**REGIONAL COUNCIL 9
ENTREPRENEURSHIP TASK FORCE MEETING
JANUARY 7, 2025**
12:30 – 1:30 PM
https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89266954721
Call 434-979-5610 x. 106 with connectivity issues
ALL-VIRTUAL

MINUTES

Entrepreneurship Task Force Members Present: Rob Archer, Tom Click, Ethan Dunstan, Pace Lochte,
Entrepreneurship Task Force Members Absent: Paige Read
Staff Present: Helen Cauthen, Shannon Holland, Christie Taylor

1. **Welcome**
   Tom Click called the meeting to order at 12:32 p.m. He announced that this meeting was all-virtual as allowed by the Governor's statement of an emergency due to the snowstorm. Tom Click shared that Council Chair, Ethan Dunstan, asked him to serve as Sites Task Force Chair until the next Annual Meeting, when a new chair will be nominated. Tom noted that today's meeting was a first step in increasing council engagement as discussed at the October Council Meeting. .
   - **Roll Call**
     A roll call was performed. **A quorum was established, as noted above.**
   - **Public Comment**
     No public comment was submitted prior to or offered during the meeting.

2. **ACTION ITEMS**
   - **Approve Meeting Minutes**
     Rob Archer made a motion to approve the Minutes as presented. Ethan Dunstan seconded the motion. The motion carried. Pace Lochte abstained.

3. **Update:**
   - **GO Virginia Program – Dashboard**
     Shannon Holland gave a brief overview on the new GO Virginia Program impact dashboard, noting the data presented is for closed projects only.
     https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/virginiadhcd/viz/GOVADashboard_17345526597200/GOVADashboard.
   - **Region 9 Entrepreneurship Projects Update**
     A draft dashboard for the Entrepreneurship Task Force was provided in the meeting materials. Shannon Holland noted that it will be refined over time, but it has been created with the goal of communicating with task forces on related activities and success. The Status stoplight on active projects is an effort to highlight areas that may need members' attention. Shannon provided these highlights:

- Carver Food Enterprise is green because it has extended its contract to get more people involved to reach goals and metrics.
- Rural Entrepreneurship is yellow because there are concerns that the project is not focusing on target sectors and we have questions about transparency with staff.
- REI is orange because the project is not on track to deliver what the Council needs. Shannon Holland has participated on the planning committee with direct feedback on consultant selection, report content, and recommendations. Her feedback has not been heeded and isn't reflected in the deliverables. The report was presented to the Council in October but the Action Plan was not delivered at that point. Shannon has most recently been working to develop a strong deliverable to ensure we get good solid implementation grants from this planning grant. DHCD shares similar concerns, and they have already been brought in to help.

4. **Regional Entrepreneurship Initiative (REI) - Deliverables**
   REI Report/Plan - "Thrive in place", October 2024 https://www.govirginia9.org/about/reports/

   Shannon Holland met with the Venture Central Team and DHCD staff to react to the Action Plan proposed in early December and enclosed in the meeting packet. Highlights included:
   o The recommendations should first be validated with entrepreneur vs entrepreneurship support organizations
   o The action plan should demonstrate more clarity of assets already in the eco-system and what they are delivering and how they will be involved (Lack of asset map, e.g. omitting CvilleBioHub)
   o The report conflates start up ecosystem and scale up (GEB) efforts – is the council okay with this and if so, should it be delineated in the action plan
   o Action items should focus on Region 9 target traded sectors/ high growth traded sector
   o Recommendations:
     o # 1 & 2: Clarify why this is needed to catalyze efforts; Rec. 1 might be feasible if led by entrepreneurs vs ESOs; and 2 could be a subcommittee but it doesn't seem feasible that this infrastructure can be maintained and needed for target sectors in each county, especially if focused on target traded sectors
     o # 3: seems most aligned with GO Virginia but needs clarity on how it aligns with existing/prior GO Virginia efforts and/or can't be duplicative of SBDC programming. It must be tailored for needs of our region
     o # 5: not a fit; VCW – P could lead something like this already; youth e-ship training is too far from cash register and is workforce development
     o # 6: assumed this would be a core part of the plan itself; it's important so why wasn't it discussed in terms of asset mapping; a small effort might be included
     o # 7: Is in line with GO Virginia but report didn't outline what is or has been done in this area so there are no specifics as to what should be happening next, i.e. post federal grant just completed with is next?
     o # 8: Does a technical education effort lead to job candidates for employers? Needs to be validated by the sector leaders as some of the training listed received pushback from employers representing the sector. This isn't a finding of the report, but more an action-item that puts them in the workforce development space. Also seems it needs to be parsed out between beginner and growth employers.
     o # 9: GO Virginia can support some outreach efforts as far as programming, but not generalized economic development marketing.

Pace Lochte asked what happens if the project team doesn't revise this report. Shannon Holland shared that in Northern Virginia, the REI project submitted a subpar report and DHCD rejected that and made them rewrite it. Secondly, these planning grants are supposed to point Council toward promising implementation grant opportunities, and that would be lacking. Ethan Dunstan added concern for the amount of time staff has spent working with the team without that feedback being implemented, and the need for Task Force involvement earlier in the process to leverage staff's position.

Next steps: Based on feedback, Shannon Holland will:
- Complete validation of the report by entrepreneurs
- The Council could decide at its next meeting to accept or reject the report and action plan. Tom Click mentioned using the current "no" votes to push for revisions.
- Address high-growth traded sector entrepreneurs in the action plan.
- Inform the project team that they are flagged as "red light" on our dashboard.
- Hold an in-person meeting to discuss feedback from the Task Force and DHCD and emphasize urgency for revisions. Tom Click agreed to join.

5. **Feedback from Task Forces**
   Shannon Holland requested feedback and ideas for improving council processes to engage more closely in project development and review, including how to involve task force members earlier, allowing time for questions and feedback on proposals? Ethan Dunstan said that having Task Force Chairs should be helpful in getting earlier feedback on proposals in order to get to go/no-go sooner, before staff and Council members expend considerable time.

6. **Project Pipeline**
   The REI Action Plan was expected to provide leads to fill the pipeline.
   Pace Lochte suggested sharing project ideas from other regions as way to develop new project ideas. This could be done at task force meetings or council meetings.

7. **Adjourn**
   The meeting was adjourned at 1:30 p.m.