Fall 2026

VASEM Insight

News from The Virginia Academy of Science, Engineering, and Medicine

# VASEM's 2026 Health Care Summit Brings Virginia Leaders Together to Advance Health Care Innovation and Access

VASEM Health Care Summit
Health Care Investments for Access, Affordability, and Trust

On October 8, 2026, the Virginia Academy of Science, Engineering, and Medicine (VASEM) convened leaders from industry, higher education, health care nonprofits, and state government for the **2026 VASEM Health Care Summit**, held at Reynolds Community College in Richmond. Under the theme "*Virginia Investments to Advance Innovation, Access, Affordability, and Trust*," the summit explored the partnerships, investments, and evidence-based strategies needed to strengthen Virginia's health care system and improve outcomes for communities across the Commonwealth.

The summit featured an outstanding lineup of speakers and thought-provoking discussions on the challenges and opportunities shaping the future of health care. Virginia Secretary of Health and Human Resources Marvin B. Figueroa delivered the keynote address, while Delegate Rodney Willett moderated a session focused on Virginia's health care workforce. Throughout the day, speakers and participants examined important issues involving health care access, workforce development, pharmaceutical innovation, affordability, and opportunities to build greater trust in the health care system. The engaged audience contributed to a highly interactive program, encouraging meaningful dialogue and opening the door to new partnerships and collaborations.




*VASEM Committee Chairs grab a photo from our session 6 panelists, From left to right: Beth Bortz, John Newby, Jennifer Siciliano, Joe Benevento, Sally Allain, and Bob Phillips.*

Industry participation was central to the summit's success. Representatives from INOVA+, Carilion Clinic, Bon Secours, UVA Health, the Virginia Tech Public Health Program, VCU Health, George Mason University's College of Public Health, Eli Lilly and Company, Civica Rx, and AstraZeneca shared their expertise and perspectives. Their participation underscored the importance of collaboration among health care providers, pharmaceutical companies, academic institutions, and other industry leaders in advancing innovation and expanding access to quality, affordable care.

Higher education institutions also played an important role, with representatives from universities and colleges across Virginia contributing to the conversation. Participating institutions included Hampton University, Norfolk State University, Virginia State University, Virginia Tech, the University of Virginia, Marymount University, George Mason University, James Madison University, Radford University, Christopher Newport University, Roanoke College, Virginia Commonwealth University, William & Mary, Old Dominion University, and the Virginia Community

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College System. Their engagement highlighted the critical connections among research, education, workforce preparation, and health care delivery—and the opportunities to strengthen these connections through statewide collaboration.

VASEM also welcomed a broad network of nonprofit and mission-driven organizations working to improve health and well-being across Virginia. Partners included Trusted Doctors, LLC; Claude Moore Opportunities; Trusted Care Foundation; the American Board of Family Medicine; the Virginia Center for Health Innovation; the Virginia Pharmacists Association; VIPC (Virginia Innovation Partnership Corporation); the Commonwealth Center for Advanced Manufacturing (CCAM); the Virginia Hospital & Healthcare Association (VHHA) Foundation; the Primary Care Collaborative; the Hampton Roads Workforce Council; and the Virginia Mental Health Access Program (VMAP). Their contributions demonstrated how organizations with diverse missions can work together to address complex health care challenges and support better outcomes for Virginians.

The summit also benefited from the participation of Virginia legislators and state government leaders, whose engagement is essential to connecting scientific evidence, emerging technologies, and practical experience with informed public policy. By bringing these diverse perspectives together, VASEM continued its mission to **Inform, Advocate, and Serve the Commonwealth**, creating opportunities for constructive dialogue and collaboration across sectors.

VASEM extends its sincere appreciation to Secretary Figueroa, Delegate Willett, all speakers and moderators, sponsors, industry partners, nonprofit organizations, university representatives, legislators, and attendees who contributed to the summit's success. Their time, expertise, and commitment helped make the event a valuable forum for advancing conversations about Virginia's health care future.

