



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

COLLABORATION  
INSPIRATION  
SUCCESS

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July 15, 2024

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# Collaboration in Action: the Story of GO Virginia Region 2



GO Virginia Region 2 recently unveiled a new video, which tells the story of the impact the program has had on the 18 localities in the New River Valley, Lynchburg, and Roanoke-Alleghany regions.

Thank you to everyone for their participation in the video!

- Eddie Amos, GO Virginia Region 2 Chair, GE Digital
- Raymond Smoot, Founding Chair
- Erin Burcham, President of Verge
- Jason Clayton, Tech Talent Strategist, Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council
- Laura Hamilton, Founding Executive Director, Lynchburg Beacon of Hope
- James Harder, Head of External Engagement, Virginia Tech Department of Computer Science
- Mike Ketron, Supervisor of Career and Technical Education, Botetourt County Public Schools
- Brett Malone, President, Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center
- Ken McFadyen, Director, Botetourt County Economic Development
- Leidra McQueen, Executive Director, Lynchburg Beacon of Hope
- Elise Spontarelli, Executive Director, Vector Space

[Watch the video.](#)

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## Next Submission Deadline: September 20, 2024 by 5 p.m

There is \$1.5 million available for Region 2 grants, with up to \$250,000 for planning grants.

[Learn more on our website.](#)

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## Save the Date for Upcoming Council Meetings

**July 23, 2024:** GO Virginia Region 2 Council Meeting, 2-4 PM, Virtual

[Join the webinar.](#)

Passcode: 592173  
Webinar ID: 842 6173 9505

**October 24, 2024:** GO Virginia Region 2 Council Meeting, 1-3 PM, Room G-101A&B, 4 Riverside Circle SW, Roanoke, Virginia 24016

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## Meet GOVA Region 2 Grantees: Leidra McQueen and Laura Hamilton, Career Acceleration Program



**Leidra McQueen, Executive Director of Lynchburg Beacon of Hope**



**Laura Hamilton, Founding Executive Director of Lynchburg Beacon of Hope**

*Leidra McQueen is the executive director of Beacon of Hope, a Lynchburg nonprofit that launched in 2011. During her ten years at the nonprofit, she has served as deputy director, director of the Office of College and Career Success, and the Future Center director at her alma mater, Heritage High School. Laura Hamilton is the founding executive director of Beacon of Hope. She is currently serving in a consultatory phase for Beacon. Over the course of her career, she has engaged in policy work, nonprofit leadership, strategic consulting, and fundraising. Beacon of Hope's first GO Virginia project, Future Centers Expansion, focused on expanding the nonprofit's Future Centers model to Amherst County and Altavista. Future Centers are privately funded spaces in Lynchburg City high schools that work in partnership with school counseling, administrators, the local economic development community, and local post-secondary providers to develop a seamless talent pipeline. Beacon of Hope's second GO Virginia project is called the Career Acceleration Program. Through this project, Beacon of Hope is continuing to engage with high school students, with a focus on connecting them to the workforce through a summer internship program. The project is also focusing on individuals who have paused their educational journeys as well as two-generation households, where parent and children are prime age workers.*

### **1. What led you to want to assist students in finding their future careers?**

LH: Beacon of Hope is special because it is so grassroots driven. What drives me is not only being able to contribute to the revitalization of our public schools and our city in general, but also being able to provide

opportunities that aren't available other places. There are so many challenges in public education. If we can help close some of those gaps, it's a day well spent.

LM: I worked for UVA's Virginia College Advising Corps (VCAC), which got me interested in this work. I was recruited for Teach for America, and I loved the concept, but being a teacher was not for me. VCAC was the same conceptually as Teach for America, but specifically focused on career advising and coaching. I've been in this space ever since. When I was working with UVA in Martinsville, I remember calling my mom and saying I would love to do this type of work in Lynchburg at Heritage High School. And as I was having that conversation, Laura and team were working behind the scenes to get Beacon of Hope off the ground.

I love seeing students find their passion and their joy, and it makes this work easy.

## **2. Since working at Beacon of Hope, is there a specific moment or memory that stands out to you?**

LM: There's so many. I think Laura and I would both agree that the launch of our [Stay Close, Go Far Scholarship program](#), our promise to Lynchburg City School students, was a really special moment.

We made that announcement in 2018 for the class of 2019. We announced to a room full of students that there was a scholarship available regardless of need and regardless of merit – the scholarship was for literally every student sitting in that audience. It was memorable.

But we've done so many things. We've started the [Lynchburg Beacon of Hope's Summer Internship Program](#). This is the third summer that we've been running it, and it gives students real world experience and connects businesses to a pipeline of local talent.

LH: We have a student who literally walked here from El Salvador when he was 11 years old, and he is now 22. I can remember the moment that he was awarded a full-ride scholarship for the Aviation Maintenance Technician Program at Liberty University. He worked really hard. Reading airline manuals in a language that isn't your own has got to be incredibly difficult. But he made it through and is now working for Piedmont Airlines as an aircraft maintenance technician and thriving. We have 2000 of those kinds of moments.

