

# GO Virginia: Region One Growth & Diversification Plan

## Executive Summary of Community Meetings

August 2 & 3, 2017



### 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. The purpose of the meetings 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 available at this [link](#)<sup>1</sup>. The top goals and priorities from each meeting were then combined after the meetings; **the top prioritized goals** from the three community meetings include:

1. Strengthen existing leadership and foster next generation leadership.
2. Cultivate entrepreneurs, and support and diversify existing businesses.
3. Develop regional collaboration for workforce and education (including K-12), and expand, market and grow regional educational resources.
4. Leverage broadband infrastructure to promote the ability to work remotely and grow information technology (IT) infrastructure and technology hubs.
5. Create a new identity for the region as a “culture of wellness”, and promote the region’s high quality of life, assets and amenities through marketing and telling positive stories of the region.
6. Coordinate and focus workforce programs to align with industry and economic development targets.

GO Virginia Region One is composed of 13 counties and three cities in Southwest Virginia (SWVA). 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 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. In 2016, leaders in business and state government came together to create the GO Virginia legislative package.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.uvawise.edu/uva-wise/administration-services/office-economic-development/go-virginia-region-one-council/>

Now, the GO Virginia initiative is being implemented through legislation ([HB834](#) / [SB449](#)) and through the budget.

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 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 Process and Highlights

### Meeting Opening

Three community meetings were held in Duffield, Lebanon, and Marion on August 2nd and 3rd 2017. During each of the meetings, Shannon Blevins of UVa-Wise (the University of Virginia's College at Wise) welcomed participants. After introductions, a Region One councilmember shared the background and purpose of GO Virginia at each meeting. Christine Gyovai, a 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, in the Lebanon and Marion community meetings, 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, beauty, positive image, progressive, success, regional, cross-pollination, increased tourism, reinvent, business opportunity and retain, diversification, green, safety, progress, creative, technology, pride, renaissance, stability, music, cyber, and joy*

Shannon Blevins then presented the findings of a regional survey, which had over 500 responses, as well as the initial quantitative economic analysis findings underway 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

During each of the meetings, after the presentation participants divided into small groups to share and prioritize ideas around these key questions (separate meeting summaries for each

community meeting are available at this [link<sup>2</sup>](#)):

- 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?

During meetings 2 and 3, the highlights of the top five prioritized ideas from the previous meeting(s) were shared with the group in advance of the small group discussions. Meeting attendees were encouraged to build on the top ideas 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. Then, the group members took turns sharing their ideas and priorities. Next, the small groups discussed these ideas, and then created a prioritized list of top ideas. Participants shared their top ideas with the whole group after the large group reconvened.

During each of the meetings after the small groups shared their ideas, the top ideas of all the small groups were collectively prioritized in one of two ways. In the first meeting in Duffield, ideas were prioritized by raising 1, 2 or 3 fingers to indicate the level of support for an idea in a test for consensus. Three fingers stood for full support, two fingers indicated that a participant supported the idea but might have some questions or concerns, and one finger meant that the participant had too many questions or concerns to support the idea. The rankings of the ideas were annotated high (H, H+, H-), medium (M, M+, M-), or low support (L, L+, L-). This allowed all the ideas to be heard and organized according to group priority with Christine tallying the votes in the large group. In the second and third community meetings in Lebanon and Marion, the entire group prioritized the ideas 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.

## Top Idea Synthesis

The top ideas from each meeting are summarized below; however, several additional ideas were developed that are available in the full meeting summary for each meeting (which are available at the link above). There was significant overlap between the ideas that emerged during each of the community meetings. The top grouped and prioritized ideas, or goal areas, are synthesized and included below after the individual summaries of collective meeting priorities, which are listed below by the name of the meeting location.

### DUFFIELD

- I. Strengthen existing and next generation leadership to help realize a compelling vision for the region. (H+)**
  - a. Strengthen existing leaders and foster opportunities for leaders to create and communicate a compelling vision for the future of the region with community members.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.uvawise.edu/uva-wise/administration-services/office-economic-development/go-virginia-region-one-council/>

- b. Foster the next generation of leadership.
- 2. Engage and grow existing businesses, and grow the manufacturing base. (H+)**
  - a. Assess market trends and identify where existing businesses could expand and new businesses emerge, taking advantage of the technical skillset of unemployed or underemployed miners.
  - b. Develop a business-to-business network to identify input or support needs that can be sourced locally to build the regional economy.
  - c. Create an entrepreneurial ecosystem – create an environment with resources for new entrepreneurs and emerging businesses, including access to capital.
  - d. Develop opportunities for smaller companies to partner with larger companies to meet and address the needs of one another.
- 3. Expand and market educational opportunities. (H+)**
  - a. Market SWVA community colleges, UVa-Wise, and specialty schools on a regional, state and national level.
    - i. Expand educational offerings and programs to include graduate-level studies and to focus on the trades.
  - b. Grow youth and education programs that prepare students for regional career opportunities, including a focus on the trades and workforce development.
- 4. Grow information technology (IT) technology hubs; attract and support millennials. (H+)**
  - a. Expand IT training opportunities.
  - b. Promote quality of life factors to attract millennials.
  - c. Include renewable energy opportunities to attract large companies.
- 5. Grow health and wellness as economic drivers. (H+)**
  - a. Promote, grow and market a high quality of life of SWVA.
  - b. Tell and share the story of the SWVA's culture in a positive way.
  - c. Promote the strength of SWVA culture and people to employers.
    - i. Promote regional outdoor recreation assets.

