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Request For Proposals



**The quarterly deadline to submit GO Virginia Region 2 proposals is April 2, 2021.**

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.

## GO Virginia Aims to Grow Workforce in Region 2 with Pipeline of Talent Projects

GO Virginia Region 2's pipeline of talent projects is helping to connect people to jobs and internships and teaching students about the opportunities they have in the region, with the goals of retaining talent in the region and growing Virginia's economy. GO Virginia Region 2 has funded 10 talent initiatives and has allocated $1,623,506 million in funds for the projects, serving a total of 234 businesses and 7,882 students.

GO Virginia Region 2 also participates as support for a statewide GO Virginia initiative called Virginia Bio-Connect, which is led by GO Virginia Region 4 and directed by the Virginia Biotechnology Association. The project also includes participation from GO Virginia Regions 5, 7, and 9.

In December 2020, the GO Virginia State Board approved $1,599,653 in state funds for Virginia Bio-Connect, which is leveraging a total of $2,335,310.

The project has three goals: increase connection in the life sciences ecosystem, bolster talent and workforce, and support entrepreneurship.

Troy Keyser, Director of Carilion Innovation at Carilion Clinic, co-leads the Region 2 effort with Robert Gibson, Associate Director of Business Development at LINK, which is based at the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC.

 "We hope the Virginia Bio-Connect project will be able to create serendipitous moments where like-minded individuals and companies can connect, share their knowledge, and collaborate on projects and initiatives," said Keyser.

"This project provides an opportunity to network and engage with regional leaders in Virginia that we may have not otherwise been able to work with," he said.

The project assists early-stage companies in the invention development stage by helping them turn their ideas into a reality. An example of such a company is Metistream, a natural language processing application that uses data science to unearth information from medical notes.

"We look forward to working with exciting new companies for the benefit of our communities," said Keyser.

Virginia Bio-Connect will also create an internship program and a Young Professionals network, which will help close the talent gap for life science companies in the state of Virginia.

"The internship development part of the project allows students to see what it is like to work in a laboratory and gain hands-on experience," said Keyser.

"Students often do not know what's available in Virginia and we lose talent to other states," said John Newby, CEO of the Virginia Biotechnology Association. "Through the internship program and the young professional network, we hope to not only keep talent but attract it as well."

Virginia has a number of life science companies, including two successful clinical stage companies, Charlottesville company HemoShear Therapeutics Inc. and Blacksburg company Landos Biopharma, Inc. It can be difficult for life sciences companies to grow due to regulatory hurdles and this initiative aims to support smaller life sciences companies and help them harness their full potential by providing talent and creating connectivity.

Virginia Bio-Connect will offer virtual mentorship to young entrepreneurs through a virtual entrepreneur-in-residence network. These entrepreneurs-in-residence will mentor life science companies across the state of Virginia irrespective of location. In the past, support from entrepreneurs-in-residence was not offered virtually and this new program will be able to reach a wider array of companies across the Commonwealth.

"With this initiative, we want to show that Virginia has a supportive life science ecosystem with interconnected companies and organizations that are working together," Newby said.

Another project working to retain talent in the region is the Experiential Learning in Tech Employment (ELITE) Internship Program. The Region 2 project grew out of a need for more technology experience in the region, and works to help businesses in the technology sector more easily attract talent from local universities, a valuable resource for businesses.

This project focuses on assisting small to midsize businesses who may not have the resources to host an internship program. Two Professional Internship Organizations, the Exelaration Center and MAXX Potential, will help connect interns and apprentices to local businesses and give them the opportunity to work on technology projects.

"As individuals graduate from intern and apprenticeship programs, the company they have been working with may extend employment. It is our hope this program will become an employment resource within our region," said John Phillips, President of the Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council and leader of the ELITE Internship Program.

"This program allows these companies to find many ways to interact with our universities to discover talent and that's what we want to see. There are many opportunities in the region for both students and businesses," he said.

The Destination for Talent Program, led by Catherine Amelink, works with Virginia Tech students and faculty and seeks to bring awareness of the long-term career opportunities that exist in Region 2.

The program connects local employers with Virginia Tech students who can take advantage of paid internships while completing coursework. The program also connects employers with faculty. Through the program, faculty can consider project-based learning opportunities inside and outside of the classroom and local employers are given another opportunity to build their brand with a pool of talent.