The 2026 VASEM Health Care Summit reinforced an important message: strengthening health care across the Commonwealth requires collaboration, evidence-based decision-making, and sustained investment in innovation, access, affordability, and trust. VASEM looks forward to building on the connections and ideas generated at the summit to help advance solutions that benefit Virginia and its residents.



# From the VASEM *President*



As we reflect on the past six months, I am encouraged by VASEM's growing impact and the progress we are making in bringing independent scientific, engineering, and medical expertise to bear on Virginia's most pressing challenges.

Our Energy Working Group has made important contributions to discussions about Virginia's energy future. Its two recently published white papers are providing objective, technically grounded information to policymakers, including presentations to the Virginia Commission on Energy and discussions with senior officials in the Governor's office. This is precisely the role VASEM was created to serve.

Our October Health Care Summit brought together leaders from government, academia, healthcare, and industry to examine critical challenges involving healthcare access, affordability, rural healthcare, pharmaceutical innovation, and workforce development. The breadth of participation reinforced the value of VASEM as a trusted convener of diverse perspectives and expertise.

We continue to strengthen relationships with policymakers, including a productive meeting with Senator Mark Warner, whose early vision helped establish VASEM. Our engagement on artificial intelligence, including work with the Commonwealth AI Initiative and JLARC, further demonstrates our growing role in informing science and technology policy.

Our partnership with XPRIZE is also gaining momentum, highlighted by our participation in the recent Global Visioneering (GV) 26 Science Conclave. These collaborations, together with expanding industry engagement, create new opportunities to connect Virginia's exceptional research capabilities with consequential national and global challenges.

Equally important is our investment in future leaders. This year, our COVES Fellowship welcomed 19 fellows, bringing the program's cumulative participation to 100, while our Undergraduate Policy Program continues to introduce promising students to science-informed policymaking.

Finally, we proudly welcomed 22 distinguished new members, further strengthening the Academy's breadth of expertise and capacity to serve.

I am grateful to our members, Board, institutional affiliates, and partners for their continued commitment. Together, we are building an increasingly influential organization, translating expertise into meaningful impact, and fulfilling our mission to **Inform, Advocate, and Serve the Commonwealth.**

**Al Grasso**
*President, VASEM*

## Tell Us *Your News!*

Our community is strongest when we celebrate one another's achievements, and we want to highlight the great work happening across the VASEM membership. Whether you've launched a new project, received an award, joined a collaboration, or contributed to your field in a meaningful way, your updates help tell the story of science, engineering, and medical excellence in Virginia. Please send your news to Nat Draper, Executive Director, at ndraper@vasem.org. Your update may appear in an upcoming VASEM newsletter.

***NOTE THESE ACHIEVEMENTS ARE VASEM MEMBERS ONLY***

## GIVINGTUESDAY
### DECEMBER 1, 2026

**Giving Tuesday is set for December 1st, 2026. This is a chance for VASEM members to donate to an amazing group of young individuals in our COVES and UPP programs. All donations from this year will go to supporting our COVES and UPP science and policy programs. Click here or scan the QR code to show your support today. This year our goal is to have at least 30% of our members donate.**




# VASEM and XPRIZE Partnership Advances Scientific Innovation and Collaboration

The Virginia Academy of Science, Engineering, and Medicine (VASEM) and XPRIZE Foundation have launched a strategic collaboration designed to accelerate scientific and technological breakthroughs, strengthen connections among academia, industry, and government, and translate innovative ideas into solutions to some of the world's most pressing challenges.

Formalized through a partnership agreement effective January 13, 2026, the collaboration brings together VASEM's distinguished network of scientists, engineers, medical professionals, and technology leaders with XPRIZE's internationally recognized approach to incentivizing breakthrough innovation through ambitious competitions and grand challenges.



