



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

COLLABORATION  
INSPIRATION  
SUCCESS

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## Future GO Virginia Meetings

**February 2, 2021:** GO Virginia Region 2 Full Committee Meeting, 1:00 P.M. to 3:00 P.M.

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## GO Virginia State Board Approves New Projects

On December 7, 2020, the GO Virginia State Board announced its approval of two new Region 2 projects aimed at growing the regional economy. Region 2 consists of the cities of Covington, Lynchburg, Radford, Roanoke, and Salem; and the counties of Allegheny, Amherst, Appomattox, Bedford, Botetourt, Campbell, Craig, Floyd, Franklin, Giles, Montgomery, Pulaski, and Roanoke.

### **Board Approved Projects: Central Virginia Region CTE Academy (Central Virginia Community College)**

The Central Virginia Region Career and Technical Education (CTE) Academy will deliver necessary workforce training for individuals in Central Virginia Community College's service region, which includes the city of Lynchburg, the town of Bedford, and the counties of Amherst, Appomattox, Bedford, and Campbell. An estimated 1,120 students will complete a credential or certificate from the Central Virginia Regional CTE Academy. Programming will concentrate on the four targeted priority industry sectors: Manufacturing, Healthcare, Information Technology, and the automation segment of the food and beverage sector. The skills-based training provided by the CTE Academy will enable students to pursue

career paths toward higher-paying jobs, which are achievable with the stackable credentials and certifications the CTE Academy will offer. The GO Virginia Board approved a total of \$266,000 in state funds for the project, which is leveraging \$134,000 in non-state sources.

#### **VA Bio-Connect (Virginia Biotechnology Association)**

VA Bio-Connect is a multi-regional, statewide initiative that aims to grow the life science and biotechnology industry cluster in the Commonwealth through a model of formalized regional BioHubs. The initiative will be led by GOVA Region 4 and include participation from four GOVA Regions: 2, 5, 7, and 9. The goal of the project is to connect the BioHubs across the state in the areas of workforce development, commercialization, resource-sharing, and mentorship. The project seeks to serve existing and emerging life science companies in the region, close the talent gap for life science companies, create a statewide virtual entrepreneur-in-residence network, and establish a statewide, externally searchable asset map that can be used to find industry-specific assets and market industry-specific events. The GO Virginia Board approved a total of \$1,599,653 in state funds for the project, which is leveraging \$2,335,310 in non-state sources.

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GO Virginia Region 2 accepts full applications quarterly. For FY 2021, there are over \$1.6 million in collaborative grant funds available for Region 2 focused projects, and additional statewide competitive funds are available for multi-regional proposals. With a focus on the traded sectors of Life Sciences and Healthcare, Advanced Manufacturing, Information Technology/Emerging Technologies, and Food and Beverage Processing, there is up to \$298,000 currently available through the Economic Resilience and Recovery program. Relaxed match requirements of 2:1 with a waived local match remain in effect during quarter one; however, local participation is still required.

**Learn More On Our Website**

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## Meet a Grantee: Melinda Leland, Ignite



### **1. Could you give me an overview of the Ignite program?**

The United Way of Southwest Virginia offers initiatives for middle and high school students, and these make up the Ignite program. These initiatives involve hands-on activities such as the Careers Expo and Educator in Industry Tours. We have previously conducted Reality Store events and hosted what's called MajorClarity, a software that the teachers can use to allow students to explore careers, jobs, opportunities, internships in Southwest Virginia. We also have a summer internship program for our youth.

### **2. What is your favorite part of being the Director of Youth Success for the United Way of Southwest Virginia?**

I enjoy being the lever between school systems and businesses in our community and making sure that students in Southwest Virginia know about healthy businesses, work opportunities, and occupations that can be found right here at our backdoor.

### **3. Since you have started the Ignite project, is there a particular moment or memory that stands out?**

I will have been with United Way for three years this summer. One of my most vivid memories is my first year orchestrating the Careers Expo, a two-day event that highlights occupations in Southwest Virginia. During this event, 4,700 7th graders move through four zones, partaking in hands-on activities and learning from more than 100 volunteers about occupations in the area. The elation at seeing the event completed and thinking about how we had brought together 4,700 students and 110 volunteers was very memorable for me. The students learned a lot, and everyone was happy with the outcome.