Other activities include programming that makes students aware of the live-work-play opportunities in the region while they are participating in their internships, so there is a greater likelihood of talent retention as students graduate.

"There's a lot of opportunities with local employers that would enable young talent to

develop desirable workforce skills but our students tend to overlook these opportunities or lack awareness of them and go elsewhere," Amelink said.

Projects such as IGNITE and Classrooms to Careers focus on preparing the younger generation for the workforce. The IGNITE program, through the United Way of Southwest Virginia, hosts an annual Careers Expo for 7th grade students where students learn about careers and occupations in the Southwest Virginia region as they are developing their Academic Career Plans. The event was shifted online in 2020 and allowed for other grades, including high school students, to participate.

Classrooms to Careers introduces high school students to careers in IT, walks them through the application process, and places them in IT roles. "The earlier we can expose students to careers in STEM and Information Technology the more likely they are to consider it and see it as something that they can do," said Mark Husband, Director of CTE and Virtual Learning at Montgomery County Public Schools.

 "The myriad of talent projects that are taking place in GO Virginia Region 2 encourage individuals to be aware of the opportunities they have around them and take advantage of the resources they have available. The projects are providing individuals with valuable work experience and preparing them for future careers," said John Provo, director of the Office of Economic Development.

**Read about more Talent Projects on our Website.**

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**Meet A GOVA Region 2 Grantee: Mark Husband, Classrooms to Careers**



## 1. What originally inspired your GO Virginia project, Classrooms to Careers?

The initial thought process was a conversation with Dr. Scott Tate, who held an informational session about GO Virginia in June 2019. The GO Virginia board was interested in helping the next generation of young workers and creating economic growth in the Commonwealth through opportunities for students in the region. The one question Dr. Tate posed to us was, "How can the GO Virginia Board help?"

Generally speaking, the most difficult piece of public education is getting employers to hire teenagers, especially in our area, when there is so much available labor in terms of college students and young adults. Frequently, college students get hired to do the jobs our high school students are capable of, but they simply don't have the resume or the college experience other applicants have. When Dr. Tate mentioned GO Virginia could help us employ high school students, that got the gears rolling and we started talking about different options.

## 2. What companies have signed up to participate in the program?

We have five companies that have signed on to hire students within the Classrooms to Careers grant. They are Ozmo; Citizen's Telephone; Automation Creations, Inc; Virginia Tech's IT Department; and the Montgomery County Public Schools IT Department. We have significant IT needs here as a school system, especially now during the pandemic where we've been working hard to expand internet access and Chromebook access to all students.

**3. What have you accomplished with the project so far?**

We started the project in June of 2019, were approved in April of 2020, and our signed agreement went into effect in January of 2021. Last month, we held an informational session with Ozmo, which does a lot of contract work related to IT customer support. We will host an information session about technology jobs with Montgomery County Public Schools and are also working on a similar information session for students with Virginia Tech's IT department, specifically regarding cybersecurity. Later in the spring, we'll have student information sessions for jobs at Citizen's Telephone, a communications provider in Floyd County, and Automation Creations, Inc, a company at Virginia Tech's Corporate Research Center in Blacksburg. Teachers are walking students through the process of applying for jobs, teaching them about writing resumes and what to expect in interviews. By the time summer rolls around, we plan to have 20 or more students employed in IT jobs across the New River Valley.

**4. Can you talk about the significance of the project and why it is important to retain talent in Virginia?**

We hear a lot about how retaining Virginia Tech and Radford students is difficult. One of our different perspectives, that makes this grant successful, is we want to hire students who are from this area originally and have deep roots here. Hopefully, IT companies can recruit them more successfully and possibly save money in terms of HR and salaries because they're not competing against areas such as Northern Virginia that can pay higher wages. Also, this way we have students who understand the benefits of living in Montgomery County. A big part of our grant is trying to make sure that companies understand the value of hiring teenagers in the long run. They may not turn into full-time employees for 3-5 years, but when they do, they're much more likely to be a successful long-term employee than a student at one of the universities might be.

