



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**COMMUNITY COLLEGES OF SOUTHWESTERN VIRGINIA
FORGE AGREEMENT TO PREPARE REGIONAL WORKERS
FOR WIND ENERGY MANUFACTURING SUPPLY CHAIN**

*Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) fulfills key recommendation
of public-private analysis around region's participation in offshore wind energy industry*

BRISTOL, VA. — The presidents of four community colleges in Virginia's Southwest today signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to collaborate on training and development actions in the offshore wind energy (OSW) manufacturing supply chain. This agreement fulfills one of the recommendations presented to the region by the Xodus Group, which performed research commissioned by InvestSWVA.

Project Veer is leveraging the advanced manufacturing legacy of Virginia's Southwest to explore entry points for the region's manufacturers into the offshore wind supply chain. An economic development initiative announced on December 14, 2021, Project Veer was funded by the GO Virginia Region One Council, the Virginia Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission and Coalfield Strategies. Xodus Group engaged the region's manufacturers along with industry experts, public-sector partners, the Virginia Department of Energy, the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, the Hampton Roads Alliance, Dominion Energy, Appalachian Power, and GO Virginia Region One's economic and workforce development organizations in order to advance the region's entry into this new market.

The MOU signifies that Mountain Empire Community College, Southwest Virginia Community College, Virginia Highlands Community College and Wytheville Community College will work together to promote, develop and expand the preparation of workers to enter the employ of regional supply chain manufacturers in the offshore wind energy generation sector.

"We are looking to connect even more deeply with the employers of the region," said **Dr. Adam C. Hutchison, President of Virginia Highlands Community College, Abingdon.** "A key group is the closely-held manufacturers who have vast experience in other supply chains. Our

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goal is to work with them to prepare employees for a pivot into wind energy, which we think is well within their reach.”

“We are realistic about the number of people ready to go to work in manufacturing,” said **Dr. Dean Sprinkle, President of Wytheville Community College, Wytheville**. “As a result, we see the wind energy sector as an exciting and compelling path for people who may be ‘on the fence’ about a manufacturing career. Training workers and inspiring them to live and work in our region are elements of our mission in community colleges, and this is an enticing opportunity.”

“With this framework for collaboration, our community colleges are making a bold statement about our role in strengthening the regional economy,” said **Dr. Kristen Westover, President of Mountain Empire Community College, Big Stone Gap**. “Our experience in legacy industries has us well-prepared to enter the renewable energy space. At the same time, the framework will enable us to touch every community we serve.”

“The decision to enter the wind energy sector signifies fresh thinking and a new chapter for the people of our region,” said **Dr. Tommy F. Wright, President of Southwest Virginia Community College, Tazewell**. “A new industry – with new courses we design with manufacturers and industry experts – is a big start for those looking to polish their existing talents or develop entirely different skills.”

The chief recommendations out of the final report by Xodus Group include the following:

1. Identify a major tier company to act as an anchor and an exemplar of the region, helping pave the way to relationships with global original equipment manufacturers (OEMs).
2. Launch a firm collaboration between the region’s community colleges to focus on worker training and upskilling.
3. Form a partnership with the Hampton Roads Alliance (HRA), a Virginia entity and one of the nation’s most prominent OSW business and investment attractors.
4. Designate a regional entity for positioning Virginia’s Southwest and for acting as a single point of entry for the OSW opportunity.
5. Coordinate an approach for retaining the next generation of workers, including building awareness of the career potential in OSW.

“Virginia’s Southwest is an answer, a resource and the place to be for wind energy manufacturers looking for business partners who can satisfy market demand in a quality fashion,” said **Will Payne, Managing Partner of Coalfield Strategies and Project Lead for InvestSWVA**. “The agreement we announce today is foundational to our success not just in the wind energy industry but to our ability to rally around opportunity, together. The presidents of our community colleges are setting a great example.”

With this initial phase of Project Veer complete, InvestSWVA is now working toward implementing Xodus Group’s recommendations. For more information, visit [Project Veer](#).

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About Mountain Empire Community College

Mountain Empire Community College is a comprehensive two-year college serving the residents of Virginia’s Lee, Scott, Wise, and Dickenson Counties and the City of Norton. Visit [MECC](#) to learn more.

About Southwest Virginia Community College

Southwest Virginia Community College is comprehensive two-year college serving the residents of Virginia’s Buchanan, Dickenson (partial), Russell and Tazewell Counties. Visit [SWCC](#) to learn more.

About Virginia Highlands Community College

Virginia Highlands Community College is a comprehensive two-year college serving the residents of Virginia’s Washington County, the western part of Smyth County and the City of Bristol. Visit [VHCC](#) to learn more.

About Wytheville Community College

Wytheville Community College is a comprehensive two-year college serving the residents of Virginia’s Bland, Carroll, Grayson, Smyth (Marion and eastward) and Wythe Counties, and the City of Galax. Visit [WCC](#) to learn more.

About Xodus Group

Xodus advises clients on a broad range of energy topics from sustainability, energy mix diversification and environmental impact to new and emerging technologies. The company provides holistic support and insight through the integration of engineering, corporate management consultancy and environmental science. Visit [Xodus](#) to learn more.

About InvestSWVA

InvestSWVA is a public-private business research, attraction and marketing campaign for Southwest Virginia launched under the umbrella of the Virginia Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission and backed by private industry. Visit [InvestSWVA](#) to learn more.

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