

## **Transcript for Vibrant Virginia Impact Fund Call for Proposals Information Webinar: June 3, 2021**

**John Provo:** So I think we'll go ahead and get started.

It's always a little bit of a mystery calling any kind of a meeting of university folks in the summer.

But I am very, very grateful for the turnout. And I'm really happy to share some information about this opportunity and I look forward to working with many of you on potential submissions over the summer.

I'm gonna pull up a deck, if you don't mind. But first I'll let you know we do have the Q&A box open. I'm joined by my colleagues, Julia Kell and Caroline Honeycutt and they're gonna help me facilitate the questions in case I get lost in the fascination of my own PowerPoint.

But I'm going to go ahead and pull the PowerPoint up now. We will have specific time at the end for questions, but feel free to post your questions as they come to you. And we may take them up as we go as well. All right.

I'm awfully enamored of my logo. I haven't had had such a bright logo in quite a while.

So, really, four things we wanna do today is talk to you a little bit about the broader program the solicitation is a part of, give you some idea about the purpose and content of the impact fund that we've released a solicitation on, talk to you about the proposal process and then address any questions you can raise at the time.

I'll try to go to a pretty good clip for the first couple of bullets here. But I do think the context will hopefully have some value for you in framing your particular proposals.

So, Vibrant Virginia really began with a realization from several folks in different parts of the university about the need and opportunity to maximize our impact and also, frankly, leverage our unique presence across the Commonwealth of Virginia.

We are truly a statewide land-grant institution. The ideas about urban and rural connections and frankly, frequent disconnections are something that we have wrestled with I think, all of us, in various ways in our work. This effort is really focused on a broad set of economic, social, and environmental issues impacting our communities.

These were present before COVID and they're even more relevant as we come out of the stress tests of this COVID crisis and other crises that have kind of flown along with that.

We look, really in doing all of this, to enhance our contributions. And yes, we are going to post this deck later.

But we're looking through all of this to enhance our contributions to the commonwealth.

And really, we started off in 2018. We had received an unfunded mandate from the state legislature to collaborate with a couple of our sister institutions in the commonwealth on coming

up with some fresh ideas about higher ed and rural economic development in particular and rural community development and related issues.

That project, which you can find links to on our website, involved Virginia Tech, University of Virginia, University of Virginia's College at Wise, and Virginia State.

We really realized that we were hardly the first and not even the 15th group to be asked to look at the challenges of rural Virginia. And we quickly realized, as we put this policy report together, that it really wasn't enough to fill the holes, if you'll let me say, in rural Virginia, but we needed to build bridges really across the Commonwealth. Connect communities, and connect issues within communities because certainly there are challenges and distress issues in our urban areas as well as our rural areas.

And all of this could be strengthened through greater connections and building opportunities across the Commonwealth to address different issues.

So we set out to run a series of community conversations. And I saw some folks registered for this who were participants in a number of our campus conversations, trying really to build a community of practice around economic and community engagement on these issues.

We got some support together for a book project. And I should mention the initial support for all of this came from my bosses in the division of Outreach and International Affairs, our good friends in the Cooperative Extension Service, the folks running the policy destination area, the team involved in the College Access Collaborative and also the School of Public and International Affairs. And leaders in those groups also supported a book project.

They helped this issue become a part of a discussion in Beyond Boundaries. If you go to the Beyond Boundaries website right now, you'll see a goal -- in the impact area -- for supporting some number of Vibrant Virginia projects in the next couple of years. That's one of the reasons we're here today.

And those folks I mentioned helped put together a small amount of seed funding. We ended up supporting 7 projects in different parts of the Commonwealth. We didn't have a lot of money, compared to this year. So we were providing small grants from \$5,000-\$10,000. We supported faculty and sometimes student groups, working on community health, working on STEM opportunities, connecting high schools and local companies, and a number of other things, again, that are articulated for you, if you want to click through to the link below.

And a number of those efforts actually led to follow-on funding. It really demonstrated the idea that we could leverage good work in communities around Virginia into larger opportunities, and that's part of what we were thinking about in 2020 when COVID hit. And like many efforts, we had to regroup and reassess. We went into a second phase where we launched a series of thought leadership activities, so a virtual conference series. And then we grew the group and I'm actually going to click through to this link, just so you have the range of folks in front of you here.

