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Upcoming GO Virginia Region 2 Council Meetings

April 28, 2022: GO Virginia Region 2 Executive Committee, 1-3 PM

May 5, 2022: GO Virginia Region 2 Council Meeting, 3-5 PM

Next Submission Deadline, April 1, 2022

Provided continued state legislative appropriation, there are \$940,133 in implementation grant funds available for Region 2 focused projects, and additional statewide competitive funds are available for multi-regional proposals. There is \$130,000 available for Enhanced Capacity Building (planning) projects. Relaxed match requirements of 2:1 with a waived local match remain in effect; however, local participation is still required.

Learn more on our website.

<https://cece.vt.edu/GOVAR2/RequestforProposals.html>

Meet a GOVA Region 2 Grantee: Matt Earnest, Helping Local Employers Prepare the Existing and Future Workforce for Industry 4.0



1. What is your career history?

I graduated with a Bachelor of Science from the Industrial and Systems Engineering (ISE) program at Virginia Tech. While I was a student, I had a co-op position with Newport News Shipbuilding for 18 months. I then went to work for Burlington Industries for six years as an industrial engineer, before accepting a position with Interface Incorporated, where I stayed for 16 years and assisted architects and interior design companies.

Now, I'm research faculty in Virginia Tech's ISE department and the director of the Center for High Performance Manufacturing and the Learning Factory.

2. What is your favorite part of working at the Learning Factory?

It's been a creative experience. The Learning Factory started as a Ph.D. research lab, so we first had to clear it out and develop a design for what we wanted it to look like, and I enjoy being involved in those kinds of facility operations. Another one of my favorite parts is working with the students in the lab.

3. For those who may not know, how would you describe Industry 4.0 technology?

Most of it has to do with machines communicating via the internet of things. Manufacturers are seeing that the use of the internet helps collect more data faster, and helps to exchange data between people and things, and places, faster. For example, our HAAS machining center is connected to the internet and we can collect machining data from it. It allows our data scientists to analyze how that machine is doing and to identify trends. The ability to use the computational capabilities of the internet within a manufacturing environment is what makes Industry 4.0 a good thing.

4. What inspired the Industry 4.0 GO Virginia project?

We realized, although we had state of the art equipment in the Learning Factory at the time, that local employers are probably using different kinds of equipment. We decided to get employers, educators, and economic developers in a room together and discuss the types of Industry 4.0 equipment used in the area. Then we could make sure the equipment in our space was compatible with what our employers were using.

We also wanted to allow employers to use our space as a test-bed to try out Industry 4.0 technology in a non-threatening environment without a financial obligation. This year, Spectrum Brands is testing the feasibility of a co-bot, or collaborative robot, to see if it would work for their operation. The advantage is they can use ours and see if it's a good fit before they decide to buy one.

5. What goals do you hope to accomplish with the project?

Our biggest goal was to have two meetings, which we held in Blacksburg and Roanoke. They were about three months apart and were with economic developers, educators, and employers in our region. At the meetings, we gave multiple presentations on Industry 4.0 so everybody could have a collective understanding of what the term means. Then, we sent everybody away with homework, asking them to tell us what Industry 4.0 technology they have at their sites. With that information, we could identify some skill gaps in the workforce. Ultimately, the goal of the GO Virginia Region 2 grant is to develop a draft curriculum centered on Industry 4.0 technology to make sure current and future members of the workforce have the necessary skills to work for any of our employers without skipping a beat.

6. What has the students' reaction been to the technology in the Learning Factory?

The Learning Factory was created so students can gain hands-on experience with Industry 4.0 technology. Most of our students understand Industry 4.0 and most of them know the theory behind it. Robots and autonomous vehicles are familiar to them. However, many of our students have not had the opportunity to play with those toys, and previous students couldn't use that type of technology until they got out into the workforce. Now, the Learning Factory allows students, starting at the sophomore level, to use the kind of equipment they've heard about in classes. We currently have 50 seniors in various capacities working on projects in the Learning Factory. So, the feedback from the students has been, "Why did we not always have this?" They love it.

7. As you move forward with this project, is there anything in particular you are looking forward to learning or doing?

I'm looking forward to telling others that the curriculum we're developing is designed by three different categories of people, the people who educate for a living, the people who make stuff for a living – the employers – and the economic developers who drive business to the area. These three groups of people advised us on this curriculum and what needs to be included, so that's a great story. A lot of times, curriculum is created without necessarily accessing those who would benefit, but with this project, we were able to get input from those groups.

8. What is an accomplishment that you are proud of?

I was in industry for 25 years, and making the transition from industry to education was a big deal for me. Some people spend their entire career in either education or manufacturing, but I've gotten to split time in both. And I have loved it. I have a Master's degree in Education so I knew I wanted to teach, but I didn't quite know how to do it at first. I consulted a career counselor and said I would like to know how to shift to a teaching role. He advised me to work at a community college before transitioning to a university setting, which I did. I was vice president of workforce development at Bridgemont Community and Technical College in West Virginia for a while, and then I came back to Virginia Tech to teach. I always enjoyed education, so that career transition has been extremely satisfying for me.

