

## **For Immediate Release**

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### **GO Virginia Grant Awarded for Tech-Lab Feasibility Study**

*Proposed facility and mobile unit would offer specialized capabilities to support workforce skill development and new company start-ups.*

**STAUNTON, VA (December 24, 2018)-** The Staunton Innovation Hub (SIH) has been awarded a \$23,000 grant from the GO Virginia Region 8 Council to complete a feasibility study. This intensive study will determine if area students and entrepreneurs will benefit from access to a “Tech-Lab” with its specialized capabilities by starting new companies or gaining skills for higher paying jobs. The feasibility study will be used as a vehicle to determine what is important for the next generation to learn, and what gaps in access to technology exist that are not currently being filled. The study will also help them determine the need, benefit, and cost of the equipment and programs of the Tech-Lab. The results from this study will help identify the funding and the support needed to build the brick-and-mortar Tech-Lab in the SIH, determine the funding needed for a mobile Tech-Bus, and identify the associated educational programming that brings it all together.

The SIH team is initially working with Mary Baldwin University, James Madison University, Valley Career and Technical Center, the City of Staunton and Page County on this venture. The Tech-Lab is a student-entrepreneur-technology initiative with a focus on student education, instructor training, and workforce development. The goal is to lower barriers to success and prepare students to become innovators, be it via an entrepreneurial path or within current employers. SIH believes in the power of bringing people together in a shared workspace and teaching creative and collaborative ways to use technology such as laser cutters, 3D printers, robotics, and electronics, to develop new products and acquire new skills.

Due to the large and rural geographic footprint and of Region 8, keeping people connected and gaining access to modern technology is often difficult. The Staunton Innovation Hub believes that an effective way to address this challenge is to build and deploy a mobile Tech-Lab, initially termed the Tech Bus.

The preliminary vision for the Tech Bus is to convert a full-size, decommissioned school bus into a rolling STEM lab. Imagine an exciting exterior design, a sleek interior with lab tables instead of seats, all filled with 3D printers, augmented reality/virtual reality stations, robotics and more! This bus will have an accompanying lesson plan for teaching these technologies to both end users and other instructors. Such an idea is revolutionary to the region. The bus will physically and virtually close the gap between stakeholders. More importantly, this will be a cooperative resource of otherwise unattainable equipment and training for teachers and students in rural areas.

Staunton Mayor Carolyn Dull stated, “I am delighted that the Staunton Innovation Hub has received the GO Virginia grant for a feasibility study. These funds will support a 21st-century educational lab featuring laser cutters, 3D printers, robotics, and electronics, which will encourage creativity and innovation and fuel our city’s entrepreneur ecosystem.”

“Page County is committed to helping SIH figure out what our “young” entrepreneurs are capable of once giving the right resources. We are excited to explore entrepreneur readiness and the positive impact this “out of the box” initiative will have on local workforce development and small business education. We know it will create a more confident small business conversation in Page County.” says Liz Lewis, Economic Development for Page County.

“At the core mission is *reducing barriers to innovation*. This study will map the best collaborative path to accomplish this mission for the younger residents of the Shenandoah Valley by complementing the hard work our area schools already put forth. This entire project is all about bringing cutting-edge resources to those who might otherwise be unable to access such technology. It will complement the ongoing workforce development efforts and make otherwise out-of-reach opportunities, technologies, and mindsets available to anyone with curiosity and a desire to learn!” says Peter Denbigh, Catalyst at the Staunton Innovation Hub.

The impact of this study will forge a foundational paradigm shift in the entrepreneurial and innovation landscape in the region. Knowledge gained will impact multiple socioeconomic groups, population segments, business industries, and business sizes. We will change the future of this region and be a fantastic case study for rural areas not just in Virginia, but across the country.

The Virginia Initiative for Growth and Opportunity (GO Virginia) is a voluntary, business-led, bipartisan initiative that was formed to foster private-sector growth and diversification across nine economic development regions in the Commonwealth of Virginia. State financial incentives designated for regional projects that encourage collaboration between private sector companies, workforce, education, and government are administered by the Virginia Growth and Opportunity Board. GO Virginia Region 8 covers a large area from Winchester to Lexington and includes ten counties and six cities in the Shenandoah Valley, with a combined population of 525,000. The 28-member council that oversees the GO Virginia program is made up of representatives from small and large business, higher and K-12 education, elected officials, and economic and workforce development organizations.

For more information on GO Virginia, visit online at [Shenandoah Valley Partnership](#) or [Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development](#).

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