



EXPLORE@RC

The Lab School at Roanoke College

Explore@RC Governing Board Meeting Minutes

Date: April 29, 2026

Time: 3:00 – 4:30 pm

Location: Monterey House, Roanoke College

In-person attendees included Natasha Watts, Jennifer Dean, Becca Goldstein, Heather Johnson, Christina Rose, Mike Riley, Sally Southard, Lisa Stoneman, Karin Carneal, Cheryl Hopson, April Woodward Kathy Wolfe and Debbie Carpenter. Absent members were Curtis Hicks, Karen Sanzo, Gary Skeens and Kimble Reynolds.

Natasha Watts (Director, Explore@RC) opened the meeting with program updates. She highlighted continued growth and positive outcomes for Explore@RC. Current enrollment stands at 54 students through a continued partnership with Salem City Schools. Student projections for Fall 2026 are at 75, which includes courses to be taught by Tom Rambo at Salem High School. Year-one outcomes reflected strong performance, with an 87 percent completion rate across 37 students, totaling 328 credit hours earned and nine graduating seniors.

The Associate of Arts degree has received approval, with a leadership planning meeting scheduled for June 30, a full rollout anticipated in August 2027, and collaboration underway with Virginia Western Community College.

Board members discussed pathway and experiential learning opportunities, including an upcoming Illinois College of Optometry field trip to Chicago scheduled for June 1–3. The five students attending will participate in clinical rotations, and eye scan experiences. Future experiential opportunities under consideration include a Washington, DC trip and potential collaboration with the Copenhagen Institute.

End-of-year celebrations were reviewed, including the banquet scheduled for May 7 at 5:30 PM, which will feature student awards and is expected to host approximately 65 attendees with catering provided by Chick-fil-A.

The board reviewed the budget and finance report, noting that the \$1.8 million planning grant must be fully expended by June 30, while the \$179,000 operating grant may roll over. Major expenditures include the Fintel and Morehead renovations, personnel, technology, and furniture.

Updates were provided on the Morehead renovation project, with the contract awarded to G&H

Contracting and demolition scheduled to begin next week. All work must be completed by June 30 and includes construction of an ADA-compliant bathroom, hvac replacement, flooring and kitchen updates, window replacement, and improved lighting.

Transportation needs were also discussed, with plans to purchase a minivan or SUV for program use and a larger van anticipated through a future grant. Summer academies were confirmed, including the STEAM Academy, Documentary Film Academy, and Pre-Law Academy, each targeting an enrollment of approximately 25 students.

The board reviewed updates on congressional funding and grants, including \$274,000 that has been awarded and a \$2.8 million request submitted in support of an RN-to-BSN program and a simulation lab. Long-term sustainability planning remains a priority, with discussions focused on tuition models, endowment development, donor engagement, and sponsored seats.

Student presenters Angeline and Keelan shared reflections on their academic experiences. Angeline discussed coursework in Environmental and Society, INQ 120, Communications, and Political Science, as well as Model UN participation and a museum-based deliverable. Keelan presented work from an environmental course, including a food-waste audit and art project, and reflected on increased confidence and engagement.

The Board accepted the finalized bylaws, with acknowledgment that revisions may be needed following the end of the grant period. Members also discussed board recruitment efforts, identifying the need for one to two additional representatives from the business or industry sectors.

The meeting concluded with scheduling discussions for a required summer virtual meeting, avoiding the weeks of July 4 and July 19, and plans for a fall meeting to be held in the renovated Morehead building.