9. What hobbies and activities do you like to do when you're not working?

About ten years ago, my wife and I bought some property in Floyd County. We enjoy walking every day, fishing, and doing various projects around the farm, including building bridges across creeks. My wife and I travel a little bit; in fact, next week we'll be going up to Massanutten but that doesn't consume a lot of our time. I spend most of my non-working time playing outside.

10. If you could invent anything what would it be?

I would invent instantaneous teleportation so we don't have to get on a plane to go somewhere; it would be nice if we could immediately bolt from Blacksburg to Hawaii or Cabo San Lucas.

Meet a GOVA Region 2 Council Member: Luke Towles, Senior Vice President at Pinnacle Financial Partners



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

My first job was stuffing envelopes for a family-owned business. It wasn't a consistent job, and the hours varied from week to week. It taught me to be more proactive in my communication as I had to let the employer know I was interested in the job and could work when they needed me.

2. What was one of the most important lessons you learned in college?

College reinforced the importance of discipline for me. I had to make sure that every day I worked on my assignments, whether it was due two weeks from then or the next day. It was necessary to create that margin when things went wrong.

3. What made you interested in a career in finance?

Growing up, I loved money and numbers. I also had an uncle who was in banking. As I got into high school and college, I would talk to him about what I should study and what kinds of summer jobs I should be looking for. Having an uncle who was in that space and had similar interests helped me realize I wanted a career in finance. I also learned in college that I did not have the skill set to be an accountant. Finance was an area that appealed to me and I could use my natural strengths in that area. Throughout college, I had a voice consistently pointing me toward banking, and after I graduated, I got a job in that field.

4. How would you describe your leadership style?

I pride myself on being collaborative. I believe when multiple people come together, better ideas result. I maintain an open door, focusing on how we can work together to take advantage of opportunities and overcome challenges. That said, I am still learning to make time for people to fully articulate their ideas. As a naturally task oriented person, I have come to realize that I need to be more patient to allow for the best outcomes.

5. What do you enjoy most about your job as senior vice president of Pinnacle Financial Partners?

One of my favorite parts is that every day is different. I have a diverse client base; one day I could be talking to a small machine shop and the next day, I could be in front of a large corporation talking about their capital needs. My role also gives me the opportunity for a lot of community engagement, so being able to invest time and energy into making our whole region economically viable is important to me.

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

I've been involved with the Lynchburg Regional Business Alliance for several years, and through that, I have seen the value of regional partnership. It's also made me realize the value of what the state is doing through its own economic development. It's important for Lynchburg, Roanoke, and Blacksburg to partner together to express the unique needs of the collective region. The GO Virginia program provides our region with a voice, helping us to get the attention of the state and attracting more jobs and investment to the area.

7. What skills are important to have as a GOVA Region 2 council member?

Having respect and care for the region as a whole. It's important to have a broad understanding of how a community may be impacted when an investment is made and that there aren't any negative unintended consequences. Also, a resource that we don't have access to may just take minimal investment to have a maximum impact. In my experience on the Region 2 board, the council has been community first and focused on what's best for the broader region.

8. Do you have a favorite memory from being on the GOVA Region 2 council?

The Central Virginia Training Center in Lynchburg was a state-run healthcare facility that was shut down. To make it a great space, it needs the opportunity to be redeveloped. The future impact can be very meaningful as the center is located right on the water, across from the downtown city of Lynchburg. Though it's an ideal space, there is a lot of complexity involved in redeveloping it. GO Virginia had partially funded a grant to help with a planning study focused on the future of this space. However, there was a funding gap between what GO Virginia gave and what the Lynchburg Regional Business Alliance was able to fundraise. It stalled for several months before William Fralin spoke up and advocated for the project. His support helped GO Virginia find a creative solution and also encouraged some additional investment from the Lynchburg region to help bridge the gap. Ultimately, we were able to rally together to get the project fully funded, and it was a fantastic collaboration between members of GO Virginia and the local community. Hearing an influential member of the GO Virginia Region 2 board weigh in was a powerful experience for me.

9. What would you like to see GOVA Region 2 do more of in the future?

There is already some collaboration between Lynchburg, Roanoke, and Blacksburg, but I would like the velocity of that collaboration to be increased and see more cross-pollination of business, resources, and universities from each of those regions. The sub-regions coming together and sharing their experiences, knowledge, and resources, will help drive Region 2 forward.

10. If you could go anywhere in the world, where would it be?

I would love to go to Italy. My wife and I were going to go for our anniversary in 2020 but the pandemic shut it down before we could get there. We'll definitely keep it on the list and look forward to the opportunity to go when the time arises.

The submission deadline for the following quarter will be July 5, 2022.

Visit the GO Virginia Region 2 Website:

<https://cece.vt.edu/GOVAR2.html>