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Building Stronger Economies in Appalachian Coal Country

A Bi-weekly Update from the National Association of Counties and the National Association of Development Organizations



Welcome to the latest installment of **“Building Stronger Economies in Appalachian Coal Country.”** This curated bi-weekly newsletter is a joint resource from the [National Association of Counties \(NACo\)](#) and the [National Association of Development Organizations \(NADO\) Research Foundation](#). NACo and NADO are collaborating on a POWER technical assistance grant generously provided by the [Appalachian Regional Commission \(ARC\)](#). This newsletter is delivered every other Wednesday and contains news about economic diversification efforts in Appalachia, resources and funding opportunities, and upcoming events and trainings to support your work in a variety of areas to improve economic development, infrastructure, and quality of life in the region.

Content Wanted! Have a news story or event you would like featured in our newsletter? Send an e-mail to Brett Schwartz at bschwartz@nado.org. We welcome your feedback on content and ideas and encourage you to share this newsletter with your colleagues and partners. Previous issues are archived [here](#).

Thanks for reading!

Economic Diversification News

- In a new [podcast](#) from [Infinite Earth Radio](#), Erik Pages, president of [EntreWorks Consulting](#), discusses topics such as **place-based economic development, entrepreneurship, workforce strategies, and efforts to diversify local and regional economies**, including in coal-reliant places. From the podcast: “Every community in the United States has entrepreneurs. Not every community has a major university or major corporation, but every community – no matter how poor or distressed – has people who are entrepreneurs and have the entrepreneurial spirit. Finding those people in your community is an important part in getting started.” Click [here](#) to listen to the podcast.
- [Virginia Tech](#) profiles the work of Crystal Cook Marshall, a Ph.D. candidate who has researched and written extensively on opportunities to support economic development Appalachian communities that tap into and grow local assets “where the jobs can’t be automated away.” She further notes, **“Our culture is part of our opportunity.”** Click [here](#) to read the article.
- A [story](#) from [89.3 WFPL](#) in Louisville describes how traditional Appalachian cuisine – long ignored outside the region – is finding its way into new markets. From the article: **“Appalachian food has been ‘discovered’ by critics and eaters alike** as trendy regional cuisine prime for reinvention. But advocates for the region...point out that many of the dishes now popping up on mainstream menus have been used in the past as a way to shame residents of Appalachia based on their perceived socioeconomic status or class.” Click [here](#) to read the article.
- A wide-ranging [interview in Paste Magazine](#) with Zachary Mannheimer, Vice President of Creative Placemaking at [Iowa Business Growth](#), covers topics and themes that should be of interest to Appalachian small towns. Mannheimer highlights technology and manufacturing opportunities for rural America: “[W]e have to look for the new jobs of the future, and rural communities have big strengths and opportunities to be centers of growth in sectors like **contour crafting, 3D printing, maker technology, driverless car technology, and drone technology**. Lots of these technologies are going to be related to helping reduce the geographic isolation of rural areas. The biggest problem for these communities (geographic isolation) is also the biggest opportunity. Click [here](#) to read the article.

Funding Opportunities and Resources

- The [U.S. Department of Energy](#) (DOE) is accepting applications to the [“Solar in Your Community Challenge.”](#) an initiative connecting solar power to low-income and underserved communities. Under the program, teams compete for \$5 million in resources to **develop business and financial models leading to solar in low- and moderate-income markets**. A team is

expected to consist of diverse stakeholders in business, community, government, and non-profits. The deadline to apply is **March 17**. More information is available [here](#).

