

# GO Virginia: Region One Growth & Diversification Plan Community Meeting in Marion, Virginia

August 3, 2017  
Meeting Summary



## Executive Summary

### Background

Three community meetings were held on August 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2017 in Duffield, Lebanon, and Marion, Virginia, with the third of the meetings being held in Marion, Virginia. The purpose of the meeting was to identify Southwest Virginia's regional strengths and opportunities for economic growth for the GO Virginia Region One Growth and Diversification Plan. Ideas and priorities were shared at each of the three community meetings, with separate summaries available for each meeting at this [link](#)<sup>1</sup>. The top goals and priorities from each meeting were then combined after the meetings in a separate executive summary with six overarching goals, which is available at the link above.

**The top prioritized goals** from the third community meeting in Marion include:

1. Coordinate and focus workforce programs to align with industry and economic development targets.
2. Grow educational offerings and pathways.
3. Cultivate entrepreneurship and support existing businesses.
4. Foster agricultural and natural resources growth, as well as healthcare development.
5. Create a digital ambassador program that creates a positive regional image.

GO Virginia Region One is composed of 13 counties and three cities in Southwest Virginia. The Virginia Initiative for Growth and Opportunity in Each Region (GO Virginia) was initiated by Virginia's senior business leaders to foster private-sector growth and job creation through state incentives for regional collaboration by business, education, and government. Recognizing the harsh effect of deep federal budget cuts on a Virginia economy that is overly dependent on public-sector jobs, they launched the GO Virginia campaign to work for regional cooperation on private-sector growth, job creation, and career readiness.

The GO Virginia Coalition provides support for the GO Virginia Board's efforts to create more higher paying jobs through incentivized collaboration and out of state investment that diversifies and strengthens the economy in every region of the Commonwealth. The coalition is comprised of business and community leaders, partners in education and government, and interested Virginians from across the Commonwealth who support regional cooperation to enhance economic and workforce development. Bipartisan and business-led, the coalition supports state incentives to encourage collaboration among business, education, and

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<sup>1</sup> [www.uvawise.edu/GOVRegionOne](http://www.uvawise.edu/GOVRegionOne)

government in each region, providing a framework for implementation of the private sector-focused growth strategies. For more information about GO Virginia, please visit [www.govirginia.org](http://www.govirginia.org).

## Meeting Opening

Shannon Blevins of UVa-Wise (the University of Virginia's College at Wise) welcomed participants. Region One Councilmember Josh Lewis shared the background and purpose of GO Virginia. He stressed the need to create high-paying jobs to replace the salaries from the coal industry. Then, Christine Gyovai, the meeting facilitator with Dialogue + Design Associates, reviewed the meeting, agenda and developed meeting guidelines with participants including having cell phones on silent, brevity is welcome, explain acronyms the first time they are used, and all ideas are welcome.

In addition, participants shared one word hopes for SWVA which included:

*Growth, prosperity, excitement, development, tangentially, collaboration, opportunities, potential, thriving, education, partnership, full employment, diversity, reinvent, sustainability, tourism, support, success, technology, health care, robust, jobs, progress, advancement, innovation, vitality, clairvoyance and beauty*

Shannon Blevins then presented the findings of a regional survey, which had over 500 responses, as well as the initial quantitative economic analysis findings by Chmura Economics and Analytics. The presentation was also shared as a handout. The handout also highlighted the initial findings as well as seven Action Teams, which emerged from the 2016 Economic Forum at UVa-Wise around key goal areas.

## Small Group Discussion

After the presentation, participants divided into small groups to share and prioritize ideas around these key questions:

- What are SWVA's top strengths and opportunities for economic growth as a region?
  - Of the list, what are the most important ideas or what is missing?
- How can these opportunities be realized or created in SWVA?
  - Who needs to be involved?
  - How can these ideas be made a reality?

One participant asked, "considering all these great ideas, how much capacity does GO Virginia have for implementation?" Shannon answered that funding is based on per capita, so project money is around \$500,000 and will change based on population (with a larger amount of money, closer to \$1M across the state for competitive grant-making with GO Virginia). Others noted that additional resources exist such as the Tobacco Indemnification Commission, ARC, and others, with a need to be very strategic about these investments to create higher paying jobs through collaboration.

