



REGION 2

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

COLLABORATION
INSPIRATION
SUCCESS

February 19, 2024

In This Issue:

1. Next Submission Deadline: March 22, 2024
2. Save the Date for Upcoming Council Meetings: April 23, 2024
3. GO Virginia Region 2 Council Approves Two Projects
4. Meet a GOVA Region 2 Grantee: Jason Clayton, Experiential Learning in Tech Employment (ELITE) Internship Program
5. Meet a GOVA Region 2 Council Member: Jacob Wright, Alleghany-Highlands School Board/Merry Go Round Farms

Next Submission Deadline: March 22, 2024 by 5 p.m.

As of January 25, 2024, we have \$819,652 for Region 2 grants and up to \$10,641 for planning grants.

[Learn more on our website.](#)

Save the Date for 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). Zoom virtual meeting link to follow.

GO Virginia Region 2 Council Approves Two Projects



The GO Virginia Region 2 council approved the following two projects at their meeting on January 25, 2024. The projects will be reviewed for final approval by the state GO Virginia program this quarter.

Career Pathway Development Initiatives for the Lynchburg Region ***Lynchburg Regional Business Alliance***

The Lynchburg Regional Business Alliance is applying for a planning grant to develop the Educator Workforce Academy and secure firms to create an online workforce resource hub in support of the materials and machinery manufacturing target sector and nuclear energy workforce pathways within that sector.

Data Analyst Training And Software Engineers Experience from Locality Data **(DATA SEED)** ***Virginia Tech Department of Business Information Technology***

The Virginia Tech Department of Business Information Technology is applying for a planning grant to enhance data analytics and software development capabilities in Region 2, growing the future talent pool through connecting college students with experiential learning opportunities in local government and private sector mentor relationships.

Meet a GOVA Region 2 Grantee: Jason Clayton, Experiential Learning in Tech Employment (ELITE) Internship Program



As the technology talent strategist for the Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council (RBTC), Jason Clayton values making the region's innovation economy the strongest it can be through partnership and collaboration. Prior to joining the RBTC team last year, he spent over twenty years in higher education at institutions such as Miami University, Radford University, Clemson University, and Virginia Tech in areas of career and leadership development, employer relations, and strategic initiatives.

1. What is your favorite part of your job as technology talent strategist for the Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council?

The overarching purpose in my career is to be a builder of people and organizations, which reflects this position's focus on connecting organizations to the right talent. My background in higher education and employer relations is helpful because I can work with universities and industry to figure out how to support their mutual needs related to talent. Connecting young talent to industry through different events and experiences on and off campus is truly a joy for me.

2. What are some of the impacts the ELITE Internship Program had on students in the region?

The ELITE grant ended in September 2023 and sought to help close the technology pipeline gap that exists here in the region. 62 students at 17 different companies completed internships thanks to \$94,000 of the GO Virginia grant that directly supported intern wages. As of September, 17 interns were already hired full time. Multiple companies also shared their interns will be coming back next spring or they'd like to hire their interns once they graduate.

Many of the students gained real-world experience in their internships and got a taste of what the area has to offer through summer programs [Onboard ROA](#) and [Onward NRV Experience](#).

The ELITE grant also funded various professional development events offered in collaboration with Virginia Tech, Radford University, Virginia Western Community College, New River Community College, Sweet Briar College, and Roanoke College. Some of these events included a fireside chat with an employer on generative AI, a Biotech Takeover event that allowed students and young professionals to engage with biotech leaders through presentations and networking, and an event focused on innovative problem identification and solving.

Also, for the first time ever, we held a student pitch competition as part of [Game Changer Week](#). 52 student teams developed their innovative concepts with finalists presenting in front of audiences and employers that served as judges. Students practiced their pitch presentations throughout the week and received feedback and mentorship from employers in the region. It was a phenomenal experience for the students, who got to meet many employers and build a professional network. Over a short period of time, the students participating in this professional development event honed skills that any employer seeks. The winning teams received \$16,000 in total prize money that was graciously provided by corporate sponsors.

Jimmy Ortiz, an intern at Cloudfit Software, had this to say about his experience: “Getting to know a plethora of knowledgeable individuals in the field has given me a leg up on my road to success. The projects they put us on give us real-world experience, which gives us a giant boost in our careers. I would love to work for CloudFit someday, not only because of the experiences but because the environment here has been exquisite.”