We expanded the original group that supported Vibrant Virginia 1.0 into this Virginia Tech Council on Vibrant Virginia. And in addition to the folks who came before added some other

administrative leaders and some of our investment institutes, and really, I think, covered a broader range of topics and issues. And so we're grateful for their participation and really presented them this idea of building a Vibrant Virginia Impact Fund.

I won't click through to it, but that link, you hopefully have all seen because that's where the RFP is located.

The Impact Fund was to go a step higher than the original seed fund notion. We anticipate that we've got enough resource put together to offer grants actually between \$25,000 and \$75,000; although we may go higher or we may go lower. But we think in particular, that we demonstrated the potential and I think we can actually show some broader impact.

The group that I showed you, the council has actually organized itself, for purposes of this activity, kind of like an angel investor network, if you will. So some of them have a broad basket of interest and some of them have more specialized interests, and I'll get into that in just a second.

But I think they're very excited to see what ideas you can bring forward and how we can support those in the year to come.

So the impact fund itself. The general requirement is really work that would impact urban/rural regions of the state. Doesn't have to be both, could be and/or.

We're looking for activities related to job creation and entrepreneurship, so work with existing companies, work with startup companies. We're interested in issues of talent development and education, so thinking about different levels of learning, going on at different times in the life cycle of individuals. We're interested in community development and placemaking, health, community well-being, civic innovation, and community leadership development.

So that's a whole lot of things.

But just the folks registered for this event -- we had about 60 some folks sign up -- really cover most of the colleges around the university as well as a lot of administrative groups. So we think there's a broad interest across these areas. Where we're asking a little bit more work from you, is for projects that very actively engage external partners. So these are things where we're looking for you to have, not just sites where you're doing work,

I mean, that's important, but partnerships with the communities, the companies, the institutions representing those sites.

So the ability to build relationships with the work that you start is one of the things that we'd like to see.

And the second bullet relates to this also because we really want to move beyond recirculating seed funding and actually taking the resource that we've put together and using it to leverage new investment in your work, or help you better use existing investment you've got for projects.

So that's a really important point because that really speaks for some funders to the kind of relationship you need to have with those external partners.

I suggested some of these broad areas. We also though have several members of the council. And these are detailed further in the RFP. But several members of the council have specific interests in resilience and environmental change, in interdisciplinary faculty teams that might qualify for some of the other funding streams that ICTAS has. Folks with work in experiential learning that are eligible for the 4VA program. And also, folks working on health and well-being at the individual or community level.

So that's the structure of the fund. That's some of the key goals of the fund.

In-hand versus applied is a question that's raised in the Q&A box. So if you have received a grant to undertake a certain function, but you believe you could use these funds to further extend the impact of that work, grow a project that you've lined up funding for, that's one way we could look at this. That would be sort of an in-hand matching fund. The applied for, and we'll talk about timelines before we finish here, but if you're looking at a particular funding opportunity where this resource could serve appropriately as match or if you have a line on something, and we can deploy our funds before the clock would run out in the fiscal year, we could look at that as well. So we could assist you in getting other funds or we can assist you in maximizing funds you have.

We also, again, I'll talk about this a little more, but we also have in our shop and amongst some partner shops -- some of whom are groups that are on the call today -- there are a number of outwardly focused units around the university like ours, who work with external funders and have a history in helping individuals faculty maximize those sorts of opportunities. So there's some technical assistance we might be able to provide with respect to this matching question.

Someone has asked: What is ICTAS?

So ICTAS is the Institute for Critical Technology and Applied Science, one of the university's investment institutes. If you go back to the link that has the full RFP, there's a link within the RFP that'll take you to their funding streams and their funding requirements. So I think you can get a little more information that way.

Back to my deck.

So in terms of the process -- this is meant to be a rolling process -- we'll take inquiries as long as we have both money and time to spend the money that we have. We suggest for fullest consideration that you submit your initial abstract by July 3rd. That goes straight to me.

And I'll acknowledge that and be collecting those and reviewing those with our council.