#### **4. How have K-12 students reacted to the Ignite project curriculum and hands-on learning?**

After our events, we survey teachers and students to gauge their reactions and ask for suggestions on how to strengthen our activities. We serve 19 school systems in Region 1 and Region 2, and overall the reception to our initiatives has been positive. Schools are super excited to partner with us and are thankful for the additional resources we provide them, which give them the opportunity to take part in activities they couldn't do on their own.

#### **5. How has your project changed due to COVID-19? What are some challenges you have had to overcome?**

The great thing about the initiatives we had taking place in our school systems is that students could complete their activities anywhere, from home on their computer, in a guided classroom such as Google Classroom, or in a physical classroom.

We did have to switch our annual Careers Expo to a virtual event, as we couldn't bring in 4,700 students or 100 volunteers anymore. The online event was rolled out in October, day by day. Before the event, students were given pre-work where they used the software MajorClarity to create an academic career plan. Students then visited a website where they could see an employer, learn about occupations and work projections, and do a hands-on activity. When you came to the Careers Expo in previous years, students got to see demonstrations or interact with something, such as welding simulators, for example. This year, we asked employers to do the same sort of demonstration, only online. Some of the online demonstrations included demonstrations of water quality, a salamander exploration, and an IT simulation. If there wasn't a hands-on exploration piece, we included links for our teachers and students to go to a website and learn more about the activities that could take place.

In regards to our Educators in Industry Tours, instead of taking teachers to businesses, businesses Skyped in to have discussions with teachers and answer questions, just as they would have in person.

#### **6. What is your favorite part of being a GO Virginia grantee?**

Documenting accomplishments and seeing how we're serving our community, I think is my favorite. When you work on narrative reports, you see what you've

been able to accomplish, you see where there may be some weakness that you need to adjust for, and you also see things that you need to celebrate.

A few numbers specific to Region 2 include:

- 620 students had access to our virtual Careers Expo.
- 8 schools with a total of 893 students from Giles, Pulaski, Radford, Floyd, and Montgomery Counties were invited.
- 14 middle and high school teachers from 7 schools in Region 2 participated in an Educators in Industry Tour with one of our businesses.

### **7. Is there an accomplishment you have made that you are most proud of regarding the Ignite program?**

Before I came to United Way, I was impressed with all the work they were doing in their community. That's what drew me to them. United Way has initiatives that help children from birth all the way to the high school level (and currently beyond). Our cradle to career approach helps us fight for the health, education, and financial stability of every person in Southwest Virginia because they are the building blocks for a good quality of life. When I came into the organization, I got to start our summer internship program. I enjoyed researching opportunities for high school students and seeing businesses across all of our localities hire students. Getting to start that program and watching it grow is what I am most proud of. I am also excited about expanding our Ignite program with new programs and services.

### **8. What does the future of Ignite look like?**

It will continue to grow. The three Youth Success staff members have numerous years of experience in various areas. We are always looking at new opportunities to offer our schools and businesses. We hope that every year there are new opportunities for us, to change, grow, and help students in Southwest Virginia see the opportunities they have in the area.

### **9. What activities do you like to do in your spare time?**

I like to go to the lake, spend time with my family and garden – I grow both vegetables and flowers.

### **10. What is the best advice you've ever received?**

Previous to this job, I worked in the K-12 system and the community college system. I think the thing that sticks with me is: never stop learning, no matter how old you are or how young you are. Always be excited about something new to get into. Always be excited about change because it's going to happen so if you're excited about it, it makes it easier to deal with.

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## **Meet a GOVA Region 2 Council Member: John Dooley, CEO of the Virginia Tech Foundation**



### **1. What is your career history?**

I grew up in a little town in central West Virginia. My very first job was delivering newspapers as a kid. In my junior and senior year of high school, I wrote sports articles for my town's local weekly newspaper. When I went to college, a private liberal arts school called Alderson Broaddus College, I worked in sports information and athletics. For my first job out of college, I stayed at my alma mater and worked as a public information officer, assisting with public relations and university college relations activities for a year. Then, I became a fundraiser. I came to work for Virginia Tech nearly 40 years ago; I spent my first 19 years with Cooperative Extension and then moved to senior administration in the university in 2001.

### **2. What's the best thing you've learned from being CEO of the Virginia Tech Foundation?**

I learned that people are what this business is all about. The benefit and power that the Foundation can bring the university is highly contingent upon the passion that our alumni and friends have for the institution and how they express that passion through their generosity and support.