*XPRIZE ,VASEM and Virginia Tech partners: From left to right: Elaine Hungenberg, Dan Sui, Anousheh Ansari, Al Grasso, Kirk Cameron*

The partnership will initially focus on four areas of significant scientific and societal importance: **Energy, Climate and Nature; Health; Quantum; and Deep Technology and Exploration.** A central objective is to move promising technologies beyond early-stage research toward real-world demonstration, deployment, and practical application.

An early demonstration of this collaboration took place at the **GV26 Science Conclave**, hosted by XPRIZE at the Virginia Tech Institute for Advanced Computing in Alexandria, Virginia.

The gathering brought together scientific and technological leaders to exchange ideas, explore emerging opportunities, and consider how interdisciplinary collaboration can help solve complex problems that transcend traditional institutional and disciplinary boundaries.

XPRIZE CEO **Anousheh Ansari** invited VASEM to participate in the event, with Virginia Tech leaders **Dan Sui and Kirk Cameron** helping host the gathering.

VASEM President **Alfred Grasso** opened the morning program with remarks emphasizing the importance of convening diverse scientific perspectives and creating environments where researchers, innovators, and institutional leaders can challenge conventional thinking and explore ambitious solutions.

The program also included a tour of **MITRE Corporation**, offering participants an opportunity to learn about advanced research and technology development at the intersection of science, engineering, and national security. VASEM members **Mark Peters and Charles Clancy** helped facilitate this important component of the program.

Beyond individual events, the partnership establishes several practical mechanisms for connecting scientific expertise with innovation opportunities.

VASEM will help identify distinguished experts to serve as XPRIZE Brain Trust participants, competition judges, advisory board members, and strategic research

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consultants. These experts can contribute to developing competition criteria, evaluating technical feasibility, reviewing proposed solutions, and ensuring scientific rigor throughout the innovation process.

The agreement also creates opportunities to engage Virginia's research universities and corporate partners in XPRIZE initiatives. Through the XPRIZE Higher Education Network, participating institutions may gain opportunities for student competitions, joint research, faculty engagement, and collaborative workshops.

For VASEM, the partnership represents an opportunity to leverage Virginia's exceptional scientific and technological capabilities while extending the reach and impact of its members beyond the Commonwealth.

Virginia's research universities, federal laboratories, technology companies, and scientific institutions provide a strong foundation for addressing complex challenges. Connecting these resources with XPRIZE's global innovation ecosystem offers opportunities to accelerate discovery, encourage cross-sector collaboration, and help transform promising ideas into meaningful outcomes.

The GV26 Science Conclave demonstrated the value of bringing these communities together. More importantly, it marked an early step in a broader relationship intended to connect scientific excellence with ambitious problem-solving and measurable societal impact.

Through its partnership with XPRIZE, VASEM continues to advance its mission to **Inform, Advocate, and Serve the Commonwealth.**—while helping mobilize Virginia's scientific and technological strengths to address challenges of national and global importance.

