



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

COLLABORATION  
INSPIRATION  
SUCCESS

## In This Issue:

- [Next Meeting, July 29](#)
- [Participate in Planning for the GO Virginia 2021 Growth & Diversification Plan](#)
- [Meet a GOVA Region 2 Grantee: James Harder, Blockchain Ecosystem Catalyst](#)
- [Meet a GOVA Region 2 Council Member: Vince Hatcher, Director of Operations for Hollingsworth & Vose, Americas](#)
- [Request for Proposals](#)

## Next Meeting, July 29

**July 29, 2021:** GO Virginia Region 2 Council Meeting, 3:00-5:00 PM.  
Roanoke Higher Education Center, Room 212, located at 108 N  
Jefferson Street, Roanoke, Virginia, 24016

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## Participate in Planning for the GO Virginia 2021 Growth & Diversification Plan

At the council meeting this Thursday, July 29th, GO Virginia Region 2 staff will present preliminary findings from their analysis of Region 2 and will also share the work plan for the GO Virginia 2021 Growth & Diversification Plan. Some of

the preliminary findings from the analysis include information about age trends, commuting patterns, job growth, and change in per capita income in Region 2.

## **Upcoming Growth & Diversification Plan Meetings**

**Wednesday, August 18, 2021:** Kick-Off Meeting and Round 1 of Workgroup Sessions, 3:00-5:00 PM at the Roanoke Higher Education Center, room 212. After the kick-off meeting, there will be 4 breakout sessions for each target industry cluster: sites & infrastructure, cluster scale up, talent, and entrepreneurship.

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### **Meet a GOVA Region 2 Grantee: James Harder, Blockchain Ecosystem Catalyst**



#### **1. What is your career history and how has it led to your current role?**

I have always loved working in higher education, and I especially enjoy projects that allow me to help grow Southwest Virginia. I have always been drawn to new technologies; however, I am not a computer scientist, far from it. My Ph.D. is in public policy; I study congressional behavior and I used to work on Capitol Hill. My previous role relates to blockchain in the way that I am learning about the technology, regulation, and policy areas blockchain touches on. I also worked on the Virginia Tech Beyond Boundaries initiative, so I'm used to thinking about the future of education and the world, which blockchain is very related to. How will cryptocurrencies, NFTs, and smart contracts affect the next ten years? I think it will be an incredible area for growth.

#### **2. For those who may not be familiar, what is blockchain technology and**

## **how can businesses and individuals use it?**

At its core, blockchain is a data structure that uses distributed ledger technology to facilitate digital interactions.

A lot of the news about blockchain is focused on cryptocurrency, but you are definitely seeing organizations use it to improve supply-chain efficiency, increase transparency and accountability, automate contracts, and create data commons.

### **3. What was the inspiration behind the Blockchain Ecosystem Catalyst Project?**

In our area, we have a lot of thought leaders in blockchain. The Corporate Research Center and some of the graduates from the Virginia Tech Department of Computer Science, such as Dan Larimer, the former-Chief Technology Officer at Block.one, have been successful in the blockchain space. The exciting thing the grant is trying to do, from the GO Virginia side, is link blockchain technologies to new and existing Region 2 companies. There is tremendous potential when you're seeing companies like Torque and Block.one here in the area. Technology companies also have a strong presence in the CRC. How can we help them think about how to use blockchain and how can we provide them with the correct ingredients to create the next Block.one?

### **4. What have you enjoyed most about being involved in the GO Virginia program and working on the Blockchain Ecosystem Catalyst project?**

It requires a decent amount of knowledge to understand how blockchain works. Helping people get the skills they need in order to have conversations about the subject is a hurdle, but I think it's one our grant is doing a good job of overcoming. It is also interesting to think about how this technology makes sense for Region 2. There's a quality of life associated with living in Region 2 that a lot of people are viewing as more attractive in the COVID-19 era. Trying to find ways to capitalize on some of the assets of Region 2 is not something we do every single day.

### **5. Could you talk about the Blocksburg events and what those were like?**

The first Blocksburg event was a two-day in-person conference at the Inn at Virginia Tech. Block.one's CEO, Brendan Blumer and CTO, Dan Larimer, were

both part of the conference. At the conference, there were opportunities to interact with various people, some who were coming from cybersecurity and others who were applying blockchain technology to change the way they do manufacturing processes. It was a catch-all opportunity to see what blockchain can be.