### **3. Do you have any advice to offer those who are interested in a career in higher education?**

I've seen a lot of changes over the 45 years I have worked in higher education. Higher education is very critical for the economic well-being and vitality of this country, and a healthy higher education system is critical for continued economic growth. We are obviously a very high-end contributor to the workforce, which is very important. The research enterprise and technology transfer process are also very critical parts of that equation.

### **4. What does it mean to be a land-grant university and why are land grant institutions important?**

The land grant system was created by Congress in 1862. In 1862, we were in the midst of the American Civil War. Congress in its wisdom made a bold statement relating to the importance and value of education as a basic fundamental tenet to democracy. The impetus behind the land grant system was making higher education available to the masses as opposed to just the elite. Prior to 1862, our education was primarily a privilege of the elite. The land grant system was created to extend that privilege to all. When Congress passed the Act, Virginia was not enabled to exercise its land grant because it was one of the Confederate States. After the Civil War, however, the act was extended to include former Confederate states, and in 1872, Virginia Tech was designated as Virginia's land grant university.

Virginia Tech and the land grant system have a unique responsibility to find ways to connect the discoveries of its classrooms and research labs for the economic and social wellbeing of all people. I believe Virginia Tech does embrace that. I am proud I have been able to spend nearly 40 years of my life engaged as an active participant in the land grant system.

### **5. What have you learned from being on the GO Virginia Council?**

What I've observed and learned is the importance of collaborative work together to realize the economic benefits of the region. One of the founding principles of GO Virginia is breaking down the political barriers that can exist between localities and local governments in order to realize a greater good. I've been encouraged by the early response of GO Virginia and the early impact of GO Virginia. We have been able to come together and identify major projects

that could have significant impacts across geopolitical entities and jurisdictions. In the past, our jurisdictional perspectives or geopolitical perspectives have, not intentionally, served as a hindrance to possible economic growth. So we're navigating that through GO Virginia.

## **6. What is your favorite part of being a GO Virginia Region 2 Council member?**

The people. I was so impressed with the individuals that came together to work on the GO Virginia Region 2 Council. They don't have personal agendas and are committed to working for the broader good. And that's so encouraging in this day and time.

## **7. Is there anything GO Virginia has planned for the future that you are looking forward to in particular?**

Several capacity building programs that we have funded are evaluating the assets relating to workforce and talent development that we may have in place in the region. I'm looking forward to now taking those infrastructure investments and using them to develop active strategies in which we can recruit and retain talent, businesses, and industry in this region.

## **8. Who has been your greatest mentor and what did you learn from them?**

I've been blessed over my career that I have many, many individuals who have influenced my understanding and perspective of business and economic development. Amongst those is our Regional chair Ray Smoot, a good friend and colleague for many years. One of my great friends and mentors has been Ben Davenport, who is on the state GO Virginia council. Also, Heywood Fralin and Nancy Agee are friends who have had a strong influence. All of these individuals' altruism and their ability and commitment to making sure that their investment of time and resources benefit the broader good is an inspiration. All of those individuals, plus so many more, have had a great impression on me.

## **9. What is your favorite place to visit?**

I love to visit Virginia Tech's Steger Center in southern Switzerland, north of the Italian border. The center is owned by the Foundation and operated by Virginia Tech. It is named after our former president, the late Charles Steger, who was a dear friend and colleague for many years. Charlie was also one of those



individuals that had a great impression on me and was a mentor. The Steger Center is in a beautiful part of the world. I love the culture, and I have so many fond memories of times there with the individuals that I've just mentioned. I look forward to getting post-COVID to where I can visit there again.

**10. Congratulations on your retirement. Is there an activity/hobby that you want to do more of once you retire?**

Thank you. My greatest hobby and love is my family. I'm looking forward to having more quality time with my family when I retire. One of the things that I'm not going to retire from is my commitment to advancing this region. I love this region in which we live, and I am going to do everything that I can to continue to advance the economic and social wellbeing of our region in retirement. I'm looking forward to being an active player and a contributor to this region, to make sure that we are uniquely positioned to attract and retain the talent that is going to be necessary for us to be competitive as a region globally.

[Learn about the GOVA Region 2 Projects on our website.](#)

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