

The University of Virginia's College at Wise Development Report November 2024

Growth in public, four-year institutions of higher education generate great benefits for the regions they call home. Examples can be found across the nation where colleges and universities serve as economic drivers and catalysts for economic growth. The University of Virginia's College at Wise (UVA Wise) was established in Southwest Virginia in 1954 to serve as a primary source of talent for the region, but its impact extends far beyond the educational realm. The College is committed to improving the quality of life and economic vitality of Southwest Virginia, and it serves as a major economic engine, as shown in the 2023 impact report issued by the Virginia Business Higher Education Council. The study was commissioned as part of the Council's "Growth4VA" campaign. The analysis revealed that UVA Wise contributed \$188 million in state gross domestic product, or GDP, and \$13 million in state tax revenues during fiscal year 2021.

The University of Virginia's College at Wise is dedicated to preparing students to be engaged citizens through excellence in teaching, personalized attention, and a commitment to individual growth. Drawing upon its foundation as a public liberal arts institution in the Appalachian region of Virginia, the College strives to build a diverse community of learners with the drive to serve and lead in their communities, the nation, and the world. The College's student population is first-generation, rural students, for whom we offer access and affordability.

To support our students, UVA Wise has committed to keeping tuition flat for the 2024-25 and 2025-26 academic years. The College was recently recognized by *U.S. News & World Report* as the #2 public college in the nation for offering the least debt upon graduation.

Continuing to increase enrollment is one of the primary ways UVA Wise can contribute to the region's economic revitalization. UVA Wise has seen a 23% overall increase in its enrollment from fall 2023 to fall 2024. We have also seen increased enrollment in our Master of Education program from its first semester in fall 2023 to today. The College's increased recruitment efforts include the expansion into the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) region. Through a 2019 legislative action, the College offers students in any of the 420 counties in thirteen states that fall in the ARC region near in-state tuition. The College also collaborates closely with community colleges to strengthen pathways to degree attainment. Additionally, Within Reach is an initiative created in 2019 to cover tuition and fees for Virginia students from families earning \$40,000 a year or less. This program has since expanded to provide the same transformative financial assistance to Virginia families earning \$80,000 or less.

Higher education institutions create conditions for a robust economy through their contributions to talent, innovation, and place. UVA Wise is inextricably linked to its surrounding communities and is affiliated with various initiatives underway throughout Southwest Virginia. The College is shifting

paradigms and encouraging innovation across public health, childcare, entrepreneurship, community and leadership development, and energy. As a neutral convener and unbiased facilitator, we assist in the writing and implementation of impactful strategic plans and lead the region's economic diversification efforts. Our 2030 strategic plan, ['Your College for a Lifetime,'](#) outlines ways to enhance our public service and community involvement by developing an atmosphere of mutual respect and making the community's agenda the institution's agenda.

To evaluate the College's economic engagement and impact and reinforce our commitment to the revitalization of the region's communities, UVA Wise applied in May 2023 for the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU) and the University Economic Developers Association (UEDA) Innovation and Economic Prosperity Designation (IEP). The IEP designation program helps higher education institutions better know, measure, tell, and enhance their economic and community development impact while recognizing institutions that have demonstrated a substantive, sustainable, and institution-wide commitment to and strategy for regional economic engagement, growth, and economic opportunity.

In fall 2023, UVA Wise joined 91 institutions across the U.S., including two in the Commonwealth, as an IEP institution. The designation, conferred in July by the APLU consisted of a rigorous self-assessment process that ran concurrently with the College's strategic planning process. The IEP is considered the leading certification process recognizing higher education institutions that have demonstrated a substantial, sustainable, and campus-wide commitment to regional economic and community development.

Full application: <https://uvawise.box.com/s/xg4gx3wh87pccw895n5hsl17ci9l6bbs>

The UVA Wise commitment to serving the region draws up on the strengths of the College but also those of our strategic partnerships as well as their expertise within the following areas of focus:

- Community & Economic Development
- Healthy Appalachia Institute
- Career Discovery & Planning
- Strategic Initiatives

UVA Wise is recognized as an anchor institution across Southwest Virginia and the Commonwealth, playing a vital role in coordinating regional initiatives. It acts as the support organization for the GO Virginia Region One Council, serves as the entrepreneurship coordinator for the region, and functions as the regional coordinator for the Virginia Talent Opportunity Partnership (VTOP) program. Recently, UVA Wise has also become the backbone partner for STRONG ACC, which is the accountable care community organization supporting the area. By way of our strategic initiatives and partnerships to address the region's needs, the College's economic engagement efforts fall into the following categories: Community Development and Entrepreneurship; Professional and Career Development; and Health and Prosperity. Key initiatives related to these three areas of focus are outlined below.