The council will then invite full proposals. These are outlined in the RFP and you'll see they're still relatively modest. Seven pages max. And then on receipt of full proposals, you may be asked to make a presentation to the council for final consideration. We hope to be working on that sort of process over the summer.

Again, we're going to do a rolling process and we'll take them as long as we have money and also time to spend the money we have.

But again, this idealized process for fullest consideration, we'd love to get folks up and running in the fall semester.

So, it's possible that some of you have things that you're working on already that may fit. It's possible that you've got ideas that you haven't fully fleshed out. And you may need some more time. And if so that's okay.

Again, this is kind of the idealized process. And we do think, to maximize the impact, we'd love to be able to start some folks in the fall.

But we're also aware of the fact that we're asking a lot. This is a little more complex than just, 'tell me you've got a great idea,' and we'll write your check and you can go off and do some wonderful things.

But we think we've got help and we think we've got resources, whether you're ready to go, thinking about going, or just really curious about this, we've got resources to help you develop this over time.

Question: time and effort in-kind from an external partner. James, I think that's a great question. I think we'd have to define that and make sure it passes some kind of nexus test relative to the overall effort. But I think that could be appropriate as long as it's also reasonably valued. I will also say, just to be completely frank, we haven't done this before. So I'm working off of my discussions with the council and what I've triangulated on with them, but I think, bearing that in mind, I think, James, that answer is hopefully a reasonable one that you could work with.

So I think, this is almost my last slide.

We have -- I will click over to this -- it's still being fine tuned a little bit. There have been a couple of surveys we've done. One in, I think 2018-19, was for the original rural project that I mentioned. That had maybe 200 responses.

And then last year, we did another survey with maybe 250 responses. And this was for the broader urban and rural aperture. And we've essentially uploaded this information into a database that you can register for access to.

We've got a lot of different reasons for constructing this, but in the context of this proposal, you know you'll see the survey really had some similar framing. And I can log in and show you just a little bit. It's not a 100 % done. I'm still tweaking some things with our IT folks. But, when it's fully ready, probably within the next week or so, you can go in and search in different ways for projects that have taken place in the last few years.

And again, you may be represented here, some of you may have responded to the survey. Some of you may recognize people in the survey responses that are listed in the database, who are either current or potential partners.

So we look at that as kind of a resource for you to build out your good work and build out your partnerships. But also if you haven't responded to the survey when it's circulated previously, it's still open.

There's a link to a Qualtrics survey here. And I'd invite any of you, not for the future work, but if there's past work that you've done in the space, we'd love to include that in the database. So essentially, you've got an opportunity to potentially network with partners through the database if you're already listed.

And if your past work isn't listed, please do consider responding to the survey and using that as another way to reach folks.

I mentioned our center, which some of you may have formerly known as the Office of Economic Development. We've actually got kind of a broader remit now.

And we work in a lot of different ways with communities and companies and agencies around Virginia, external funders, particularly in the government side and some of the foundation side as well. And I think we have the ability to help you make some matches. There are definitely many other groups as I said, some of which are on the call today, but we're very happy to connect you to other folks who might have a deeper experience in say, health or social services or other activities.

So there's a lot we're asking here in this solicitation that's a big lift for individual faculty, but part of what we'd like to do in this is help individual faculty better network their ideas with support organizations around the university.

So I believe that was my last slide. And we are not quite halfway in. My contact information should be all over the place. But I'm going to drop my screen share and go back to this view.

And really ask, well, let's see, really ask to open up the -- we're gonna post the PowerPoint and I'll see once we put a link up, if we can send that link out to this mailing list; I think my colleagues can take care of that.

So I would just open the floor for additional questions.

If there aren't questions, if this were a live room, I'd be scanning the room right now and calling on some folks. But it's a virtual thing and it's even worse; I can see a list of your names.

And Jon Green. I'm glad you've joined us today. If you don't mind, Jon, I'm gonna see if my colleagues can bring you over to the panel side of the webinar. And Jon is actually a member of our council. So I feel okay putting him on the spot and asking if he has either questions from his own perspective or maybe comments he'd like to offer to give folks some more things to think about.

Hi Jon Greene.