## LEBANON

- 6. Leverage broadband infrastructure to promote the ability to work remotely, and introduce youth to technology operations early. 14 votes**
  - a. Promote the ability to work remotely with creating desirable communities and available broadband.
  - b. Develop an inventory of “things to do” that would be attractive to young professionals. This could be marketed as: “Bring your own job with you and move to SWVA.”
  - c. Develop funding and resources for K-12 grades in schools to hire a dedicated technology teacher (computer science).
  - d. Promote openings that are available today and emphasize the available salaries.
- 7. Foster regional collaboration for workforce and education of all ages and stages, including workforce rehabilitation. 13 votes**
  - a. Focus on K-12 opportunities including placing an emphasis on the trades.
  - b. Develop partnerships to work with industrial recruitment and coordinate with educational opportunities creating a hand-in-hand pipeline for job recruitment.
- 8. Identify, cultivate, and retain next generation of leadership. 9 votes**

- a. Cultivate leadership and mentoring opportunities with community members and local business leaders and students in elementary school through college, and engage them in the community.
    - i. Focus on opportunities to develop student leaders.
  - b. Develop training and resources such as a regional leadership academy and celebrating successes.
- 9. Diversify existing businesses and create adaptive manufacturing that responds to market needs. 9 votes**
- a. Determine regional manufacturing needs and connect with new business and contracting opportunities.
  - b. Match job training to skilled workers.
  - c. Identify workforce talents of the existing workforce and provide opportunities for training and advancement to aid in retention of employees.
- 10. Create a new identity for the region as a “culture of wellness,” beginning with agriculture and then to value-added manufacturing. 8 votes**
- a. Connect farmers markets to grocers, school systems, hotels, hospitals, and food banks (gleaning “seconds” or produce that is still viable but might be blemished and unable to be sold).
  - b. Leverage new opportunities for cattle, heritage breeds, and legacy farms, and connect to new markets.
  - c. Recruit farm supply and packaging businesses into the area.
  - d. Explore new ways of growing things and niche markets like hydroponics, maple syrup, heritage breeds, and tilapia.

## MARION

- 11. 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.
- 12. Grow educational offerings and pathways. 13 votes**
- a. Focus on youth in education and establish a pathway from kindergarten to career for workforce development.
  - a. Focus on opportunities to educate the parents of children – combine school efforts with family support opportunities.
  - b. Emphasize or expand trade and soft skills (such as communication and collaboration) in education.

- 13. Cultivate entrepreneurship and support existing businesses.** *12 votes*
  - a. Identify the needs for entrepreneurs.
  - b. Identify what is currently being done and who is doing it.
  - c. Create capital by identifying funding and leveraging existing resources.
  - d. Develop a prepared workforce.
- 14. 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.
- 15. 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.

## COMBINED REGIONAL GOALS

Meeting facilitators and organizers synthesized overlapping goals across the three community meetings into the list of prioritized goals below. Following the list of prioritized goals that are a synthesis of specific next steps and action ideas, combined by each goal area, from across the three community meetings (which may also be found on page one of this summary).

- 1. Strengthen existing leadership and foster next generation leadership.**  
*(#1 and #8 from the list above.)*
- 2. Cultivate entrepreneurs, and support and diversify existing businesses.**  
*(#2, #9, and #13 from the list above.)*
- 3. Develop regional collaboration for workforce and education (including K-12), and expand, market and grow regional educational resources.**  
*(#3, #7, and #12 from the list above.)*
- 4. Leverage broadband infrastructure to promote the ability to work remotely and grow information technology (IT) infrastructure and technology hubs.**  
*(#4 and #6 from the list above.)*
- 5. Create a new identity for the region as a “culture of wellness”, and promote the region’s high quality of life, assets and amenities through marketing and telling positive stories of the region.**  
*(#5, #10, #14, and #15 from the list above.)*
- 6. Coordinate and focus workforce programs to align with industry and economic development targets.**  
*(#11 from the list above.)*

## **1. Strengthen existing leadership and foster next generation leadership.**

*(#1 and #8 from the list above.) Action ideas include:*

- a. Strengthen existing leaders and foster opportunities for leaders to create and communicate a compelling vision for the future of the region with community members.
- b. Foster the next generation of leadership.
- c. Cultivate leadership and mentoring opportunities with community members and local business leaders and students in elementary school through college, and engage them in the community.
  - i. Focus on opportunities to develop student leaders.
- d. Develop training and resources such as a regional leadership academy and celebrating successes.

