



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Virginia Department of Housing
and Community Development

For Immediate Release
May 5, 2015

Contact: Amanda Pearson
Public Relations Director, DHCD
(804) 371-7006
amanda.pearson@dhcd.virginia.gov

Two Virginia Regional Projects Receive Stronger Economies Together Awards

– Virginia's Growth Alliance and Northern Neck recognized for regional economic development plans –

RICHMOND – The Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development is pleased to announce that two regions in the state have received awards through the Stronger Economies Together (SET) program. Virginia's Growth Alliance (VGA) received the Innovation in Regional Development Award and the Northern Neck received an award for the Development of a High Quality Plan. The awards were given in recognition of regions that have effectively implemented an innovation process or strategy to support their region's economic SET plan.

Since its inception in 2010 through the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development (USDA-RD), more than 50 regions in 28 states have utilized the SET process for regional planning. The program strategically builds and strengthens the capacity of communities in rural America to work together in developing and implementing an economic development blueprint for their multi-county region. In 2012, VGA and the Northern Neck received backing from the SET program to develop proactive regional approaches to economic development.

Since its involvement in the program, VGA has developed a regional plan that strategically identified assets and built on current and emerging economic advantages. Since the plan was unveiled, VGA has seen more than 360 jobs and \$1.16 billion in investment in the targeted industries including advanced manufacturing, transportation and logistics, data and information technology, wood products and more. In addition, VGA has created a comprehensive entrepreneurial ecosystem aimed to cultivate, support, and expand small business development. Originally, VGA was comprised of the counties of Brunswick, Charlotte, Greensville, Lunenburg, Nottoway and Mecklenburg and the city of Emporia. Recently, the region was awarded a Building Collaborative Communities (BCC) grant to update and continue the SET process for the expanded footprint which includes Amelia, Buckingham, Cumberland and Prince Edward counties, and the region created the Small Business/Microenterprise Assistance Program, a comprehensive, four-pronged approach aimed to cultivate, support and expand small business development.

The four-county Northern Neck Chesapeake Bay Region Partnership, comprised of Northumberland, Lancaster, Richmond and Westmoreland counties, has been energized by new partners as a result of the SET process. Since it implemented the program, the region has been awarded various grants, including two from DHCD, to assist with branding, entrepreneurship efforts and a loan program for small businesses. This collaborative effort produced the first business center in the region, which opened in May 2014. The region also celebrated the formation of the Artisan Trail and Oyster Trail, a

project that will capitalize on cultural and natural resources including agri- and aqua-artisans, artisans, fine arts, performing arts and heritage guilds. The Oyster Trail is scheduled to open in November 2015.

In order to maximize the program and utilize other state resources, VGA and the Northern Neck have worked closely with the Virginia coaching team consisting of staff from the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Tourism Corporation and USDA-RD to develop and implement their SET plans. By combining the multiple resources and support from the state and local governments, the regions have made huge strides to creating healthy regional economic plans, as well as moving forward through additional funding sources.

For more information about the regional programs and other DHCD programs, visit www.dhcd.virginia.gov.

###