**Jon Greene:** Thanks John, can you hear me?

**John Provo:** Yes, sir.

**Jon Greene:** Can you see me?

**John Provo:** I cannot see you, but you sound fine.

**Jon Greene:** See if I can figure out how to do that...

**John Provo:** Yeah.

**Jon Greene:** I don't see an option to turn my camera on. I'll just yak at you.

**John Provo:** Sure.

Now we lost your voice John, you're muted. Oh now you're back and we hear you and you're wearing a tie.

Oh my goodness.

**Jon Greene:** The Institute For Critical Technology and Applied Science, or ICTAS, is interested in participating in this. We see a lot of opportunity in the collaboration that's involved.

But as we do this, one of the things that we're trying to do is make sure that we stay true to our roots and our mission, which is to try to support interdisciplinary research and to attempt to put ourselves in positions to bring in larger external funding. So we viewed this as similar to our other seed research efforts. And I'm happy to try and chat with you and how you might form one of these proposals so that we would take interest in it.

**John Provo:** Jon I think that's great. I appreciate that, because I think that's a great example of something I alluded to before, is this idea that what we've set up isn't just one pot of money. Essentially, we've got several different funders networked together, not to borrow from the entrepreneurship world, but we won't be televising the pitch calls like on Shark Tank or something.

But the idea here is that ICTAS may have a particular thing, very particular to ICTAS that you may bring forward that would make sense.

And you may also have something where ICTAS and one of our other -- Extension is an investor in this -- so there may be something where Extension and ICTAS have a common interest.

As you could see on that roster, we think we've got a pretty comprehensive group of investors and we think there's money there for all of the things we've talked about.

Let me turn to some of the questions and Jon, stay with me too, because I can see at least one of these that you should be right in on.

But let me start first, Kang asked about rolling versus a deadline. So we've got a target date of July 3rd. And again I wouldn't use the word deadline, but that should be your target for fullest consideration. You're gonna be the first one in the door for what we're considering. And it's our intention to consider things as long as we still have money and time.

We're using FY 22 funds, so we've got to obligate on a certain schedule. And again, for fullest consideration, if you submit something later that's okay, we just don't know where we'll be on the funding.

I don't think we have a hard count of grants, so Emmanuel's question.

But again, we expect to offer grants somewhere between \$25,000 and \$75,000. Again, one-to-one match, FY 22 funds, and what not. That's as best I can answer that question for right now. And I think that takes care of the next question. Half of the next question, which was about how much funding.

We can use this to support postdocs. I think we envisioned in the language, there might be things that you're doing where student teams supervised by faculty really might be the way to come at this. And so that's completely appropriate as well.

I think Theo, hello Theo, has the next question, and John, this is something that's kind of in your ally too, because this is a part of the world that straddles.

So if you can see that in the Q&A box, would you want to take a first shot at that question?

**Jon Greene:** Sure.

The question is, "Can you offer any advice about how proposals should balance between applied projects and basic research?"

Well, so what I would state is that the intent of this program is really -- excuse me. The intent of this program is really to have impact outside of the university. So while basic research is not excluded as a possibility, I, think the intent is to have applications of that research that will result in impacts beyond the walls of the university.

So if you're gonna focus where you're going, you're gonna definitely want to lean toward the applied side and it might be exclusively the applied side.

**John Provo:** Yeah. John, thank you. And I think that's a good answer. The only thing I would add is some of you have dealt with sort of the NSF broader impacts kind of questions, right? And that's a field of study in and of itself. I think we're probably broader than that, and I think particularly as you're looking at this question about how to engage with external partners, you'll notice that one of the questions in the full RFP for the full proposals that you'd eventually have to answer also, as to how either you or the university can build a relationship from this work. And that's going to come from those impacts that you can deliver to the partner or with a partner in places where they work.

So I think that's yeah, so I think again, most directly, yes, it leans applied. But we certainly understand, many of you may have some underlying basic questions you're trying to drive to, and we think that's really doable.

All right. I think we're caught up.

Oh, sorry. Question: "Does it have to be spent by June 30?"

Yeah, I think there may be some ways where we can obligate the funds before the end of the fiscal year, but it kinda depends on the vehicle. So the question about, it's fiscal year '22 money. Most of it is going to be E&G money, but I may have some other types of funds. And I think we just need to get into a conversation with you about the structure of your project.