Community and Economic Development

SWVA Economic Forum

UVA Wise, along with regional and state partners, coordinates the SWVA Economic Forum each May. The event engages participants annually through a shared vision of regional collaboration, growth, and innovation for all Southwest Virginia. It has become a central gathering place for the region to discuss the latest ideas and synergies to build Southwest Virginia's future.

Over 300 attendees gathered in Wise in May to celebrate 'A Region on the Move.' Governor Glenn Youngkin served as a keynote speaker, discussing the impactful work happening across the region and introducing his administration's Accelerate Southwest Virginia initiative. Economist Chris Chmura highlighted regional economic trends, while Dana Cronkhite, Economic Development Director for Dickenson County, and John Wilson, Market President for Addiction Recovery Care, discussed a new facility to support long-term recovery and mental health services. A legislative panel focused on topics in housing, childcare, in-migration, and higher education. Dan Schawbel, bestselling author and managing partner of Workplace Intelligence, spoke on generational differences in leadership, learning, and work styles, and an afternoon panel featured a conversation on the changing nature of philanthropy and a place-based investment strategy that centers on community impact.

The event garners significant media attention, which contributes to enhancing the region's profile. Media outlets focusing on the 2024 forum included but are not limited to the Tri-Cities Business Journal, Cardinal News, PBS Appalachia, Washington Post, Yahoo Finance, and a host of local and regional newspapers and television stations.

GO Virginia Region One

Since 2017, UVA Wise has served as the coordinating entity for the GO Virginia Region One program. GO Virginia is an initiative that fosters private-sector growth and job creation through state incentives for regional collaboration by business, education, and government.

GO Virginia Region One is working to restore Virginia's position of economic leadership by growing and diversifying the region's economy. As the Region One support organization, UVA Wise is focused on regional economic development support that encourages collaboration between local government, higher education, private industry, and workforce by incentivizing projects that will create higher-paying jobs in traded sectors.

During FY24, the GO Virginia Region 1 Council approved seven Per Capita projects (five planning and two implementation) and one Talent Pathways Initiative project. In total, GO Virginia Region 1 has awarded 42 projects for a total of \$10,175,036.71. Of the 42 projects, 14 are still active and 28 are closed. As of Quarter 1 2024, GO Virginia Subgrantee projects have reported 372 jobs created, 585 job retained, 20 businesses created, 52 businesses expanded, and 271 credentials awarded.

The GO Virginia Region 1 team promotes regional awareness of opportunities through the distribution of a quarterly newsletter and bi-monthly podcast has proven to be a key instrument to keeping stakeholders engaged and informed. Through these platforms, we showcase project updates, share success stories, and offer valuable insights through interviews with applicants, fostering transparency and community involvement in regional initiatives.

The five target industries identified by the GO Virginia Region One Council includes:

- Information and Emerging Technology
- Agriculture / Food and Beverage Processing
- Advanced Manufacturing
- Energy and Minerals
- Transportation, Warehousing and Distribution

The College has produced four Growth & Development Plans for the thirteen-county, three-city region, and as of June 30, 2024, the UVA Wise team has supported the GO Virginia Region One Council in awarding the following:

Projects: 42

- 23 Planning
- 12 Per Capita
- (Implementation)
- 1 Talent Pathways Initiative
- 5 Economic Resilience & Recovery (ERR)
- 1 ERR Statewide Competitive

GO Virginia Investment: \$10,175,036.71

Match Investment: \$7,889,096.23

Leveraged Resources: \$2,310,598.37

Overall Investments (includes match & additional leverage funds): \$20,374,731.31

Cumberland Forest Community Fund

UVA Wise, The Nature Conservancy, and The Anne & Gene Worrell Foundation announced the 2024 recipients of the Cumberland Forest Community Fund in June. The Towns of Cleveland, Dungannon, Honaker, and Richlands, along with Appalachian Sustainable Development, Breaks Interstate Park, Friends of the Buchanan County Library, and Mountain Kids Inc., were awarded a total of \$100,000 for projects, including a community garden expansion, an aquatic research station and improvements to a local recreation area.

The fund provides financial support for local projects that contribute to economic diversification, expanded community capacity, and benefits to nature within the seven counties. Since its inception in 2022, the Community Fund has successfully distributed over \$300,000 to 28 impactful projects, demonstrating a collaborative dedication to regional growth.

Opportunity Appalachia

UVA Wise/Opportunity SWVA is pleased to be the Virginia lead partner in Opportunity Appalachia, a program for community real estate development projects that support economic restructuring and diversification in underinvested communities of Central Appalachia. Since 2020, the program has supported 58 projects that seek to raise \$471 MM in financing and create 2,700 quality jobs. Investment priorities of Opportunity Appalachia include downtown development, housing, manufacturing, IT, healthcare, education, food systems, clean energy, and heritage tourism and recreation in rural communities.