Our most recent conference was online and finished in mid-April. Some of the speaking topics were how the federal government applies blockchain, what the future of this technology looks like, and how centralized manufacturing utilizes blockchain. We're trying to make sure we keep the iron hot and give people opportunities to think about blockchain and its current applications. In the 2021-22 academic year, we're excited to get back in person to host another conference and have more engaging conversations about blockchain.

## **6. What are some of the businesses you have worked with in the region and how have they been affected by the project?**

We have worked with Tim Abbott, the Manager of Digital Innovation at Moog Inc., to think about ways their company can use blockchain and how other companies might be able to use it as well. We've also done consultations with companies in the Region 2 footprint, including Virginia Tech.

Another Virginia company we've spoken with is an HR company called ProTask. Our connection to ProTask came through their CEO, Donna Gibb, who is a Virginia Tech graduate. ProTask wants to use blockchain to check a person's credentials and complete criminal background checks more quickly. We're excited to engage with them to consider the ways that we can help existing businesses use blockchain in productive ways.

ArchiveCore, a company in Roanoke, wants to do something similar, except for doctors. Doctors typically have to go through a credentialing process that can take 6-8 weeks. In the COVID-19 era, the length of this process had a major consequence because if doctors needed an 8-week credentialing process, they couldn't go to hot spots. ArchiveCore is putting its finger on an interesting application of blockchain, and you might end up seeing a national model for proving credentials and performing criminal background checks.

## **7. You are currently working on producing a blockchain certificate program. What can people who want to get their blockchain certificate expect from this program?**



We're working with Continuing and Professional Education and several adjunct professors from the blockchain industry to produce a blockchain certificate that will be offered through the Department of Computer Science. The blockchain certificate will specifically focus on blockchain for business. Through videos, direct engagement with the professors, and assignments, people will learn about the history and foundations of blockchain and how it can be used. A distinctive element of our certificate program is people will also have opportunities to work with adjuncts to talk about how blockchain works in the field and how it can affect their specific business. Another distinctive aspect of the certificate program is that it will examine the ethical dimensions of blockchain technology, which is a hot topic and an important debate for the field.

### **8. What does the future of the Blockchain Ecosystem Catalyst look like?**

Virginia Tech had an entrepreneur challenge in Spring of 2019 that allowed students to develop a blockchain app. We're going to do another one of the entrepreneur challenges in the fall. However, instead of having students design an app that may or may not reach the marketplace, we're working with some companies that will give students a problem to work on. If the students solve what the company's asking of them, their solution could be adopted into the company's operations or code, which is a cool opportunity for students.

We also have a webinar series called Blockchain that Serves. In this series, you learn from people who are doing blockchain-related activities in the spirit of Ut Prosim. For example, one of the companies involved in the series is allowing people to donate cryptocurrency to non-profit organizations, which is an interesting way to think about cryptocurrency. It doesn't necessarily have to be a speculative asset and can be an opportunity for nonprofits to raise money.

### **9. If you could live anywhere in the world for a year, where would it be?**

I would love to live in Italy. I'm a huge soccer fan; throw in the pizza, pasta, and wine, I'm sold.

### **10. What activities/hobbies do you like to do when you're not working?**

I love playing guitar. But I'm also outside with my kids all the time, either playing golf or going to the pool. I'm enjoying the fact that Southwest Virginia gives you

a great opportunity to get outside. The outdoor opportunities in Southwest Virginia are truly incredible.

[Register here for the Virginia Tech Blockchain Certificate.](#)

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## **Meet a GOVA Region 2 Council Member: Vince Hatcher, Director of Operations for Hollingsworth & Vose, Americas**



### **1. What first made you interested in a career in engineering?**

I have always been interested in how things work. From an early age, I enjoyed building model cars, repairing things around the house, and helping with home improvement projects.

My parents emphasized the importance of learning and encouraged me to pursue my interests by taking advanced classes in high school. I was very fortunate to have great teachers who not only helped me learn, but also got me thinking about a future career path. Computer science and engineering became my areas of focus as I started looking at colleges. I also had some really helpful conversations with people around me who were engineers, including one of my uncles (industrial engineer and business owner) and my Sunday school teacher (an engineering professor at Virginia Tech). I ultimately chose to study at Virginia Tech, earning a BS in Mechanical Engineering and an MS in Systems

Engineering. I am proud to be a Hokie!

## **2. What is your favorite part of your job at Hollingsworth & Vose (H&V)?**

H&V is a global manufacturer of advanced materials used in filtration, battery, and industrial applications. To support and grow this business, we have an impressive network of talented people. I really enjoy my leadership role, and working closely with the commercial, technology, and operations teams to create strategies and operating plans to deliver world-class solutions for our customers.