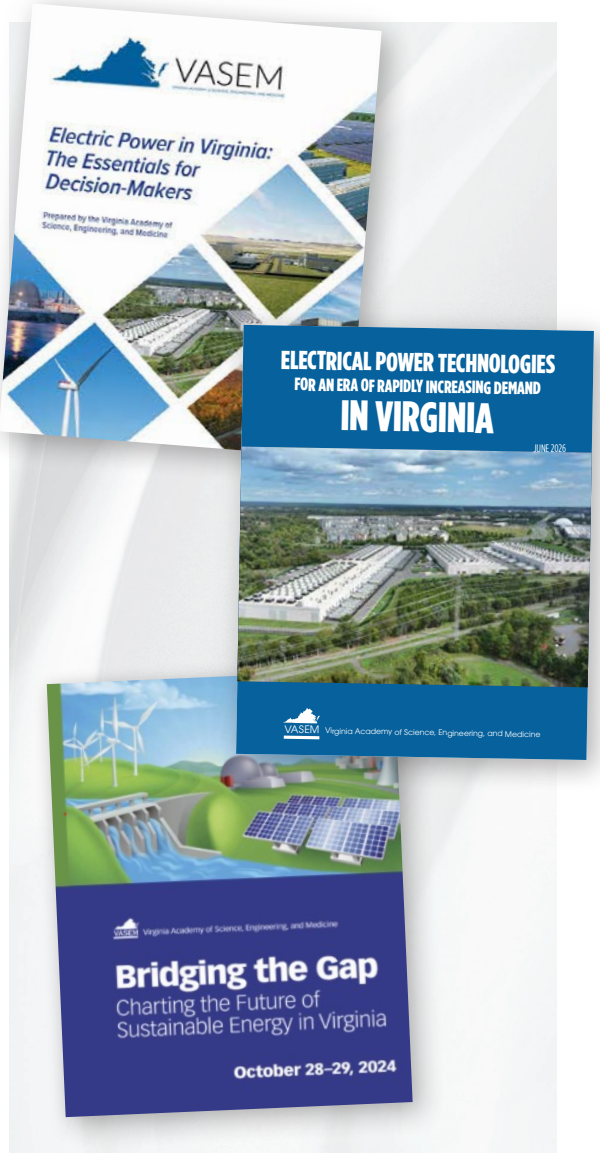
Those members interested in contributing to this partnership, please contact VASEM Executive Director Nat Draper. ❖

## Updates from VASEM Energy Working Group (EWG)

In July 2026, the Energy Working Group (EWG) released its white paper, *Electric Power in Virginia: The Essentials for Decision Makers*, and the accompanying study report, *Electric Power Technologies: For an Era of Rapidly Increasing Demand in Virginia*. The white paper summarizes the forecast of rapidly increasing electricity demand, the availability and limitations of various generation resources, and challenges facing the transmission and distribution grid, along with potential grid enhancement technologies.

The response from the state legislature and other organizations has been encouraging. EWG provided written responses to questions from Delegates Rip Sullivan and David Reid. David Roop and Haydn Wadley were invited to participate in a podcast hosted by the Virginia Association of Counties. With strong support from Nat Draper and Laura Novey, EWG members Haydn Wadley, David Roop, and Chen-Ching Liu met with Chief Energy Officer Josephus Allman and Deputy Policy Director Kelly Johnson of the Governor's Office to discuss the white paper and opportunities for future collaboration. Haydn and Nat also presented a summary of the white paper on behalf of VASEM, marking the first time EWG to be on the agenda of the Energy Commission of Virginia. These follow-up activities laid the foundation for EWG's next steps in addressing critical energy issues facing the Commonwealth.

On October 1, the Virginia Department of Energy released the *Virginia Energy Plan*, a report prepared every four years by the Governor's Office. At its October 7 meeting, EWG invited Larry Corkey, Manager of Policy and Planning, and Dr. Ashish Sedai, Associate Director of Energy Modeling and Innovation, to discuss the newly released plan. Following a presentation of the Virginia Energy Plan, EWG members shared their views and feedback in an engaging discussion. ❖



# COVES reaches milestone, 100 fellows in year seven

VASEM hosted the seventh cohort of the Commonwealth of Virginia Engineering and Science (COVES) Policy Fellowship from May 26 to August 14, 2026. During the fellowship, 19 graduate students from 11 universities participated in the program, serving as science advisors in host offices across the Commonwealth and gaining valuable public service and policymaking experience. With the conclusion of this year's cohort, the COVES Policy Fellowship has now supported 100 fellows since the program began, marking an important milestone in its continued commitment to strengthening connections between science, engineering, and public policy.

