

Minutes
Advisory Committee on International Trade
Virginia Economic Development Partnership
November 12, 2024

9th Floor, Board Room
901 E. Cary Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 10:03 a.m. by Mike Ligon, Chairman of the VEDP Advisory Committee on International Trade.

Members Present:

Hobey Bauhan
Michael Coleman
Bob Feeser
John Huddle (Virtual)
Mike Ligon, Chair
Secretary Lohr
David White

Members Absent:

Tag Greason
Anne Marie Lacourse
Will Sessoms

Staff Present:

Stephanie Agee
Lindsey Bertozzi
Jamie Canup
Alexia Inge (Intern)
Julie Richmond
Hannah Robertson-Forrest
Mary Wood

Guests Present:

Rob Davenport, Director of Marketing and Development, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Barry DuVal, President & CEO, Virginia Chamber of Commerce
Connie Loughhead, President of Deschamps, Virginia

Welcome and Chairman's Remarks

Chairman Mike Ligon welcomed everyone to the meeting at 10:03 a.m.

Chairman Ligon virtually introduced the newest member of the Advisory Committee on International Trade, John Huddle, CEO and Founding Member, The Global Law Group, PLC as

well as special guests: Barry DuVal, President and CEO, Virginia Chamber of Commerce, Rob Davenport, Director of Marketing and Development, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Connie Loughhead, President of Deschamps and VEDP's newest Board member, as well as VEDP's Hannah Robertson-Forrest, Senior Grants manager.

Mr. Huddle remarked what a pleasure it is to join the group and looked forward to working together to support both VEDP and the Committee.

The Chairman thanked James Xu, former ACIT member, in his absence, for his years of service to the Committee.

Public Comments

Chairman Ligon solicited for public comments. There were none.

Review and Approval of September 10, 2024, Meeting Minutes, October 4 and November 4, 2024, Sub-Committee Meeting Minutes

After a review of the minutes, Chairman Ligon requested a motion to approve. A motion was made by Mike Coleman. The motion was seconded by Bob Feeser and was unanimously approved by all Committee members present.

Virginia Chamber Update

Barry DuVal shared his business profile with the committee. He was named President and CEO of the Virginia Chamber of Commerce in April 2010. Under his leadership, the Chamber has become Virginia's largest business advocacy group, growing from approximately 1,000 members in 2010 to more than 29,000 members today. Mr. DuVal explained the Chamber's effort to develop "Blueprint Virginia" every four years, presented to each incoming Governor starting in 2013. Blueprint Virginia was the Commonwealth's first comprehensive business-led initiative to provide direction and long-term economic development planning for Virginia. He shared that international trade is an important priority in each Blueprint. He also remarked that a Virginia Chamber Executive Committee has been formed to focus specifically on international trade and supply chain issues. He said that on December 6 the 2035 Blueprint would be presented at the Virginia Economic Summit, as well as a joint study on the economic impact of Virginia's exports.

Mr. DuVal commented on the Chamber's strong partnership, at all levels, with VEDP. He identified two key trade-related assets of the Commonwealth – Norfolk's natural harbor where the Port of Virginia is located and Dulles Airport, which are both critical to the economic prosperity of the Commonwealth.

Mr. DuVal remarked on CNBC's Top State for Business award, noting that Virginia has been named the top state for business more times than any other state. He also noted that although there is a national crisis of 300,000 open and unfilled jobs, CNBC believes Virginia has the talent to fill them with a holistic approach. Mr. DuVal stated that Virginia is an innovative state with the best business climate and ranked second for cyber security. He shares the overall goal of keeping Virginia ranked as the best state for business.

Chairman Ligon went on record to say that the ACIT committee is not a political organization and encouraged politicians, regardless of party affiliation, to speak to the committee. He shared an interest in securing Senator Mark Warner to join a future committee meeting.

Mr. DuVal encouraged working across the aisle, noting the General Assembly has changed hands a number of times, but the consensus remains to be progressive in Virginia. He recommended that the ACIT offer suggestions about how to raise the profile of Virginia and International Trade, using the Chamber as a partner to get the message out.

