became so great at what we were doing, we started gaining market share.

We were looking at a potential reduction of 100 or 200 jobs in a 400-person company, but we turned it 180. We started expanding. We had two acquisitions. And in a matter of two to three years, we had quadrupled the population for that business. The business today is thriving. That's one of my proudest accomplishments.

3. What do you like most about your job at Graham White Manufacturing?

Graham White is a century old business and is part of a larger corporation, Wabtec Corporation. It's been foundational in the Roanoke Valley. I have had the opportunity to leverage the benefits of this large corporation and bring more value to our business in Salem, Virginia. We have been able to expand the business, create more jobs, innovate, develop new technologies, improve employee careers, and contribute back to the community.

[Read more about Douglas Agner.](#)

Region 2 in the news

[Project Vital bringing millions in funding to Roanoke-Blacksburg's life sciences](#) (Cardinal News)