- The Department of Labor's [Employment and Training Administration](#) (ETA) is hosting a series of webinars providing guidance on the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Webinars are scheduled **through March 1** covering topics including the **one-stop delivery system and WIOA partnerships**. For more details and a complete list of webinars, click [here](#).
- The [National Fund for Workforce Solutions](#) has introduced two reports on **investing in frontline workers and sustaining regional collaborative investment in workforce development**. The first report, *CareerSTAT Guide to Investing in Frontline Workers*, highlights best practices of developing frontline workers; the report was developed through information from 25 health care organizations. The second guide, *Sustainability Guide for Regional Collaboratives*, addresses collaborative investment in workforce development through areas such as policy advocacy and partner engagement. The *CareerSTAT* report is available [here](#). The *Sustainability Guide* can be found [here](#).
- Last week, the [Aspen Institute](#) hosted "[Local Innovation Strengthening Rural Economies](#)," a panel discussion featuring innovators – business owners, intermediary partners, and investors – active in a variety of rural economies in the United States. **Rural manufacturing, rural wood products, and rural investment capital** were all discussed. This event is part of a six-part series of panel conversations that invites policymakers, economic and community development practitioners, and business and philanthropic leaders to engage in dialogue around advancing a rural opportunity agenda. Click [here](#) to watch a recording of the event.
- [NJIT's Technical Assistance to Brownfields \(TAB\)](#) program provides **free technical assistance to communities that helps guide them through the cleanup and redevelopment process at brownfield properties**. Communities and municipalities often need help in understanding the technical issues associated with brownfields projects – issues such as: deciphering technical reports; realizing health impacts and risks; financing brownfields projects; understanding science or environmental policy; learning how best to involve the community; and working with local, state, or federal governments. NJIT has been selected by the U.S. EPA to provide the assistance to communities, tribes, governmental entities, and non-profit in EPA Regions 1, 3, and 4 (New England, Mid-Atlantic, and the Southeast US). The program is generously funded by EPA. The process for getting assistance is informal - there are no contracts to sign, just send NJIT TAB an email at tab@njit.edu or call them at 973.642.4165.

Events and Trainings

- Through the support of ARC, NACo and NADO recently hosted **two small-group technical assistance clinics** in **Wise, VA** and **Beckley, WV** to continue to support the cohort of teams from the ARC region that participated in the [2015 Innovation Challenge workshops](#). These events featured guest speakers, while also offering valuable peer-to-peer learning opportunities for county and regional leaders.

The [workshop in Wise](#) focused content on **advanced manufacturing, site plan development, business incentives, and innovative entrepreneurship strategies**. Review guest speaker [Ellen Harpel's presentation HERE](#) on trends in incentives. Other programs mentioned at the clinic that support building an entrepreneurial ecosystem include: [Kansas' Pipeline program](#), [Maine's Top Gun program](#), and the [SWVA Entrepreneurial Blueprint](#). The [Beckley clinic](#) focused on **community marketing and explored key trends in 'telling the community story'** through digital media, such as blogs and social media. [Jake Lynch of WV Hub's presentation can be found HERE](#). Discussion also explored building the local foods economy, including presentations by Lisa Sharp from [WV USDA RD](#) and the Brandon Nida from [WV Food & Farm Coalition](#).

Each clinic also featured an ARC & [POWER Initiative](#) update from [Karen Fabiano](#), ARC POWER Program Manager. Contact [Jack Morgan](#) at NACo for more information or resources from these events.

- The [Appalachian Regional Commission](#) and [National Endowment for the Arts](#), in partnership with the [Conservation Fund](#), are hosting the [Appalachian Gateway Regional Workshop](#) on **May 9 – 11** in Ringgold, GA. The workshop will provide teams with skills to capitalize on opportunities related to sustainable drivers for **local economic development, cultural heritage and natural resource tourism, public arts promotion, and preservation and stewardship of community character**. In addition to enhancing a community's natural and historic assets, the role of the arts – particularly in revitalizing downtowns – will be explored by community teams to assist in developing strategies to safeguard community character and drive local economic development. The Appalachian Gateway Regional Workshop is open to teams of 4 – 7 members from communities that are entry points to Appalachia's national and state parks and forests. The deadline to register is **March 24**. Click [here](#) for more information.
- The [Appalachia Funders Network 8th Annual Gathering](#) will be held on **March 28-30** in Abingdon, VA. This annual meeting is a space for learning and analysis, where members build trust and relationships, expand their connections, develop lasting partnerships, and align their investment strategies to **accelerate large scale change across Central Appalachia**. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

