



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

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SUCCESS

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Next Submission Deadline: September 22, 2023 by 5 p.m.

As of July 24, 2023, we have \$995,609 in funding available for Region 2 implementation (per capita) grants and up to \$250,000 for Region 2 planning (enhanced capacity building) grants.

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

Save the Date for Upcoming Council Meetings

October 19, 2023: GO Virginia Region 2 Council Meeting, 2-4 PM, Roanoke, VA

Meet GOVA Region 2 Grantees: Jonathan Buttram and Mary Zirkle



Jonathan Buttram is the chair of the Town of Bedford Economic Development Authority (EDA) and owns an engineering consulting company called Interwav, Inc. that specializes in the nondestructive inspection of metal fabricated components using ultrasonic testing. He has a master's degree from Virginia Tech in Engineering Mechanics. Mary Zirkle is the director of planning and community development for the Town of Bedford and also serves as the town's economic development coordinator, assisting the Town of Bedford EDA. She has a master's degree from Virginia Tech in Urban and Regional Planning. Their GO Virginia Region 2 project seeks to develop a master plan for repurposing a former steel shot foundry into a training center focused on metal fabrication skills. Metalworking is vital to the economy and is a large industry in GOVA Region 2, with 62 metal fabricating companies in the Bedford-Roanoke area. The facility will train people of all ages, including high school and college students as well as those who are returning to work or looking to upskill.

1. What was the inspiration behind your GO Virginia project?

MZ: The practical inspiration for the project was the sudden closure of the WinoaUSA plant during the pandemic. There was a concern the property could be purchased and mothballed or converted into a warehouse, and the EDA saw an opportunity to reactivate it. The next year, we found intangible inspiration through Central Virginia Community College when they visited and could see their metalworking programs in the space.

2. What is the history of the former foundry the Town of Bedford EDA is purchasing?

MZ: The WinoaUSA property was built in 1974 as the second abrasive manufacturing plant of Wheelabrator-Frye. It remained in this use until the closure by the French-owned company. It's always been metal focused, and we want to honor that niche.

3. What are some of the next steps you will take as you develop the plan for the Bedford Regional Metal Workforce Retention Center?

MZ: After finding the right consultant team to develop the plan, the next step is bringing the stakeholders together. This is the key step to determining which businesses in the Roanoke and Lynchburg regions can use the facility. We will then match those businesses with education opportunities in the region.

4. What are some of the industry partners you are working with on the project?

MZ: We have enthusiastic support from Central Virginia Manufacturing in Bedford and Precision Steel Manufacturing Corp. in Roanoke, as well as the American Foundry Society. In the Lynchburg area, both BWX Technologies and Framatome are on board with the project. Each industry partner has a different need, but the training that is most requested is welding. Quoting from Precision Steel Manufacturing, we can see to the range of just one company's needs, including "fabrication, forming, tube bending, traditional welding, robotic welding, CNC machining, and inspections." Exploring the teaching foundry opportunity is also exciting to envision here.

5. How do you hope the project will help the town of Bedford and surrounding area?

MZ: We expect the project to reach out to daily commuters in Roanoke and Lynchburg regions, but we believe the program has the potential to go nationwide. The idea that Bedford would be a spring in the desert for this facility brings with it the potential to attract businesses that would locate in the town and county in order to be close to a continuously-produced skilled workforce center.

6. The project builds on a previous GOVA award to Central Virginia Community College (CVCC) to create a Regional Career and Technical Education Academy. What is one of your favorite parts about working with CVCC and other school systems in the region?

MZ: So far, the favorite part for us has been the enthusiasm that CVCC has brought to the project. The project doesn't exist without them because they are the reason we did this. After they toured the plant in April 2021 and we discussed possibilities and their need for more training space, we launched based on their encouragement. They recognized the potential that could help them achieve their vision. Finding other partner institutions is expected to be an exciting outcome of the GOVA plan.

7. The project's executive summary states the facility has long-term potential for daily rail-based commuters. Can you talk about the plans for making the facility accessible by rail?

JB: The facility is about three quarters of a mile from the proposed Bedford Amtrak train station. In Bedford, we have a small town bus service called the Otter Bus that circuits through town once every hour, four days a week.

Our over-the-horizon plan, assuming Bedford receives future funding for its Amtrak station, would be to work with the Otter Bus to align its schedule to correspond with a future train schedule. The current Amtrak schedule would support students in Roanoke taking the morning departure to Bedford, using the Otter Bus to get to the facility and arrive to class by 8 a.m. The schedule would support students attending classes all morning and arriving back in Roanoke around 1:00 p.m. Similarly, the second half of the day would be dedicated to Lynchburg students, who could take the 11 a.m. train out of Lynchburg, be in class by 1 p.m. and back home around 6 p.m.

