

Modeling and Simulation Advisory Committee Meeting Summary, September 16, 2005

The Modeling and Simulation Advisory Committee held its first meeting on September 16, 2005 at the Virginia Modeling, Analysis and Simulation Center (VMASC) in Suffolk, Virginia. Chairman Delegate Cosgrove and Delegate Alexander were present with twelve other members of the advisory committee. Mark Phillips began the meeting with a brief introduction of VMASC.

VMASC was set up by the state and is a joint effort of academia, industry, and government. On the academia side, VMASC houses the modeling and simulation masters and PhD programs for Old Dominion University. Mark stated that the program does not generate enough students to fill industry needs and students that graduate from these programs are in very high demand. In addition to receiving state funding, VMASC helps support its operations through contract work and grant funding. One of the key issues concerning funding is the lack of a high level, sustained, baseline funding. With VMASC moving into a much larger facility, Mark Phillips indicated a more reliable source of funding would help VMASC grow even further.

From an industry perspective, VMASC encourages businesses to tap into their resources and use VMASC as a tool, especially in the case of young M&S start-ups. The advisory committee discussed whether Virginia should be competing with the M&S industry in Orlando, or whether Virginia should try to distinguish itself in new areas of M&S. There seemed to be a consensus that a little of both was needed. With the growth of an educated workforce in India and China there will be increased competition for non-defense related contract in M&S. Infrastructure, such as roads, access to the LambdaRail, and marketing, need to be in place to attract new and expanding businesses to the Hampton Roads area and Virginia in general.

The advisory committee then turned the discussion towards federal involvement with Don Barbaree, representing Congressman Forbes' office, and Phillip Infantino leading the discussion. Mr. Barbaree stated it was important to keep companies in the Hampton Roads area from competing with each other. He also stressed the importance of education and the need to grow education locally. The advisory committee also agreed that Hampton Roads would have to attract more young professionals. In attracting young professionals, the Hampton Roads area would need to solve some very serious traffic problems and generally improve the perception of the area. With growth in Joint Forces Command (JFCOM) a major opportunity will exist for concurrent growth in the private sector. Mr. Barbaree gave a brief background on the M&S caucus Congressman Forbes' formed with other congressmen. At this stage, the main goal of the caucus is to educate other congressmen on M&S. The advisory committee agreed that there would need to be continued education for both civilian and military leadership to help those leaders understand the applications and importance of M&S. Chairman Cosgrove requested that Don Barbaree look into "plus-ups" to help fund M&S projects in the area.

Phillip Infantino, formerly with Congressman Forbes' office, commented that as the M&S industry moves forward in Virginia, new opportunities for growth must be identified. One of those areas is in the field of disaster modeling and simulation, which may help bring in federal funding.

To further promote the industry in the Commonwealth the advisory committee agreed that technical jargon would have to be minimized and references to modeling and simulation should be more focused on its use as a tool to reduce costs or operate more efficiently, rather than discussing M&S as an end in itself. David Piggott, from the Hampton Roads Economic Development Alliance (HREDA), mentioned that the technical jargon was a barrier to his discussions with M&S companies considering locating in the Hampton Roads area. The solution is to have area businesses help educate HREDA about some of the terminology.

Another opportunity for growth would be to partner with the gaming industry, which already has significant experience in the 'SIM' world and attracts young minds. The gaming industry also has a centralized and strong national lobbying industry.

The advisory committee discussed the importance of generating an educated work force to feed the industry's current and future demands. Education at the middle school and high school levels would help generate interest going into college. The Thomas Jefferson High School is an ideal model and should be replicated where the demand exists. Chairman Cosgrove commented that if hundreds of qualified students are being turned away from Thomas Jefferson, another high school like Thomas Jefferson might be needed.

In addition to securing more state and federal funding, the advisory committee wanted to find ways of leveraging existing business and infrastructure. One potential asset is the Secretary of Technology. Ashley Boyd from the Secretary's office is following up on his possible involvement. Chairman Cosgrove requested that the Hampton Roads and Northern Virginia Technology Councils be present at the next meeting. Chairman Cosgrove also requested Don Barbaree look into bringing the M&S caucus to one of the next meetings.

The advisory committee also discussed using some form of communications hub to bring together 'communities of interest'. The main idea was to hire a professional to develop a website that could help emerging technology industries do business in and with the Commonwealth. The website could serve as a portal for venture capitalists, start-ups, and existing businesses.

Chairman Cosgrove proposed a hypothetical 5 million dollar budget and asked members of the committee where that money would best be spent. The advisory committee agreed that all 5 million should not go to VMASC, but no other conclusions were made.

John Sternlicht, the Deputy Secretary of Commerce and Trade, offered the following list of how the recent 1.45 million dollars allocated by the General Assembly would be spent, each item would get an equal amount of the 1.45 million dollars:

1. Additional faculty for more grad students
2. LambdaRail
3. Physical Infrastructure
4. Marketing

Mark Phillips volunteered to put together a 1-2 page plan outlining education and marketing prior to the next meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 12:20 p.m.