**5. What do you like most about getting to collaborate with other school systems in the region?**

It's always interesting to see how different school systems can be. We work together with Floyd and Giles school systems and share ideas and thoughts on the best ways to implement curriculum. In Montgomery County, I feel a certain responsibility because of our larger school system and stronger economic situation to be leaders in the region, especially in the areas of IT, healthcare, and advanced manufacturing. I used to be a principal and CTE director in Giles

and so I recognize they may not have the time or the staffing to go after a grant like this one that would impact their curriculum and their work-based learning opportunities for students. I was happy GO Virginia was interested in bringing in multiple school divisions so we could help out smaller school systems that may need more resources.

## 6. What else is Montgomery County Public Schools doing to expand IT curriculum?

The GO Virginia grant, Classrooms to Careers, is a major part but it is just one part of the expansion of IT curriculum in Montgomery County. We have added three-course pathways in cybersecurity and we have a four-course pathway in computer science. We're also teaching robotics in grades 6-12, and we have a two-course sequence in coding at the middle school level. These courses allow our students to try out IT and STEM careers as a whole. The earlier we can expose students to careers in IT and STEM, the more likely they are to consider those types of careers and see them as something they can do. We've been recognized as a school division of innovation from the Virginia Department of Education and have received some grant money from them. That, paired along with our Classrooms to Careers grant, has us going down the right direction in terms of equitably offering additional access to all of our students who are interested in STEM careers.

## 7. A challenge for some students in Montgomery County is broadband access. How has the school system addressed this problem?

During the pandemic, we've worked with the county and we've done a great job getting MiFis out to students. Anybody that can get a cellphone signal from their phone can use a MiFi to connect to the internet. Montgomery County has also implemented Wireless on Wheels, or WOW carts, which are internet hotspots placed around the county. We have been able to limit the number of students in Montgomery County that have no internet access to less than 100 students. We hope that a year from now the number of students without WiFi will be zero. The pandemic has shown us the importance of internet access as a utility. It's required for our students to succeed within their education and not just something nice to have within their home.

## 8. What advice would you give to a student who is interested in a career in the IT Sector?

The advice I'd give to any student is to try lots of different things. If they think they want to be involved in IT, I would encourage them to pick multiple courses and multiple experiences across a variety of IT pathways. Most of our teenagers and high school students are not figuring out what they want to do for a career; they're figuring out what they don't want to do. They might like the idea of working with computers but when they get into computer science, they realize it's not for them. But networking, cybersecurity, or customer support and sales related to computers might be a great fit. IT is such a large field, there's a fit for just about everybody, and it's just a matter of finding your niche.

## 9. What is your favorite part of your job at Montgomery County Public Schools?

My favorite part of my job is publicizing the cool things our students and teachers are doing. I get to work with a wide variety of curriculums, from culinary arts to cosmetology to welding. Being able to inform our students and parents about the wide variety of opportunities in Montgomery County is an exciting part of my job. I enjoy sharing what's inside of our classrooms with the greater community so everybody can see what activities and events are taking place in Montgomery County.

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

Our family visits the Outer Banks quite a bit in North Carolina to go to the beach. With the age that my boys are, that's a fun family trip at the moment. The boys are at a great age to go hiking, play in the water, and build sandcastles so we're enjoying our family trips to the beach.

**Meet A GOVA Region 2 Council Member: Debbie Petrine, Commonwealth Care**



**1. What lessons have you learned throughout your life that have helped you in your career?**

Something I learned a long time ago is to listen intently to what people are saying and pay attention to what they're saying because you learn a lot. This is true no matter what you're doing, but certainly in your career, it's something that's very helpful.

**2. What inspired you to form your own company, Commonwealth Care of Roanoke, in 2001?**

After I left the company I had been with for 20 years, I formed another company with a developer, which I worked on for around 5 years. We developed old properties and facilities that needed to be replaced and turned around troubled facilities in the state of Virginia. It was our plan that we would sell them at some point. However, when we did end up selling, it was very hard for me because I'm an operator at heart, and I love the development piece. I knew I wanted to go out on my own because we had been successful with that venture, and I had the capital resources that I needed. While I wasn't opposed to selling before, I wanted to control my destiny and be able to create something reflective of me and my partners' values.

**3. What is your favorite part of being chairman and chief executive officer of Commonwealth Care?**

Generally speaking, I am more involved in strategic planning. If we're looking at a potential acquisition or development of a certain project, I am involved in the details of that. I'm also very big on the culture of the organization. One of the things I started early on with this company is making sure we live the culture we espouse to have. With COVID-19, I've been more involved in the day-to-day just to be an additional help, but the things I enjoy doing a lot now include fostering the company culture and working on strategic planning.