Bedford is the only location that could facilitate Roanoke and Lynchburg students in one facility. By train time, Bedford is also close to midway between Virginia Tech and the University of Virginia. We could offer graduate level type studies, such as a working foundry, where, if both engineering departments from the state universities wanted to participate, students could travel to Bedford in a similar fashion on a daily basis. The potential this facility has for daily commuters by train and/or car in a somewhat rural area like Southwest Virginia is unheard of, and it's a unique opportunity.

8. What is your favorite part of being a GOVA grantee?

JB: For me personally, it's an opportunity to meet interesting people, and from a project standpoint, it's exciting to work regionally. Bedford is located in the geographical center of GOVA Region 2, making it ideally located to work with both Roanoke and Lynchburg. Our location is our strong point, and that is one of the reasons we wanted to work on this project. This is truly a regional project, and we want this training center to encourage companies to move to Bedford, Roanoke, and Lynchburg. That's our ultimate goal.



Winoa USA Plant

Meet a GOVA Region 2 Council Member: Whitney Czelusniak, American Electric Power



Whitney Czelusniak is a native of Southwest Virginia and grew up in Chilhowie, a small town in Smyth County. She received a bachelor's degree in political science and history from Roanoke College and a master's in public administration and a graduate certificate in economic development from Virginia Tech. She began her career in Savannah, Georgia where she served as a management fellow for the city. She then returned to Virginia Tech where she spent six years as an economic development specialist for what was formerly the Office of Economic Development and is now the Center for Economic and Community Engagement. She then returned to her home region where she served as Washington County's economic development coordinator for six and a half years. In March 2021, she joined American Electric Power as an economic and business development manager for Appalachian Power's service territory in Virginia and Tennessee.

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

During my undergraduate years at Roanoke College, I initially pursued a legal career. I had summer internships in the Smyth County Commonwealth Attorney's office, for the honorable James C. Turk, a Senior U.S. District Judge in Roanoke, and the U.S. Attorney's Office in Roanoke. Not only did I learn about how legal systems work in general, I also learned about the challenges that face our region from a socioeconomic perspective. I saw how those challenges showed up in the legal system and how cases coming through the courtroom provided a barometer of what was going on in the community.

2. What drew you to the economic development field?

I wanted to have a career where I could help communities remain vibrant places. During my childhood and teenage years in the 1980s and 90s, the community I lived in primarily produced textiles, furniture, and tobacco. Those industries were experiencing a lot of change as I was beginning to think about what I wanted to do for a career. In my hometown, I saw firsthand how important economic diversification and economic resilience is for communities as they encounter times of economic transition. I also saw the importance of workforce training as a tool in helping communities navigate that transition.

3. What do you like most about your job as manager of economic and business development for American Electric Power?

The role allows me to support regional, state, and local economic developers in communities, in this case, from a utility-based perspective. I enjoy having an opportunity to work with several professionals who are passionate about the communities they serve. I also enjoy the opportunity to interact with our customers and learn about some of the opportunities and challenges that are facing a wide range of businesses and industry across Western Virginia and Northeast Tennessee.

4. What made you interested in joining the GOVA Region 2 council?

I've had prior roles that have given me a unique perspective on economic and talent development opportunities and challenges across the New River Valley, Roanoke Valley, and Lynchburg regions. Through my current role, I've also developed considerable insight into how product development and infrastructure play an important part in helping support both existing business expansion and new business attraction opportunities. My hope is that I can use my current and combined experiences to offer helpful insight to the council. I'm looking forward to learning a lot from my fellow council members and working with them to understand how we can support our local stakeholders in moving our region forward.

5. Who are key leaders or mentors in your life that have inspired you?

My parents are both active in my home community in various volunteer and public service roles. From a young age, that helped to instill in me the value of being an active participant in your community. My aunt and my uncle were also inspirational to me. My aunt is a college professor, and she gave me a lot of valuable advice when I worked in academia. My uncle was an engineer and a public administrator for North Carolina government. He was one of the first people to introduce me to the concept of having a career in economic development. It was beneficial for me to have two people offer their experience to help me identify a career opportunity in this profession.

6. What is your favorite place to visit?

Iceland. It's one of the most beautiful places I've ever traveled.

7. What activities/hobbies do you like to do in your spare time?

Anything that allows me a chance to get outside. There's such a diversity of assets that exist across all communities in GOVA Region 2. Whether it's kayaking, camping, or mountain-biking, I've been able to find some really unique attributes in each of Region 2's subregions, and I love the opportunity to get out and explore. I also enjoy gardening and outdoor sports. I love music, especially enjoy old-time music and jam, and I play nine musical instruments.

GO Virginia Region 2 In The News

[\\$2.9M in GO Virginia grants announced by Gov. Youngkin](#) (WSET)

['A spring in the desert': Bedford Town EDA has big plans for workforce training center](#) (The News & Advance)

[Bedford firing up tech training](#) (Virginia Business)

[Falling Branch Corporate Park Phase II receives GO Virginia funding](#) (WDBJ7)

[Falling Branch Corporate Park to undergo Phase II of development in Montgomery County](#)

(WSET)

[This steel mill closed in 2020. It's being turned into a technical training center.](#) (Cardinal News)