Stephanie Agee thanked Barry DuVal for his attendance and for his support of VEDP's International Trade programs in his role as leader of the Virginia Chamber, including his support of the Virginia International Trade Plan in 2019.

ACIT Communications Discussion

Chairman Ligon initiated a conversation about how the ACIT can help to get the message out to various audiences about the importance of trade in its role as an advisory committee. He mentioned a sub-committee of the ACIT had been formed to discuss how to advance these pro-trade communications to the public, both throughout Virginia and in specific regions, and to federal partners. He emphasized that international trade is not a political topic and that successful trade is about economic development.

The Chairman read a statement he worked on with Anne Marie Lacourse regarding the importance of international trade and of compliance in the international trade space. Following this, the committee engaged in a discussion about developing a strategy to get communications out about the importance of international trade to Virginia, how it trade impacts Virginia companies and individuals and the overall economy and what audiences those messages should be directed to. It was discussed that it could be difficult to get the attention of the public and get them to take action upon receiving such messages and that directing messaging to Virginia's Congressional representatives, state lawmakers, and other businesses could be more effective. Committee members emphasized the importance of sharing stories about real businesses benefiting from doing international business. Discussion was had about how VEDP could also help with getting messaging out via social media and traditional media, including case studies of companies that benefit from trade. Stephanie Agee said that these case studies already exist and are shared via VEDP's LinkedIn accounts and could be shared more intentionally with ACIT members so that they can help to spread the messages. Members also discussed the importance of aligning any communications campaign with those that have been approved by the VEDP Board, since the ACIT is an advisory committee to the board. They discussed the idea of making a recommendation to the Board and seeking their support for more pro-trade communications to come from VEDP.

The discussion ended with a plan for the ACIT Communications sub-committee to meet again virtually in a few weeks.

VDACS International Marketing Update

Rob Davenport, Director of Marketing and Development with the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services provided an update on the agency's international marketing efforts. He shared an update on the year-to-date Virginia agriculture and forestry export statistics, which are down compared to the same time in 2023. Soybeans, wood pellets, tobacco, and poultry remain top export commodities for Virginia.

Mr. Davenport said he is collaborating with Secretary Lohr and the Governor to focus on driving export sales of small to medium size companies, specifically specialty food and beverage producers.

State Trade Expansion Program (STEP)

Hannah Robertson-Forrest, VEDP's Senior Grants Manager, provided an update on VEDP's use of the State Trade Expansion Program (STEP) grant, administered by the Small Business Administration (SBA). The goal of STEP nationally is to grow the total number of businesses that are exporting and grow the sales of new and existing exporters. VEDP has been able to go after and receive more STEP grant funding in recent years due to new funding for the International Trade Plan, which also enabled the hiring of a dedicated grants manager. For the current fiscal year, VEDP was awarded the maximum STEP grant by the SBA. Ms. Robertson-Forrest shared that STEP participants are reimbursed for the cost of trade-related activities such as trade shows, marketing campaigns, trade missions, certifications, and travel.

FY24 International Trade Client Survey Results

Stephanie Agee was happy to report impressive statistics from VEDP's Fiscal Year 2024 International Trade Client Survey. She stated that clients who worked with VEDP in that year were sent a short survey about their experience using VEDP's Trade resources or programs. She noted that the International Trade team achieved exceptionally high scores for the quality and value of its programs and services and that clients attributed \$1.5 billion in international sales to having worked with VEDP in the prior year. Survey response rates were high, and comments were helpful in terms of suggestions and ideas to enhance the programs.

Beyond Virginia Calendar

Lindsey Bertozzi shared that VEDP created a 2025 Beyond Virginia Calendar, highlighting Virginia exporters who work with VEDP. She said that VEDP decided to issue a calendar after suspending the program a number of years ago. She shared that VEDP is sending a copy of the calendar and a letter to every Virginia state legislator. She also said VEDP plans to use the content for social media posts throughout the year.

Closing and 2025 Meeting Schedule Discussion

Stephanie Agee said she would send the committee members proposed dates for the ACIT's 2025 meetings and would follow up once the meeting times had been confirmed.

Chairman Ligon thanked everyone for their attendance.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 12:01 p.m.