Funded FY24 projects in Southwest Virginia include:

608 Main Street, Town of Clifton Forge, Clifton Forge, Va. – Rehabilitation of the former furniture company building to serve as the Chesapeake & Ohio Historical Society’s Museum space on the ground floor and apartments above. Total costs are estimated at \$2 MM.

Appalachian Mercantile & Good Coffee, Town of Appalachia, Appalachia, Va. – Restoration of the downtown building to rehab and create new commercial spaces, provide overnight accommodations, short-stay rentals, and long-term middle-income housing options. Total costs are estimated at \$1.6 MM.

Lonesome Pine Motor Company, Gap Partnership LLC., Big Stone Gap, Va. – Revive the historic building to serve as retail space on the ground floor and affordable housing above. A second building will serve as a gallery with artist-in-residence space in the apartments above. Total costs are estimated at \$1.5 MM.

The Peake and Lavigne Buildings, Appalachian Rising Ventures LLC, Appalachia, Va. – Restoration of two downtown spaces to serve as retail or food service on the first floor and short-term rentals above. Total costs are estimated at \$3.1 MM.

Appalachian Renewable Energy and Resilience Collaborative

In partnership with regional partners, UVA Wise will provide community engagement support for an interdisciplinary team representing engineering, economics, business, policy, and impact investing experts in researching how communities can increase their resiliency to various threats to their economic, health, and social viability. The three-year, multi-phase project includes interviews with stakeholders and the selection of two communities for a deep engagement to develop a resilience plan specifically addressing the communities, goals, assets, and threats.

Building GIS Capacity in Energy Communities

UVA Wise will serve as the Virginia state lead in an Appalachian Regional Commission-funded project that aims to enhance the use of GIS and geospatial technologies in land records management to foster economic development in Central Appalachia. The project will conduct a thorough planning process to identify how to increase the capacity of county governments to utilize existing technologies effectively. Objectives include developing implementation plans for

technological upgrades and land records management practices. The effort also includes creating a comprehensive training program for local government staff and leadership after feasibility and cost studies are completed in two localities for each of the participating partner states.

RALLY SWVA

In April, the Town of Wise hosted the unveiling of a new LOVE sign in the Gateway Gardens area, with the “V” being the UVA Wise Athletics Power V. The LOVE sign is the result of a RALLY SWVA grant project in collaboration with the Town of Wise, the Wise County Career-Technical Center, Union High School, and UVA Wise.

Rally SWVA, which stands for “Real Action Leadership Learning Yay!” is a strategy of the Opportunity SWVA initiative, administered by UVA Wise’s community and economic development team, put in place as an action learning mini-grant program that engages community leaders in working together to make their community a better place for small businesses. The project provides positive coaching, leadership development activities, and facilitated discussions emphasizing goal setting based on a shared vision, consensus building, outcome measurement, and moving from talk to action.

The Mayor of the Town of Wise, Teresa Adkins, felt it was integral to incorporate the College into the LOVE sign. “The relationship between the town of Wise and the College is vital. “We need the College, and the College needs us,” said Adkins. “We are grateful for the college community and enjoy seeing students and the local community interacting with one another.”

Entrepreneurship

The College recognizes that entrepreneurship is a critical component of a regional economic growth plan and provides staff support to Opportunity SWVA, a network of community development and small business support organizations. These entities are working together to encourage business development in rural communities throughout the region and serve as partners in the multistate Opportunity Appalachia program. Led by the UVA Wise entrepreneurship ecosystem builder, the network leads a regional innovation program, cultivates strategic partnerships through community outreach, and raises awareness of entrepreneurial activities throughout Southwest Virginia. The following are examples of initiatives led by UVA Wise and Opportunity SWVA.

CREATORCON

In partnership with Do Good Brands, UVA Wise presented the second annual CreatorCon conference on the UVA Wise campus in September 2024. The event attracted over 100 entrepreneurs and creators for networking, sharing ideas, and taking away actionable items to grow their ventures.

The Gauntlet Business Program and Competition

The Gauntlet business program and competition took place in May, supporting eight SWVA entrepreneurs, four of which placed in the top twenty of the statewide competition and two of

which placed in the top five—Blue Hills Market, Abingdon, 2nd place, and Whistle Pig Country Store, Lee County, 5th place. The Gauntlet is Virginia’s largest business program and competition and a proven business development system that connects entrepreneurs to the training, mentorship, and resources needed for success.

CO.STARTERS

CO.STARTERS Core is a three-month, cohort-based program that equips aspiring entrepreneurs with the insights, relationships, and tools needed to turn ideas into action and turn a passion into a sustainable and thriving endeavor. In 2024, UVA Wise wrapped its fourth cohort of the program.