My focus is the Americas, but I have the pleasure of working with people all over the world.

## **3. What are you working on right now at Hollingsworth & Vose?**

I am working with other leaders across H&V to update our long-range plan. We are taking a careful look at the markets and needs of our customers, then updating our plan to ensure that we are ready to deliver key solutions over the next five years and beyond. This includes advances in our product platforms like AlphaPerm®, NanoWave®, NanoWeb®, Technostat®, Trupor®, and Molecular Filtration Media (MFM), with much of the development and manufacturing taking place in Floyd, Virginia.

As part of this work, we are also thinking about organizational capability and resource needs for the future. It is very important to recruit, develop, and retain talent at all levels in order to maintain and grow a healthy business.

## **4. What have you learned from being on the GO Virginia Region 2 Council?**

The Council is made up of some very impressive leaders with diverse backgrounds in our region. I was honored and excited to have the opportunity to join this group in May 2020 and start learning about the wide range of projects in progress and the pipeline of new proposals. It was eye-opening to see all of the activity and energy, with the clear goal of encouraging economic growth through the creation of high-wage jobs.

## **5. What are some similarities and differences between your role at Hollingsworth & Vose and your role as a GO Virginia Region 2 Council**

## **Member?**

As the Director of Operations, it is important to have a clear understanding of the mission, vision, strategy, and goals for the organization. The organization is depending on you to make good decisions and deliver the best outcome possible. Similarly, members of the Council must carefully consider each proposal to ensure that it is aligned with the goals of the region and that the funds are spent wisely.

One of the differences is that the perspective is broader with GO Virginia, including the collaboration of business, education, and government to diversify and strengthen the economy in the region.

## **6. What has GO Virginia Region 2 planned for the future that are you looking forward to?**

A good example of how GO Virginia is working to help businesses and encourage economic growth was by sponsoring the “Stopping the Brain Drain” study conducted by Onward New River Valley, Lynchburg Regional Business Alliance, and the Roanoke Regional Partnership. I am looking forward to seeing how leaders in our region utilize the data and insights to help grow and retain talent in our region.

Another initiative is the Re-tooling Virginia Manufacturers for Strategic Industries Program. Genedge is managing this program over two years to implement a mid-to-long term approach across all nine regions in Virginia. The goal is to serve 50 companies while creating or retaining 500 jobs with new or retained revenue of over \$100 million over a five-year period. The first phase was focused on medical supplies and PPE. The second phase has just started and will address other critical industry supply chain retooling and continue PPE capacity additions. I am looking forward to seeing the progress in the coming years.

## **7. Do you have a favorite memory from being on the GO Virginia Region 2 Council?**

I remember the first couple of meetings, which were virtual due to the pandemic. I was impressed by how well the members utilized the video conferencing technology and effectively discussed proposals. The questions and debates were very good.

You could feel how seriously the members take their role and see that they really care about making quality decisions.

**8. What have you learned from being on the advisory committee for the statewide initiative *Retooling Virginia Manufacturers for Strategic Industries* and what do you like most about being a part of the initiative?**

Genedge has been at work in our region since the 1990s and has been a great resource for Virginia manufacturing companies. They have effectively partnered with the Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) to help companies solve problems, increase productivity, and improve overall economic competitiveness. The team is in a good position to help drive the re-tooling initiative and has really embraced the opportunity. It is great to see the coordination across the regions in Virginia. I am glad to help in this important work, as it is never easy for a company to expand operations or move in a new direction.

**9. What was the best advice you ever received?**

While growing up and starting my career, I learned that it is important to always treat others with respect and to actively listen. As a leader, it is very important to engage the people around you and listen carefully to their thoughts and ideas. I have made better decisions and developed into a more effective leader over time by keeping this in mind.

**10. What is your favorite place to visit?**

There are several places that I call favorites. First, my family and I love to explore places right here in the Blue Ridge Mountains. We live in a beautiful area and sometimes take it for granted.

We also have a couple of favorite spots outside of Virginia. My wife was born in Michigan and has family in several places across the state. We always look forward to family gatherings in Northwest Michigan along the shores of Lake Michigan. When we travel to the beach along the east coast, our favorite spot is the Outer Banks in North Carolina.

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

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## **Request for Proposals**

For FY 2022, there are over \$1.5 million in collaborative grant funds available for Region 2 focused projects, and additional statewide competitive funds are available for multi-regional proposals. 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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