## **2. Cultivate entrepreneurs, and support and diversify existing businesses.**

*(#2, #10, and #13 from the list above.) Action ideas include:*

- a. Assess market trends and identify where existing businesses could expand and new businesses emerge, taking advantage of the technical skillset of unemployed or underemployed miners.
- b. Develop a business-to-business network to identify input or support needs that can be sourced locally to build the regional economy.
- c. Create an entrepreneurial ecosystem – create an environment with resources for new entrepreneurs and emerging businesses, including access to capital.
- d. Develop opportunities for smaller companies to partner with larger companies to meet and address the needs of one another.
- e. Connect farmers markets to grocers, school systems, hotels, hospitals, and food banks (gleaning “seconds” or produce that is still viable but cannot be sold).
- f. Leverage new opportunities for cattle, heritage breeds, and legacy farms, and connect to new markets.
- g. Recruit farm supply and packaging businesses into the area.
- h. Explore new ways of growing things and niche markets like hydroponics, maple syrup, heritage breeds, and tilapia.
- i. Identify the needs for entrepreneurs.
- j. Identify what is currently being done and who is doing it.
- k. Create capital by identifying funding and leveraging existing resources.
- l. Develop a prepared workforce.

## **3. Develop regional collaboration for workforce and education (including K-12), and expand, market and grow regional educational resources.**

*(#3, #8, and #12 from the list above.) Action ideas include:*

- a. Promote, grow and market a high quality of life of SWVA.
- b. Tell and share the story of the SWVA’s culture in a positive way.
- c. Promote the strength of SWVA culture and people to employers.
  - i. Promote regional outdoor recreation assets.
- d. Cultivate leadership and mentoring opportunities with community members and

local business leaders and students in elementary school through college, and engage them in the community.

- i. Focus on opportunities to develop student leaders.
- e. Develop training and resources such as a regional leadership academy and celebrating successes.
- f. Focus on youth in education and establish a pathway from kindergarten to career for workforce development.
- g. Focus on opportunities to educate the parents of children – combine school efforts with family support opportunities.
- h. Emphasize or expand trade and soft skills (such as communication and collaboration) in education.

#### **4. Leverage broadband infrastructure to promote the ability to work remotely and grow information technology (IT) infrastructure and technology hubs.**

*(#4 and #6 from the list above.) Action ideas include:*

- a. Expand IT training opportunities.
- b. Promote quality of life factors to attract millennials.
- c. Include renewable energy opportunities to attract large companies.
- d. Promote the ability to work remotely with creating desirable communities and available broadband.
- e. Develop an inventory of “things to do” that would be attractive to young professionals. This could be marketed as: “Bring your own job with you and move to SWVA.”
- f. Develop funding and resources for K-12 grades in schools to hire a dedicated technology teacher (computer science).
- g. Promote openings that are available today and emphasize the available salaries.

#### **5. Create a new identity for the region as a “culture of wellness”, and promote the region’s high quality of life, assets and amenities through marketing and telling positive stories of the region.**

*(#5, #10, #14, and #15 from the list above.) Action ideas include:*

- a. Promote and grow a high quality of life of SWVA.
  - i. Market the existing high quality of life in the region as well.
- b. Tell and share the story of the SWVA’s culture in a positive way.
- c. Promote the strength of SWVA culture and people to employers.
  - i. Promote regional outdoor recreation assets.
- d. Connect farmers markets to grocers, school systems, hotels, hospitals, and food banks (gleaning “seconds” or produce that is still viable but cannot be sold).
- e. Leverage new opportunities for cattle, heritage breeds, and legacy farms, and connect to new markets.
- f. Recruit farm supply and packaging businesses into the area.
- g. Explore new ways of growing things and niche markets like hydroponics, maple syrup, heritage breeds, and tilapia.
- h. Focus on health care development as these jobs can be high paying jobs as

- considered “low hanging fruit”.
- i. 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.
  - j. Create an “ecosystem” that illuminates opportunities, and change the perception that college degrees only yield more money and jobs – the trades can be lucrative.
  - k. Create partnerships and symbiotic relationships that link industry with farms to manufacturing as well as to health and well fare.
  - l. Create a digital ambassador program that creates a positive regional image. 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.
  - m. Designate one person to facilitate the process.
  - n. Leverage business contacts nationally and globally, and target millennials and industries that value quality of life.
  - o. Educate community members in general of the region’s assets such as outdoor recreation, broadband, water, energy, land and labor.

## **6. Coordinate and focus workforce programs to align with industry and economic development targets.**

*(#11 from the list above.) Action ideas include:*

- 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.

## **Conclusion**

At the conclusion of each community meeting, participants were encouraged to share any additional ideas, thoughts, or examples of models that they were aware of with meeting organizers by email, or to sign up for continued engagement and communication in the GO Virginia effort. 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.