Virginia Tech’s Center for Organizational and Technological Advancement (COTA) is a University Outreach Center that was established in 1994 to foster economic development and continuing education initiatives. To accomplish its goals, COTA offers, hosts, and/or sponsors programs for individuals, groups, and societies interested in educational programs or special meetings at The Hotel Roanoke and Conference Center (HR&CC) in Roanoke.

Each year the center receives state and private monies to support its program activities. Participants in COTA programs often receive continuing education units (CEUs) or some other type of training unit. The programs range from small grant-planning meetings and short courses to conferences that have attracted as many as 2,500 participants.

The topics for COTA programs are quite diverse since they take advantage of the expertise of faculty members from across the campus. In recent years, the center has sponsored short courses and conferences related to aquaculture, waste management, water treatment, new instructional techniques, various minority issues, standards of learning, biomedical techniques, transportation, project management, economic development, geographic information systems, veterinary methods, ISO training, nursing, tourism, and world trade.

COTA teams with Virginia Tech’s Division of Continuing Education (CE) staff as well as HR&CC staff to deliver its programs, and COTA personnel help with the programmatic details. At times, the center aids a program simply by providing a small grant, typically $1,000-$5,000, to help defray the costs of invited speakers or technology use. At other times, COTA focuses on the logistics of planning a program, but it relies heavily on CE resources to manage tasks such as program budgeting, marketing, registration, and accounting. Some assistance with budget development, contracts, and marketing are available at no cost to the client.

The center has offices on the Virginia Tech campus in Blacksburg and at the HR&CC in Roanoke. Its workforce presently consists of eight Fellows and four staff members. The current Fellows—four come from off-campus and have no previous affiliation with Virginia Tech—share their expertise in environmental matters, leadership, municipal government, business management, information technology, and power electronics. Since the Fellows serve a term of two to three years, the program focus areas vary somewhat from year to year. However, COTA programming extends beyond the efforts and expertise of its Fellows.

Although current budget issues in Virginia will certainly impact COTA, the center hopes to continue developing and sponsoring a broad range of programs in the coming years.

Additional information about COTA, including contact information, a list of upcoming programs, and an electronic application form for small grant monies, can be found on the center’s website at www.cota.vt.edu. Potential clients can also contact Gregory Boardman, COTA director, at 540/231-2013 or gboard@vt.edu or Roy Jones, CE’s associate director for program development, at 540/231-9448 or royjones@vt.edu.