The program began with a two-day Science Policy Bootcamp and Orientation in Richmond on May 21–22, 2026, featuring speakers from Virginia's state government, policy organizations, and the broader science policy community. The first day included sessions on science policy fundamentals with Hallie Thompson (Radicle Consulting), emerging issues in Virginia led by Jodi Kuhn (JCOTS) and Sarah Staunton (JCHC), the legislative process with Megan Davis and Levi Goren (The Commonwealth Institute), and the state budget process with Michael Maul (DPB). In the afternoon, fellows heard from Nikki Rovner (DCR), Jonathan Rak (DEQ), and Aaron Proctor (DWR) about the work being done at Virginia agencies as well as Jay Ford (CBF), Scott Johnson (Hancock, Daniel, & Johnson LLC), and Laura Novey (McGuireWoods Consulting) about politics, stakeholders, and tradeoffs in state policy. The second day featured a hands-on policy analysis workshop with Dr. Deborah Stine (S&T Policy Academy), guiding fellows through a ten-step framework for science and technology policy analysis.

Fellows heard from various other speakers throughout the summer in the weekly session to continue professional development opportunities. These sessions provided fellows with practical tools to analyze complex policy issues and prepare for their summer placements. In July, seven fellows and program staff traveled to Chicago, Illinois, to participate in the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL). The trip provided fellows with an opportunity to engage with the broader state policy community and learn more about legislative issues and policymaking beyond Virginia. The fellowship culminated in the 2026 COVES Forum, where fellows presented their policy work and shared insights from their summer placements. The fellows' presentations showcased the diverse policy issues they explored throughout the summer and demonstrated how research and technical knowledge can contribute to informed decisions across the Commonwealth. The Forum featured keynote remarks from Les Lyles and closing remarks from Jodi Kuhn, highlighting the importance of connecting scientific and engineering expertise with public service and policymaking. COVES also continues to strengthen connections between fellows, alumni, and the broader science and policy community. On October 7th, Maria Colón, shared her experience as a COVES fellow at VASEM's new membership dinner, offering attendees a perspective on the fellowship's value and the opportunities it provides for graduate students to engage in policymaking. Reaching 100 fellows since the program began reflects the growing community of graduate students and alumni committed to bringing scientific and engineering perspectives into policy discussions. VASEM is grateful to the participating universities, host offices, speakers, alumni, and partners whose continued support makes the COVES Policy Fellowship possible.

To help with the recruitment of applicants and answer questions, the Program Coordinator will be hosting information sessions on October 28th and November 12th. Over the coming weeks and months, we will begin putting together the COVES Selection Committee and securing host office placements for the 2027 program. If you are interested in helping choose the 2027 cohort, please contact the Program Coordinator, Carreen de Cárdenas (carreen.coves@gmail.com).







*UPP students take a photo with Jodi Kuhn, Dr. Kira Allmon, and Sarah Stanton*




*Senator Lashrecse Dianna Aird speaking to UPP students about Rural Health Care, AI and Energy.*

# VASEM Undergraduate Policy Program Launches Its Second Year of Science Policy Training

On Monday, July 13, the Virginia Academy of Science, Engineering, and Medicine (VASEM) launched the second year of its Undergraduate Policy Program (UPP), welcoming nine students representing eight Virginia universities for an immersive week of science policy training, professional development, and experiential learning. The program introduces undergraduate students to the intersection of science, engineering, medicine, and public policy, helping prepare the next generation of leaders to apply evidence-based thinking to the Commonwealth's most pressing challenges.

The week began at McGuireWoods Consulting with sessions on ethics, public policy, and policy analysis led by Sarah Campbell and Virginia Tech's Todd Schenk. Students then visited the Virginia General Assembly, where they met with Delegate Destiny LaVere Bolling and Senator Lashrecse Aird to discuss the legislative process and the role of scientific evidence in policymaking. Additional conversations with legislative and policy professionals provided valuable insight into how policy is developed, evaluated, and implemented in Virginia.