## **3. What impact have your GOVA projects had on Lynchburg and the surrounding area, and what goals do you have for the future?**

LM: This GO Virginia partnership has allowed us to expand our reach and influence in positive ways. For this current project, it's yet to be determined, but what we're seeing is we're making small waves by providing hope for students and encouraging them in their educational journeys. We want to continue being able to share our experience and knowledge with other communities across the commonwealth to hopefully expedite their process, shorten the learning curve, and help them get programs off the ground quickly so they can better serve their students.

## **4. What do you like most about being a GO Virginia grantee?**

LH: We love GO Virginia. We can't say it enough. The GO Virginia grant process makes you think differently about who you are and what you want to accomplish. The process gave us the fuel to work with populations we otherwise might not have and has broadened our horizons in terms of what we can do.

## **5. What is your favorite part of living in Lynchburg?**

LM: Lynchburg gave me a home. I traveled a lot growing up and didn't anticipate being in Lynchburg beyond high school. But however many years later, my family is still here, and I've gone away and come back. Lynchburg is such a giving and philanthropic community, and something like Beacon of Hope could only thrive in this type of environment. There are so many good people. It's not the biggest area to exist in, but it gives you what you need. If you don't have a healthy, strong community, and you don't have something to seek after, then you don't want to fight for something better. But the community here is so good that it's worth what's being built here.

LH: I agree with that 1000%. Also, I think it's really special that we get to spend a lot of time with the students we serve. The relationships are there. It's not that we're serving this faceless population of kids. We know these kids; we know their families. When we began working with the National College Promise in Washington D.C., they asked us how we identified students to speak at our events or to participate in our live speaker event series. We said we have a two-page list of kids who are eager to be our next speakers. This isn't anonymous work; we see it every day.

#### **6. Tell me more about your live speaker event series!**

LH: This series is called [HopeX](#), and it's a nonprofit fundraiser we developed. We just finished our third year of it in March. We integrate adult speakers with our students. The adults do a 12-15-minute talk, and our young people do a five to seven-minute talk. Previous themes speakers have based their talks around include 'The Power of Education to Transform Lives,' 'The Power in Finding Your Why', and 'The Exponential Power of Connection.'

#### **7. What hobby would you dive into if time and money weren't an issue?**

LM: The first thing that that came to my mind was boating. My grandfather used to live in Annapolis, and my brother and I would go out on the boat with him in the summertime.

LH: I would travel more. The books I read inspire the places I want to go, and the latest trip I was looking at was India. I would love to travel there.

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## **Meet a GOVA Region 2 Council Member: Michael Friedlander, Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC**



*Michael Friedlander is the Vice President for Health Sciences and Technology at Virginia Tech and the founding executive director of the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC. He also serves as the Senior Dean for Research at the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine and is a Professor of Biological Sciences and of Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine. He has a bachelor's degree in biology from Florida State University and a Ph.D. in physiology and biophysics from the University of Illinois. He began his career as a faculty member at the*

*University of Alabama at Birmingham's medical center, where he started a neuroscience program and became founding chair of the Department of Neurobiology and Director of the Civitan International Research Center for Developmental Disabilities. From there, he became head of the Department of Neuroscience at the Baylor College of Medicine and Director of Neuroscience Initiatives in Houston, Texas. Since 2010, he has worked at Virginia Tech and helped launch the Virginia Tech Health Sciences and Technology campus in Roanoke as well as the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute.*

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

I'm most proud of the people and the enterprise that have emerged in the last 14 years at Virginia Tech. It was very exciting to be part of launching an entirely new program in biomedical and health science research and seeing it grow and flourish has been rewarding. It has been especially gratifying for myself and my best recruiting partner, my wife, Sandra, to have been able to be part of this growth and to have been so warmly embraced by the Roanoke community.

**2. What is your favorite part of your job as executive director of the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC?**

My favorite part of my job is helping, in any way I can, early career scientists grow and become successful. My role as a leader is to share resources with them, remove barriers, and connect them to other people and programs. I love seeing these scientists make important discoveries and go on to have national and international impact.

**3. What projects are you currently working on at the research institute and at the Virginia Tech Carilion Health Sciences and Technology campus?**

We are starting a new patient research center that will be located in our partner Carilion Clinic's new Cancer Center building in Roanoke. With this new project, we will be taking discoveries and translating them into patient populations. I'm also excited about Virginia Tech's partnership with the Children's National Hospital in Washington, D.C. We have a strong partnership with that organization as well, and we have scientists there working on cancer research, including those that impact children. We are continuing to grow our partnership with the hospital by building out space and hiring new scientists to work there.