**4. Could you describe your company's culture?**

Our tagline is Committed. Caring. Responsive. We want to be committed to doing things the right way, in a caring way. There are times when working with medicine and people, things don't always go how you'd like so you want to be responsive and make sure mistakes aren't repeated. We treat our patients, our residents, and all of our employees the way we would like to be treated. We can't always say yes to everything an employee wants, for example, but we can respond to them, we can explain it, we can understand it, and we can be kind and considerate. We look for those qualities in the people we hire and try always to build and maintain those values.

It's crucial that you not only take care of people's health and medical needs but you also take care of that whole person and realize that quality of life makes such a huge difference.

In regards to employees, we all spend a tremendous time at work, so it's important to enjoy it as best as we can. There are always going to be challenges. At any company, it's not always going to be smooth sailing, but there will also be good times and you want to try to create a work environment that people will enjoy.

**5. What skills have you learned from being on the GOVA Region 2 Council?**

I've learned a great deal more about the mechanics of how economic development works, particularly in regards to the state as a whole. Seeing how some of that is handled has made me better at doing that sort of work in my own company. I also learned a lot about other companies and aspects of the economy that I haven't dealt with directly.

**6. How have you been able to transfer that knowledge to your role at Commonwealth Care?**

Having worked so closely with Virginia Tech, there were certain things I was aware of by virtue of being involved with the university, but I have learned more about initiatives in the health technology arena in particular. In this region, we're strong in healthcare and life sciences, and it's always helpful for me to hear about what's going on in the region in the healthcare industry as well as other industries. For example, sometimes there is an IT discussion that comes before us, and I think about how this theory could be a possibility for the healthcare industry.

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

I feel like we're being productive when I can follow the projects' progress. I personally think regional development makes so much sense. It takes a while to see that because the projects don't happen overnight; they're in different phases. What I'm really looking forward to is seeing how the projects progress and come to fruition. If one isn't as successful as we hoped it would be, we can learn from that and focus on what we can do to improve for the future. I also always look forward to seeing what is being presented as the proposals come along. There is so much potential in the region given all the resources we have: our beautiful location, access to water, our universities, and our healthcare, manufacturing, and IT sectors.

**8. Do you have a favorite memory/part of being a GO Virginia council member?**

I have a couple of favorite memories. One was when we established how GO Virginia Region 2 was going to operate and function, which I really enjoyed. I also enjoyed when we broke out into three focus groups so that we could work on understanding employment and staffing difficulties, and how those issues dovetail with higher education or technical education. In the focus group I was in, there were folks from the four-year and community college system, from all various areas of the region. It was really interesting to share information and to see all the synergies that were there. I think it was a great foundation for being able to move forward in this region, so when somebody brings a proposal forward, we have a better understanding of how the people in Lynchburg, the New River Valley, Covington, or Clifton Forge are handling matters.

**9. What activities do you like to take part in outside of work?**

Now that I'm a grandmother, I love spending time with my little grandbaby. I really like to read, and gardening is my favorite hobby when the weather's nice. My husband and I really enjoy boating, and we love to travel.

**10. What is your favorite vacation spot?**

For more routine vacation spots, we go down to Sanibel Island in Florida. It's a very nice, laid-back place, and we ride our bicycles to breakfast and lunch. Italy is one of my favorite places in the world to spend some time and we've been fortunate to travel to some pretty interesting places. We went to Antarctica a few years ago, which was really interesting and a very enjoyable trip. It was very different from anything else, and not the kind of thing you do every year. We also went to Croatia and really enjoyed that. I'd love to spend a little more time there. We enjoy boating so we also like going where there are beautiful islands. I love seeing visiting different parts of the world and spending a little time trying to get a sense of how people live there.

Learn about the GOVA Region 2 Projects on our website.

GO Virginia Grantees In The News



- [Innovation alliance unveils new name and strategic plan for Western Virginia](#)
- [Pulaski County business owners can explore new app to help minimize COVID risks](#)

**Future GO Virginia Meetings**

**April 22, 2021,** GO Virginia Region 2 Executive Committee Meeting, 1:00-3:00 p.m.

**May 4, 2021,** GO Virginia Region 2 Council Meeting, 1:00-3:00 p.m.

Save the Dates