



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

COLLABORATION  
INSPIRATION  
SUCCESS

April 17, 2024

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## Next Submission Deadline: June 21, 2024 by 5 p.m.

Applications submitted in June will be considered in the next fiscal year. After July 1, 2024, there will be \$1.5 million available for Region 2 grants, with up to \$250,000 for planning grants.

Learn more on our website: <https://cece.vt.edu/GOVAR2/RequestforProposals.html>

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# Upcoming Council Meetings

**April 23, 2024, 1-3pm :** GO Virginia Region 2 Council Meeting, Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC, room G 102A (4 Riverside Circle, Roanoke, VA 24016).

Join the webinar:

<https://virginiatech.zoom.us/j/85233273344?pwd=Q0g3eXFIZ1htSVpSNjFacU55OXVRZz09>

Passcode: 273695

Webinar ID: 852 3327 3344

**July 23, 2024, 2-4pm:** GO Virginia Region 2 Council Meeting, Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC, room G-101A&B, (4 Riverside Circle, Roanoke, VA 24016). Zoom virtual meeting link to follow.

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## Meet GOVA Talent Pathways Initiative Coordinator: Emmalee Wagner



*Emmalee Wagner joined the Virginia Tech Center for Economic and Community Engagement in January as the project coordinator for the Talent Pathways Initiative, which is focused on growing talent for two of the region's largest and fastest-growing industry clusters: Life Sciences & Biotechnology and Transportation Manufacturing & Autonomy. Raised in the sunny state of Florida, she spent the last eight years in Salt Lake City, Utah, where she pursued dual majors in political science and economics at the University of Utah.*

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

When I was in high school, I lived in Egypt for a year and a half. I was a student hire at the United States Embassy over summer and winter breaks. I worked in the community liaison office and was in charge of newsletters and facilitating onboarding and offboarding. The job taught me how to be clear and concise in my communication and have a strong understanding of my audience.

### 2. What made you interested in economic development?

In high school, I learned about microloan programs for women in developing companies. Learning about that made me want to be involved in helping communities through economic policy. I looked into what education I might need to work for NGOs or similar organizations. I originally wanted to work for the Foreign Service and work at embassies. But traveling around the U.S., I saw so many discrepancies between towns, which made me interested

in understanding what vibrant towns do to keep their vitality. That's what led me back to local economic development in the U.S. versus developing countries.

### **3. What have you enjoyed most about working on the Talent Pathways Initiative so far?**

Working with our implementation partners. As this is my first time working in economic development, the partners have helped me by sharing their experience and giving me good feedback. I'm happy to be learning new skills, and these partners have been great role models for me.

### **4. What are you looking forward to learning or doing as you move forward with the project?**

I've had a great time touring life science and biotech companies in the region. I toured Virginia Tech Carilion and Qentoros, a company focused on treating orthopedic injuries in horses.

In the future, I'm excited to learn more about occupations in transportation manufacturing and autonomy and go on tours of companies such as MELD Manufacturing and Volvo. Seeing companies in-person helps with my understanding of the industries, and I've learned so much about career opportunities in the region from talking to employers and going on tours.

### **5. What is your favorite part about working with organizations and employers in Region 2?**

I've been impressed by the pride people have in the region. That's important for maintaining momentum with development programs. It is motivating that on an individual level people are so excited and happy about where they live and have a passion for developing the region and making it successful.

### **6. What is the most memorable place you have ever visited?**

The island of Chiloé in Chile. It's the furthest south I've ever been. There's no light pollution, and it was so dark I was able to see the Milky Way and shooting stars. There is a lot of wildlife on the island including penguins, sheep, and horses. Also, the architecture is unique, and I enjoyed seeing the rustic churches.

### **7. What is a book you read that you would recommend?**

*A Short History of Nearly Everything* by Bill Bryson. I enjoy listening to it while I go on walks to revisit topics I learned in school. I liked science a lot when I was a kid, and it's been a great read so far.

### **8. What is the best advice you have ever received?**

My last manager helped me learn how to establish and maintain professional boundaries. She helped me realize the importance of a healthy work-life balance – being proud of the work you do but making sure that's not the only thing you're proud of.

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# Meet a GOVA Region 2 Council Member: Cathy Underwood, Branch



*Cathy Underwood has worked at construction management firm Branch since 2000 and serves as its corporate business development officer. She has bachelor's and master's degrees in Biological Systems Engineering from Virginia Tech.*

## **1. What is your favorite part of your role as corporate business development officer for Branch?**

The variety of the work and the opportunity to work with so many different people, both internally and externally. No two days are the same. I have the pleasure every day to help others develop their vision into reality. My career has been a series of experiences in different roles and so now I can lean on my experience in my previous role as President of our Builds division to help me in my business development role. It is exciting and inspiring to be with a company that's growing, is employee owned, and puts a high focus on supporting the communities where we live and work.

## **2. What projects are you currently working on at Branch?**

I'm working on our strategic plan and long-term vision. I'm also working on the Roanoke County Career and Technical Education (CTE) project along with two elementary school projects. These projects are great for workforce and talent development in our region. The Roanoke CTE project has been fun because we're always looking for skilled workers, and CTE fits right in that space.

## **3. What have you learned so far from your time as a GOVA Region 2 council member?**

It reinforced my belief that we live in a great region for collaboration and advancement. The focus on working together to move the region forward in key core areas is exciting. I've also learned about the meaningful projects happening around our region that were made possible through GO Virginia.

## **4. What are some similarities between your role at Branch and your work on the Region 2 Council?**

There's a lot of alignment between GO Virginia and Branch's areas of focus. We are both concerned with talent development, to both recruiting and retaining top talent. The markets that I'm focused on in my role at Branch also align with the industry clusters in GOVA Region 2. Involvement in these sectors requires collaboration from a wide range of entities, including higher education, private business, and government. At Branch, we work on infrastructure projects of all types, which helps me understand the needs in our region.

## **5. What is your favorite part of living in GOVA Region 2?**

We have the best of both worlds. We have the beauty of the outdoors and the opportunities that come with nature. Yet we're also technologically advanced and looking to grow in key areas that will allow the region to prosper. We have multiple top colleges and universities in our area, K-12 schools with leadership who understand the changing world around them and a desire to get students ready for their futures, as well as a great business base and health systems.

**6. What hobbies and activities do you like to do in your spare time?**

I enjoy spending time with my husband and our four children and supporting them in sports and school activities. They like to play volleyball, soccer, and basketball, and my son started golf this past fall.

**7. What was the last book you read that you would recommend?**

The last book I read that I would recommend is *The Gap and The Gain: The High Achievers' Guide to Happiness, Confidence, and Success* by Dan Sullivan and Dr. Benjamin Hardy.

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