**4. What are some of the lessons you have learned serving on the GO Virginia Region 2 Council?**

The programs supported by GO Virginia include a lot of partnerships with institutions of higher learning, city and county governments, and private industry, and I've learned a lot about the exciting things going on in the New River Valley, Lynchburg, and Roanoke-Alleghany regions. I've learned how important it is to effectively partner with organizations, community groups, businesses, government, and universities in the area to launch truly collaborative projects. Serving on the council has taught me lessons on how to more successfully pull together teams across disciplines and organizations to effectively deliver projects for the greater good of the communities they serve.

I've also learned how sometimes a small financial investment can multiply and bring about successful outcomes. I've seen several projects the council has supported where modest investments take off and pay back in many ways.

**5. What do you look forward to seeing GO Virginia Region 2 do more of in the future?**

There are enormous opportunities in Region 2 to parlay the strengths we have in health and biomedical sciences, research, and healthcare. There's a lot of talent in the area and good training programs and facilities that provide wonderful healthcare and are constantly innovating. We have opportunities in Southwest Virginia and across Region 2 to excel. In the future, I hope to see GO Virginia entertaining more proposals that address issues around discovery, innovation, translation, and implementation in the health sciences.

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

The best advice I've ever received is trust your instincts. Having spent many years in leadership positions, I've learned to develop a strong sense of people and opportunities. While analytical thinking is needed, allowing your first impressions and instincts to enter into the decision-making process as well is good advice that I've received from several mentors along the way.

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

I got to spend a year living and working in Australia, and I have very fond memories, not only of my work experiences, but of the people and the environment in the country. I especially enjoyed getting to visit the Australian Outback, the beaches, and the Great Barrier Reef.

**8. What is a book you read recently that you would recommend?**

One of the books I've recently read is called *Breath from Salt* by Bijal Trivedi. It's a fascinating account of the history of a disease called cystic fibrosis. When I worked at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, people were doing research on the underlying biology and genetics of cystic fibrosis, so I already knew something about the story. This book talks about the history of the patients and the advances made in genetic medicine; today, 90 or 95% of everybody with cystic fibrosis can be effectively treated. The book also focused on how the O'Donnell family raised hundreds of millions of dollars to bring together small biotech startups and the scientific community to put a full-court press on trying to understand the disease, the genetic mutations, and how to develop therapies. This research comprises some of the earliest studies in precision medicine and gene therapy and has opened up a whole new landscape in medicine. It also puts a human face on the stories of the families who have been impacted by this disease and helps one as a scientist appreciate what it's really all about – patients, their families, and science in the service of all humankind.

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## **Welcome Jemma Sabokrouh, GOVA Region 2's New Program Manager**



Jemma Sabokrouh joined the team in June and serves as program manager for the Region 2 Internship Collaborative and GO Virginia Region 2. She earned a master's degree in educational leadership from the University of West Florida and a bachelor's degree in science education from the University of Central Florida. Jemma relocated to Blacksburg from Central Florida, where she worked as a high school assistant principal. Prior

to that, she taught high school biology and mathematics. In her free time, Jemma enjoys the much cooler weather and beautiful landscapes of Virginia in outdoor activities with her daughter and two dogs.

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## GO Virginia Region 2 Council Appoints Two New Members



**Doug Agner**



**Nanci Hardwick**

GO Virginia Region 2 has appointed two new members to serve on the council: Douglas Agner and Nanci Hardwick.

Agner serves as the vice president and general manager of Salem-based company Graham-White Manufacturing. Graham-White Manufacturing is part of Wabtec, a company focused on accelerating the future of transportation and delivering rail and industrial solutions that improve safety, efficiency and productivity.

“Growing up in Danville, VA, I saw how industry trends can impact small towns and communities,” Agner said. “As a GO Virginia Region 2 council member, I look forward to channeling my passion for manufacturing and technology to help this region grow stronger by creating more thriving businesses and high-paying jobs through collaboration between business, education, and the government.”

Nanci Hardwick is CEO of MELD Manufacturing Corporation, MELD PrintWorks Corporation, and Aeroprobe Corporation.

Hardwick has led MELD from a concept to commercialization and has received several awards, including R&D 100's most disruptive new technology worldwide and the Edison award. MELD has changed the scale of metal additive manufacturing with its solid-state printing process and holds over two dozen patents. The company's industrial MELD printers are capable of printing aluminum, magnesium, copper, titanium, steel, and more.

“GO Virginia supports our region's growth with critical funding prioritizing material and machinery manufacturing, transportation and autonomy, biotech, and emerging tech,” Hardwick said. “I look forward to working with a great team of people to continue investing in success for our community.”

[Read more about Doug Agner and Nanci Hardwick.](#)

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## Region 2 In the News

[GO Virginia State Board approves two projects](#) (Virginia Tech Center for Economic and Community Engagement)

[Radford University gets grant to collaborate on IT and cybersecurity](#) (The Roanoke Times)

[Radford University receives grant over \\$200k to strengthen IT & Cybersecurity workforce development](#) (WFXR)

[Radford University secures GO Virginia grant to strengthen IT and Cybersecurity workforce development](#) (Radford University News)

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