Christine asked the participants to share what have been the best successes or points of pride in last five years in the region. Participants responded with ideas including:

- Existing businesses expansion projects
- Higher educational institutions and community awareness
- Business challenges
- New start-ups
- Planned site preparation
- Downtown revitalization projects
- Momentum from creative economy helping with tourism and downtown revitalization
- SET plan (Stronger Economy Together)

Meeting attendees were encouraged to build on the top ideas, which were shared from the previous community meetings in Duffield and Lebanon (available in the combined executive summary of the three meetings at the link above), and to identify new ideas as well during the small group discussions. Participants were provided a handout with the questions that are listed above with space to reply to each question. Each of the small groups identified a facilitator and reporter, and group members took turns sharing their ideas and priorities. Next, the small groups discussed these ideas, and created a prioritized list of top ideas. Participants shared their top ideas with the whole group after it reconvened.

The top ideas of all the small groups were collectively prioritized by voting with four sticky dots per person, which were recorded with a tally of dots per idea to determine top ideas for each meeting. The full ideas of each small group are recorded below with the corresponding level of support noted by the number of votes received.

### **Group 1 priorities and supporting ideas** *(with Marty Holiday facilitating)*

1. Coordinate regional promotion and involved stakeholders by crafting a shared story.
  - a. Determine the shared story of all three planning districts.
  - b. Collaborate to tell the story – a positive story.
2. Support and grow entrepreneurship. *(12 votes)*
  - a. Identify the needs of existing businesses and of entrepreneurs.
  - b. Support existing businesses for innovation.
  - c. Find out who's doing what – create an inventory.
  - d. Create capital by identifying funding and leveraging existing resources.
  - e. Develop a prepared workforce by starting with existing workforce.
3. Focus on youth and education. *(13 votes)*
  - a. Establish pathways from kindergarten to career.
  - b. Focus on careers that support regional growth.
  - c. Health and wellness starts with the youngest kids.

### **Group 2 priorities and supporting ideas** *(with Shannon Blevins facilitating)*

1. Coordinate and focus workforce programs to align with industry and economic development targets. *18 votes*

- a. Build credentials and certifications that are transferable between industries and geographic areas.
  - b. Leverage the Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP) strategic plan by targeting industry clusters.
  - c. Establish connection with Work Ready Communities (WRC) to help businesses navigate programs and organize workforce needs.
    - i. Identify one WRC point of contact to help businesses navigate different programs. Focus on serving the “business”, not the educational institution.
  - d. Develop industry clusters that can cross county and regulatory boundaries to provide support for specific industries such as equipment manufacturing, electrical equipment, and IT and cyber.
    - i. Engage economic development professionals.
2. Create a digital ambassador program that creates a positive regional image. 8 votes
- a. Create a network of people that are trained to share announcements built upon a consistent media theme and content, posting positive stories to counteract negative stories to build community support and excitement around regional assets.
  - b. Designate one person to facilitate the process.
  - c. Leverage business contacts nationally and globally, and target millennials and industries that value quality of life.
  - d. Educate community members in general of the region’s assets such as outdoor recreation, broadband, water, energy, land and labor.

**Group 3 priorities and supporting ideas** *(with Emily Carlson facilitating)*

- 1. Focus on education and resources. (10 votes)
  - a. Educate parents of kids about jobs in order to generate family support.
  - b. Develop k-12 technology programming.
  - c. Upgrade school facilities to attract industries.
  - d. Provide opportunities for kids to explore all the career possibilities such as in exploratory classes.
- 2. Be strategic about attracting millennials.
  - a. Develop tech clusters that have the urban feel and amenities.
  - b. Market the experience and livability of SWVA.
  - c. Consider the new adulthood of age 26-27 when they need to obtain their own healthcare.
- 3. Improve livability. (7 votes)
  - a. Create high paying jobs.
  - b. Attract technology businesses through quality of life, good education opportunities, and attractive place to live/work/play.
  - c. Establish leadership and succession.
  - d. Promote healthcare services and opportunities.