Scanning through.

Yeah, and that also sort of echoes the question about the anonymous attendee.

So again, ideally most of the money is gonna be E&G money and it would need to be spent.

But again, let's get into the structure of your projects. There may also be ways for you to stagger our money and your match money. We need to know that the commitment is there for the match money before you expend our funds.

But I could see a situation where we were bridge funding or overlapping funding say with projects funded on another schedule.

Another question, Anonymous attendee. That's a really popular name today: Anonymous attendee.

So let's see. Guidance about the range of ways folks have accomplished the match.

I would say the examples, the only thing that would really qualify would be the third example. So this shouldn't be departmental funding, it shouldn't be other institutional funding within VT if that money is state budget money, right.

So. I'm trying to think of an example from my shop. So we're like 60 percent externally funded. And we've got projects right now doing community planning on recovery from the pandemic. And these are all funded through the US Economic Development Administration. Those could be sort of -- that's a type of project that's supporting staff in our office.

And the planning and capacity building work that they're doing may suggest other types of projects. I don't know if that's a great example or not. But again, bottom line, this, needs to be non VT money.

The 4-VA program. So yeah, I got to apologize because I don't -- and I'll double-check and make sure our 4-VA colleague is not on. I don't see her.

So there is extended language on the RFP relative to the 4-VA eligibility.

I think these are experiential learning activities. I don't know that they're strictly limited to undergraduate students, but I think the takeaway I had, sort of the headline for that sort of channel, is experiential learning. I think there's also a collaborative requirement for those funds because they do with some strings from upstream. And there's like, I want to say like four or five other schools that have to be potential collaborators on your project. So that one's got a certain number of extra layers to it. But that's a very robust stream of funding in our effort.

So I hope that's helpful, but I'd refer you back for more information to the RFP language and some links that you can click through there.

And if those don't answer it, definitely happy to take questions and get them answered for you.

And that I think is a given too. Jon offered very kindly to talk with folks. And I'm happy or happy to connect you to other folks who can answer questions that I can't answer.

So yeah.

Other questions?

So if you're doing something with a company yeah, we need to have an impact in Virginia.

So, a project, so let's take rural manufacturing companies.

I don't know if I see my friends from ISE on here, but their senior design projects work with companies all over, but definitely Virginia companies, and I know we've helped them partner in some grant funded efforts before working with smaller supplier companies whose growth as a group creates employment in some of our more distressed communities.

So the question isn't so much -- the main question you want to ask yourself is where can you show the impact of your efforts? And it should be impacts within Virginia, if that makes sense.

We've got a few minutes left. I might do this thing that I would do again if we were all in a room together in a very different way. But I'm looking at the award-winning Jake Grohs.

Jake, can I call on you to just talk a little bit about what you may be thinking about?

Jake is with engineering education and has actually been involved in community engagement, in a number of different hats over a period of time.

And if you don't mind me picking on you, Jake, I'll ask my -- if you do my mind I guess, you know, too late.

But I'll ask my colleagues to bring you over to the other side here.

And again, I didn't prep Jake or John for talking today. So Jake, I guess I'm just asking what piqued your interest about this, if you're thinking about something specific, or just generally, maybe you could share how this might fit within your world.

**Jake Grohs:** Sure. Thanks, John. Yeah. So I guess I'm interested for a number of reasons. One is we're primarily -- engineering education. Most of my work which has involved community engagement work with school systems and companies being involved in schools. We funded it primarily through National Science Foundation. We're always looking to diversify our funding sources. We submitted a grant proposal to the WT Grant Foundation, which actually seeks to do research partnership work more around inequity in youth outcomes. And we've got some good feedback on that. And that involves a formal relationship with a partner. So I was in part listening in because I was curious. We feel like we need to do some stronger work to be more competitive, and so I'm always interested in the way that these sorts of calls work at Virginia

Tech, is that you can, with \$25,000-\$50,000 dollars sometimes, get a lot of good groundwork done to then be really competitive for bigger projects.

So that was in part of my interest, was kinda learning about that. And so yeah, thanks, John. I don't know if there's other things you want me to talk about but that was certainly why I'm on the call and I appreciate the shoutout.