3. What did you like most about partnering with software development company ExelARATION?

ExelARATION has one of the best internship programs in the country. They put their interns on real projects with real clients, and their expert staff members provide mentorship for the students. Once the projects are complete, the company that partnered with ExelARATION might want to hire the student intern because they've seen the good work they're capable of. It's a powerful model, and we were very thankful to be able to partner with the ExelARATION team in Blacksburg.

4. What is your favorite part of being involved in the GO Virginia program?

Internships are a great example of experiential learning, which is a high priority for the state of Virginia. Virginia Chamber of Commerce's Blueprint Virginia 2030 plan mentions internships as a key strategy for building the Commonwealth's world-class talent supply to become a leader in the global economy and the best state in the nation for business. Developing and keeping the talent that's graduating from our amazing universities here is important for that to occur. When I look at the ELITE program, it made a significant impact for our region toward that larger goal. Many of the 17 companies who participated in the program were smaller and wouldn't have been able to afford interns if it hadn't been for GO Virginia's support. Now these companies have an internship program model, have had good experiences, and have hired some skilled employees. They've filled some gaps to reach our goals of retaining talent, not just here in the region, but across the state.

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

I enjoy hiking and being on the water. I love spending time with my wife, 12-year-old daughter, and our dog in the great outdoors. I also enjoy live music and the arts and culture the Roanoke and New River Valleys have to offer. This region is a great place to call home.

6. What is the most memorable place you've ever visited?

I did some outdoor leadership work early on in my higher education career in New Zealand. Our group backpacked in Mount Tongariro National Park, where Mount Doom is in the Lord of the Rings movies. It's amazing how diverse the topography is – you go from being on top of a volcano, to walking across lava fields, to being in a temperate rainforest. It's also incredible to experience the culture and see the stewardship of the land by the people and the value they place on their outdoor resources.

Meet a GOVA Region 2 Council Member: Jacob Wright, Allegheny-Highlands School Board/Merry Go Round Farms



Originally from the Allegheny Highlands region, Jacob Wright serves as the chairman of the newly consolidated Allegheny Highlands Public Schools school board and operates Merry Go Round Farm, a family farm and private events venue. He also runs two real estate businesses. He has a bachelor's degree in design from Corcoran School of the Arts and Design at George Washington University and studied architecture at Boston Architectural College.

1. What do you like most about serving as chair for the Allegheny Highlands Public School board?

Since I've had the chance to be chair, we've consolidated Covington City Schools and Allegheny County Public Schools. That project is something I've had a major hand in. I've worked on it for about 10 years, but there have been talks of consolidation since 1963. Finally, we were able to come together to accomplish consolidation, and it's been great for the kids so far.

2. What made you want to start Merry Go Round Farms, and what is your favorite part of running a farm?

The farm has been in my family since 1756. When I returned to the region, I wanted to see what I could do to make the farm sustainable. On the farm, I raise Gloucestershire Old Spots pigs. I also love entertaining, which was what led me to open the farm as a wedding and private events venue.

3. What have you learned so far from serving on the GO Virginia Region 2 council?

It's been great to meet new people that are interested in progressing our region. A lot of the work is education related, which is one of my main focuses, so I enjoy being part of a group of like-minded people that want the best for our region.

4. Is there anything that you would like to see GO Virginia Region 2 do more of in the future?

I'm excited about the possibility of some projects in the Alleghany Highlands. We're the northernmost point of Region 2, and I'm eager to get some folks from our council up to the area to look at some potential projects.

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

Spending time in the outdoors. We have so much to offer around here, and I like canoeing, fishing, and hunting.

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

My parents and grandparents were all entrepreneurs in very creative ways. They turned the things they liked to do into businesses, which inspires me in my own work. When I was a child, my mother always stood up to the local governments for what she believed in. She was the driving force behind me wanting to work on the school board and collaborating with others on consolidation.

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

The last book I read that I would recommend is called *Charcuterie: The Craft of Salting, Smoking and Curing* by Michael Ruhlman and Brian Polcyn. I did a presentation with the authors in Atlantic City, and the book has been helpful as I'm getting ready to process some pigs in the next couple of weeks.

8. What is the most memorable place you've ever visited?

The most unique place I've ever visited is the tunnels in between the Corcoran Gallery of Art and the White House in Washington D.C. You can no longer access these tunnels as this was before 9/11. I went through the sculpture lab and underneath the streets of D.C. all the way to the White House.