On the program's third day, UPP students shadowed Commonwealth of Virginia Engineering and Science (COVES) Policy Fellows in their host offices, gaining first-hand exposure to science policy careers. A COVES Fellow panel and a Commonwealth agency panel further explored career pathways and demonstrated how state agencies collaborate across disciplines to develop evidence-based solutions for Virginia.

This year's cohort includes students from Hampton University, James Madison University, George Mason University, Old Dominion University, Virginia Commonwealth University, Radford University, the University of Virginia, and Virginia State University. Through the generosity of VASEM's partners, legislators, policy professionals, COVES Fellows, and state agency leaders, UPP continues to create meaningful opportunities for students to connect their academic interests with public service. VASEM is proud to support these emerging leaders as they develop the knowledge, relationships, and skills needed to help shape Virginia's future through science-informed policy. ❖

# VASEM Welcomes *22 New Members* for 2026

The Virginia Academy of Science, Engineering, and Medicine (VASEM) proudly celebrated its 22 new members for 2026 during its annual New Member Celebration Dinner on Wednesday, October 7, at McGuireWoods Consulting in Richmond. Held in conjunction with the VASEM Health Care Summit, the evening was a wonderful opportunity to welcome these distinguished individuals and recognize the expertise and leadership they bring to the VASEM community.

The evening featured a keynote address by VASEM member Dr. Steven Woolf, a member of the National Academy of Medicine (NAM), who shared his insights on aging and life expectancy. The event provided an opportunity for new members and VASEM leadership to connect, strengthen relationships, and celebrate the growing community of scientific, engineering, and medical leaders committed to advancing Virginia.

VASEM's newest members bring an extraordinary depth of expertise, experience, and leadership across science, engineering, medicine, and related fields. Their collective knowledge and commitment to advancing research, informing public policy, and serving the Commonwealth will further strengthen VASEM's ability to address Virginia's most pressing challenges and opportunities.

VASEM is proud to welcome these 22 outstanding individuals to its growing community. We look forward to the perspectives, partnerships, and contributions they will bring as we continue our mission to Inform, Advocate, and Serve the Commonwealth.




**To read the full 2026 new members report, visit at [vasem.org/members](vasem.org/members).**

# Members *In The News*



## Andrew Lovinger *Bell Laboratories*

In May 2026, Andrew Lovinger received the Distinguished Chemical Engineering Alumni Award from Columbia University. Earlier this year he retired from the National Science Foundation where he had served as Program Director for Polymers.



## J. Stephen Jones *Inova Health*

Elected to the American Hospital Association (AHA) Board of Trustees for a three-year term effective January 1, 2027.



## Mariano Garcia-Blanco *University of Virginia*

Elected President of the RNA Society - term January 2027-December 2028. The RNA Society was formed in 1993 to facilitate sharing and dissemination of experimental results and emerging concepts in ribonucleic acid research.



## James Galloway *University of Virginia*

Elected to American Academy of Arts and Science, April 2026.



## David Roop *DWR Associates LLC*

Elected to the Virginia Tech Academy of Engineering Excellence. Membership in the Academy is reserved for individuals holding an engineering degree from the College of Engineering at Virginia Tech who have made sustained and meritorious engineering and/or leadership contributions during their careers.



## Shuhai Xiao *Virginia Tech*

Dr. Shuhai Xiao was awarded the Paleontological Society Medal, "the most prestigious honor bestowed by the Society, reflecting the objectives and standards of the Society", on October 11, 2026, in Denver, Colorado.



## Elise Miller-Hooks *George Mason University*

Selected as 1 of a class of 12 to become an INFORMS Fellow. INFORMS is the world's largest association for professionals and students in operations research (OR), AI, analytics and data science.



## Ret. Gen. Lester L. Lyles *Retired Military*

Recognized by the Air & Space Association (AFA) with their "Lifetime Achievement Award for 2026. Award was presented at the AFA Annual Conference in September.


VASEM *Insight*

*VASEM Insight* is a publication of the Virginia Academy of Science, Engineering, and Medicine.



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