

VIPC Awards Funding to Virginia Tech for Recruitment of World-Class Expert in Fungal Diseases

Dr. Kirsten Nielsen will help Virginia Tech meet the challenge of reducing the impact of infectious diseases of humans, animals, and the environment.

RICHMOND, VA, UNITED STATES, January 16, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The [Virginia Innovation Partnership Corporation \(VIPC\)](#) today announced that Virginia Tech has been awarded a Commonwealth Commercialization Fund (CCF) eminent researcher grant to recruit Dr. Kirsten Nielsen to their [Center for One Health Research \(COHR\)](#), part of the Department of Biomedical Sciences and Pathobiology at the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine (VMCVM). Nielsen, a leading expert in fungal diseases, will establish and strengthen Virginia Tech's research focus in infectious diseases.

Nielsen's research on the ubiquitous human pathogenic fungus *Cryptococcus neoformans* (*C. neoformans*) and how a myriad of host-pathogen interactions impacts its virulence and the outcome of disease has already produced two paradigm shifts in the field of medical mycology. *Cryptococcus* is a devastating disease of global significance, killing more than 500,000 people annually and considered the 2nd leading cause of death in people living with HIV. *C. neoformans* was recently listed as number one on the World Health Organization (WHO)'s critical fungal pathogens list. Nielsen's research spans both basic research and clinically relevant science, allowing her findings to contribute to the development of fungal diagnostics and therapeutics. She currently has two parallel and commercially viable research portfolios.

"Dr. Nielsen is a highly accomplished researcher with a strong record of success in mycology that complements the expertise of Virginia Tech's existing robust infectious diseases program. We are looking forward to her continuing her strong record of external research funding and publishing, as well as developing a collaborative research initiative with other life sciences-oriented departments, colleges, and institutes on campus, in particular a growing drug development research group working to expand fungal drug candidates," said Dan Sui, Senior Vice President for Research and Innovation at Virginia Tech.





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Joe Benevento, VIPC President & CEO

Nielsen joins Virginia Tech from the University of Minnesota Medical School. She brings with her a large research program and personnel, along with more than \$8 million in grants from the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Joe Benevento, VIPC President and CEO, said, "Virginia's leading universities are attracting world-class research talent and Dr. Nielsen exemplifies this vision as a

commercialization-focused, world-leading expert in fungal diseases who will join a robust Virginia Tech program for infectious diseases with demonstrated strength in research, diagnostic medicine, and therapeutics. VIPC is pleased to support Virginia Tech in attracting expanded scientific research and federal grant funding into the Commonwealth."

"We are excited about Dr. Nielsen and the crucial expertise that she will offer our community," said Dr. Randy Heflin, Senior Associate Vice President for Research and Innovation at Virginia Tech. "She is a translational researcher who is enthusiastic and passionate about her scientific field and brings a solid track record of grant funding, technology commercialization efforts, and student engagement."

"Virginia Tech is actively building their profile in infectious disease research, and there is an exciting opportunity ahead to establish a robust fungi research program that I'm delighted to be a part of. I'm grateful for VIPC's support and eagerly await many new opportunities and adventures in Virginia," said Nielsen, Professor of Infectious Diseases at Virginia Tech.

In addition to translational studies, Nielsen also performs research and has served as a scientific consultant for companies such as 3M and Zepto Life Technologies, along with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).

Virginia Tech is a public research university based in Blacksburg, Virginia.

About Virginia Innovation Partnership Corporation (VIPC)

Connecting innovators with opportunities. VIPC operates as the nonprofit corporation on behalf of the Virginia Innovation Partnership Authority (VIPA). VIPA / VIPC is Virginia's designated authority for leading innovation and economic development in the Commonwealth of Virginia through research, commercialization, and technology advancement; entrepreneurship, startup, and venture capital growth; and regional ecosystem, innovation network, and industry sector expansion. As part of its operations, VIPC helps attract and catalyze private investment into early-stage startup companies, provides research and technology commercialization grants to universities and entrepreneurs, and offers resource and funding support for entrepreneurial ecosystems, innovation networks, and public-private partnerships at local, state, federal levels.

VIPC's programs include: Virginia Invests | Virginia Venture Partners (VVP) | Commonwealth Commercialization Fund (CCF) | Entrepreneurial Ecosystems Development | Regional Innovation Fund (RIF) | Smart Communities | The Virginia Smart Community Testbed | The Virginia Unmanned Systems Center | Virginia Advanced Air Mobility Alliance (VAAMA) | The Public Safety Innovation Center (PSIC) | Federal Funding Assistance Program (FFAP) for SBIR & STTR | University Partnerships | Startup Company Mentoring & Engagement.

For more information, please visit www.VIPC.org. Explore the latest news from VIPC and images from VIPC-supported stakeholder events. Follow VIPC on Facebook, X, and LinkedIn.

About the Commonwealth Commercialization Fund (CCF)

VIPC's Commonwealth Commercialization Fund (CCF) accepts applications and awards funding to university research partners and entrepreneurial startups at the earliest stages of technology commercialization along the innovation continuum. These commercialization grants support R&D and early technology and market validation efforts such as the development of prototypes or minimum viable products (MVPs), customer pilots, and intellectual property protection. For more information on CCF funding opportunities and eligibility requirements, or to apply, visit www.VIPC.org.

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