Business Builder Series

Throughout FY24, 11 Business Builder social events were held in the communities of Gate City, Clintwood, Abingdon, Tazewell, Wytheville, Norton, St. Paul, Marion, Bristol, Galax, and Lebanon. The program fostered local and regional connections as well as shared resources and opportunities and saw a total of over 250 participants.

Side Hustle Market

Held on April 17 on the UVA Wise campus, the Side Hustle Market is a farmer’s market-style event where entrepreneurs and creatives can sell or market products, gather feedback on a future product, share or assess an idea, and pitch for crowdfunding or support. The event featured various booths hosted by students, staff, faculty, and community members and gave participants an opportunity to shop, connect with local businesses, and enjoy live music, lawn games, and activities. Over 100 people attended this year’s event.

Nest Activities

UVA Wise manages a student entrepreneurship facility called Nest. Just off campus in the Town of Wise, Nest supports students in their efforts to launch a new venture. Student engagement has increased steadily since the opening of the facility in the fall of 2018. The facility is critical to entrepreneurial activities to include pitch competitions, workshops, and events promoting entrepreneurship as a viable career choice for students.

Professional and Career Development

Career Planning

The Office of Career Discovery & Planning (OCDP) is the destination for career-related assistance during college and beyond Wise. Career Discovery and Planning counsels students on career pathways, hosts events and programming, provides recruitment services, meets with faculty and staff to explore opportunities for collaboration, and manages Smiddy’s Closet, a resource offered to students that provides professional attire for job interviews, formal presentations, and jobs.

The office also hosted the first on-campus career fair since the pandemic. Different companies, organizations and schools engaged with students from every major in hopes of establishing professional relationships and sharing potential job and internship opportunities. Some of the companies represented included Eastman, Hard Rock Bristol, Ballad Health, Frontier Health, Food City Corporate, Wize Solutions, and Virginia Career Works.

Virginia Talent Opportunity Program (VTOP)

UVA Wise is the regional coordinator for the statewide VTOP initiative, which targets expansion of paid and credit-bearing student internships and other work-based learning opportunities in collaboration with employers. Employers are provided access to training on how to launch effective internship programs and financial support for paid internships.

In March, SCHEV awarded two \$100,000 grants (limited submission opportunities) for Internship Support and Internship Data Collection. A substantial portion of the Internship Support grant will provide funding for housing, transportation, professional clothing, meals, and other necessary materials to UVA Wise students who have secured an internship yet still have a need for support. The Internship Data Collection grant allows for the purchase of modern technology and explores upgrades to existing technology. The goal is to administer and track internships, undergraduate research, community service, and study abroad, which will be necessary beginning in Fall 2024 when experiential learning becomes a graduation requirement.

UVA Wise and VTOP hosted the inaugural SWVA Internship Summit on November 11 and 12 at the Southwest Cultural Center and Marketplace in Abingdon. Presenters included experts in mentorship, employers on internship programs, and others. The two-day event provided valuable information and resources for employers, as well as a networking session for employers and students seeking internships.

Health and Prosperity

Healthy Appalachia Institute

UVA Wise operates the only public health institute in Southwest Virginia, leveraging relationships with UVA, the Southwest Virginia Health Authority, and numerous stakeholders to positively impact the challenging health metrics across the region through the Healthy Appalachia Institute.

In FY24, the SWVA Blueprint for Health Improvement and Health-Enabled Prosperity was published. A consortium of partners, including the UVA Center for Telehealth, the Southwest Virginia Health Authority, the Health Wagon, Tri-Area Health and Ballad Health, worked together to develop the blueprint. Following the release of the blueprint, HAI worked with the Health Authority to select and fund seven regional projects aligned with the goals of the blueprint. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) provided funding to support the development of the blueprint as well as initial seed funding for the regional grants.

Summary

At the core of UVA Wise's efforts is creating economic prosperity through community engagement and mutually beneficial partnerships that leverage the College's assets to strengthen the region. We collaborate with the mission of 'Creating Opportunity Through Community' by building upon the strength of bringing people together to identify challenges and unique opportunities.

UVA Wise builds community and improves the quality of life for all Southwest Virginia by:

- Producing the talent needed to fuel the economy, ensuring that employers have the skilled workforce they need to grow.
- Connecting the wealth of resources available at UVA Wise and UVA Charlottesville to opportunities in Southwest Virginia.
- Serving as a neutral facilitator and unbiased convener to develop strategic blueprints and catalyze regional efforts.
- Linking the community to faculty, staff, and students through strategic partnerships.
- Strengthening the quality of K-12 education in Southwest Virginia in partnership with local schools.
- Serving as a source of professional and leadership development.
- Supporting the economic development community (local governments, chambers of commerce, IDAs/EDAs, etc.).
- Playing an integral role in improving regional healthcare access and quality.
- Leading the way in environmental stewardship.