**Group 4 priorities and supporting ideas** *(with Melinda Leland facilitating)*

- 1. Foster agricultural and natural resources growth, as well as healthcare development. 8

votes

- a. Focus on health care development as these jobs can be high paying jobs as considered “low hanging fruit”.
  - b. Grow awareness of and foster education in food systems, experiential food related businesses for a span of ages (K-gray) through activities such as field trips, train and the trainer opportunities.
  - c. Create an “ecosystem” that illuminates opportunities, and change the perception that college degrees only yield more money and jobs – the trades can be lucrative.
  - d. Create partnerships and symbiotic relationships that link industry with farms to manufacturing as well as to health and well fare.
2. Create a system that illuminates opportunities in early education through college and beyond (“K-gray”). (6 votes)
    - a. Change perception about college degrees being higher paying jobs and promote trades.
    - b. Incorporate environmentally friendly practices in education system and buildings.

### **Group 5 priorities and supporting ideas** (with Becki Joyce facilitating)

1. Develop jobs that are created along the supply chain which communities are ready to accept or work with. (1 vote)
2. Develop IT and technology hubs. Expand broadband where it is needed and utilize existing broadband resources.
3. Foster the energy of next generation leadership and opportunities to retain youth.
4. Teach and expand trades and soft skills – create a new emphasis and focus on this (6 votes)
5. Develop an inventory of existing infrastructure across counties to identify the best potential sites for business development. (2 votes)
6. Create a certified workforce for the region of work ready or NCRC; focus on a positive image of SWVA. (5 votes)

## **Large Group Discussion and Prioritization for Top Collective Ideas**

After each group reported their top ideas out, meeting attendees clarified the ideas as a large group, and then did a test for consensus around priorities. The top ideas are included below.

### **Overall Top Ideas**

- I. Coordinate and focus workforce programs to align with industry and economic development targets. 18 votes**
  - a. Build credentials and certifications that are transferable between industries and geographic areas.
  - b. Leverage the Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP) strategic plan by targeting industry clusters.
  - c. Establish connection with Work Ready Communities (WRC) to help businesses navigate programs and organize workforce needs.
    - ii. Identify one WRC point of contact to help businesses navigate different



SWVA. Shannon answered that their work is available for use including 1200 photos, icons, and branding, noting that it would be helpful to connect to this effort to build pride in region and focus on promotions and marketing. Another participant asked for clarity on strategizing funding strategies. Shannon answered that the growth and diversification plan will address

funding priorities, and that strategies will synthesize the overlap in strategic plans, survey, economic analysis, the community meetings, and the Economic Forum.

Shannon also noted that the Region One Growth and Diversification Plan would be complete by August 25<sup>th</sup>, and shared future meeting dates. These included Board meetings on September 7<sup>th</sup> at Wytheville Community College at 10:00 am, and on December 7<sup>th</sup> at Bluefield College at 10:00 am. Finally, participants were thanked for their participation and encouraged to hand in their handouts to share additional ideas and participant contact information.

### **Meeting Participants**

Katherine Ashby, BRCEDA

Keith Barker, City of Galax

Jason Berry, Washington Co.

Laura Blevins, Senator Tim Kaine

Shannon Blevins, UVa-Wise

Mark Bloomfield, Downtown Wytheville

Whitney Bonham, Washington Co.

Cassandra Caffee, United Way, SWVA

Howard Chapman, Tri-Area Community Health

Timothy Corvin, VCOM

Jayne Deuehring, Abingdon CVB

Danya Diplilt, Town of Abingdon

Joe Hale, Wythe Co.

Marty Holliday, NR/MR WDB

Perry Hughes, Wytheville Community College

Becki Joyce, UVa-Wise

Melinda Leland, VHCC

Josh Lewis, Virginia's Industrial Advancement Alliance

Cathy Lowe, Town of Abingdon, VA Tobacco Commission

David Manley, Joint IDA of Wythe Co.

John Matthews, Joint IDA of Wythe Co.

Dirk Moore, Emory & Henry

Martha Necessary, UVa-Wise

George Owen, United Way, SWVA

Scott Robertson, Business Journal

Aaron Sizemore, MRPDC

John Smolak, Appalachian Power

Nelson J. Teed, MTC

Ellen Tolton, City of Bristol, VA

Teresa Walker, VCC

Todd Wolford, Downtown Wytheville

Uva Wright, United Way of Southwest VA

Christine Gyovai, facilitator, Dialogue + Design Associates

Emily Carlson, Dialogue + Design Associates