**John Provo:** Sorry, you know, you would think, what are we now? 16 months, 18 months? That's twice today, I've done that.

Thank you, Jake. That was great.

And, would you mind, just to give you a commercial too, for just a second, to give folks some other time to reflect on your interests. As an example, would you just talk briefly about the APLU award running project that you guys did because I think that's a great exemplar of good community engaged work.

**Jake Grohs:** Sure, so yeah. I think your friend to the VT PEERS project, which stands for Virginia Tech Partnering with Educators and Engineers in Rural Schools.

And it's an NSF funded ITEST project, and I'm sorry for all the acronyms, most of them are not mine. ITEST stands for Innovative Technology Experiences with Students and Teachers.

And so the idea really is, we've been working with three different counties, Bedford County, Giles County, and Smyth County, working with all their science teachers in their 6th, 7th, and 8th grade courses, trying to develop some hands-on engineering activities to supplement the science curriculum and it's developed and implemented in partnership with the teachers and then also our regional manufacturer, Universal Fibers, Fostek, and then Celanese and they've sent engineers or scientists to volunteer in the classroom on the days that we're there, ranging from three to six times per classroom per year.

That project is coming to a close. We've gotten a follow-on project to work in high schools and try to scaffold some additional opportunities in the high schools in Giles and Smyth County, working with the same industry partners.

So that's kinda what John's referring to. It's been a great learning experience; I think our overall philosophy, for that project is to realize that especially when it comes to educating our youth in rural regions, Virginia Tech's should be a ready and active partner. Already is in many cases, but especially to build infrastructure and spotlight ways we can continue to work together is really important; same with regional industry, the companies that we've worked with have been very, very generous and very interested.

And I feel like they in some ways had been looking for a good opportunity, and this project kind of afforded us all a reason to partner together.

Of course, COVID has been a major impact for all of us in many ways on our project. Our project included -- certainly industry has had a range of challenges and in some cases, financial

challenges. And then schools have had just incredible demands on their time. So we're still trying to figure out what next year might look like because it's going to look really different.

But the award John was referring to was the Engagement Scholarship Consortium. And we were winners of that along with the University Extension office, who also received an award. So very happy to be part of lots of efforts at Virginia Tech of people doing good stuff.

**John Provo:** Well, Jake, thank you, and Jon, thank you too, for being with us today.

I'm going to -- we're in our last quarter hour here. And I'm actually always in favor of ending meetings a few minutes early but what I'm gonna try to do is just quickly recap and summarize and encourage everyone if there's one more last burning question you want to present to the Q&A box, we'll take it.

But in the meantime, we think we think there's great work, and the survey that I referenced again as being -- I think we've had good evidence of this great work of the type that we're looking to encourage taking place all over the university.

This is a commitment by different leaders in institutions like ICTAS and others in the university to scale up that work and also help you enhance the impact of that work outside of the walls of the campus.

We believe and we have support from our investors, if you will, our internal investors, that there's work to be done in urban and rural areas. There's work to be done across the range of colleges in the university.

This isn't an all engineering thing or an all social science thing or an all agriculture thing. We think there's a contribution really for all the disciplines of the university. And we're ready to help you shape that idea, or to take that opportunity that you've been building and see if we can move it to the next level.

So again, it's not a hard deadline, but we suggest for fullest consideration, submitting your abstract to me by July 3rd.

If you've got questions, we may come back to you with questions about the abstract.

But we're happy to work with you to flesh out whether or not you're ready to present a full proposal to the council or if you need a different kind of a partner or other sorts of technical assistance to get ready for that.

And we're really looking also while there is sort of a time clock on some of the funding, as I mentioned, we really are looking for quality, not quantity.

And we're, looking to work collaboratively. The full council is looking to work collaboratively with you to develop these ideas and to the fullest extent possible, help you enhance your impact around Virginia.

And I haven't seen anything else pop up in the closing box. I didn't know if Jon or Jake, if you have any last words for the good of the order. No?

With that, I will yield back the remaining 12 minutes for you to use as you see fit.

I thank you all for coming today, and I thank my colleagues, Caroline and Julia for running the process here.

And yeah, best of luck and we look forward to reading your submissions. Take care. Bye.