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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](mailto: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

- The [Roanoke Times](#) covers the **rapidly expanding drone industry in Wise County, Virginia** in a recent [article](#). The article also describes the opportunity to retrain coal miners as high-tech drone pilots. Says Fred Coeburn of Mountain Empire Community College: “When coal is mined, it’s done with a remote control, just like this [drone]. A drone operator is someone who is dedicated to accomplishing their mission, has hand-eye motor skills, and knows how to run a machine. Coal miners fit this bill.” Click [here](#) to read the article.
- [Yale Climate Solutions](#) provides a brief look at the job training provided by the [Coalfield Development Corporation](#) in West Virginia in the areas of sustainable building, agriculture, and, more recently, solar installation. **“We see real economic opportunity in solar,”** says CEO Brandon Dennison. Click [here](#) to read the article or listen to the audio segment.
- [Southeast Energy News](#) describes how Virginia is exploring the viability of developing **pumped-storage electric power plants that will utilize water from abandoned coal mines**. From the [article](#): “Pumped-storage plants work by using cheap, excess electricity at night to pump water uphill into a higher elevation lake or reservoir. Energy can be recaptured during times of higher demand by reversing the flow and sending the water through turbines to a lower reservoir.” Click [here](#) to read the article.
- [TechRepublic](#) covered a **recent event in Paintsville, KY that celebrated the early success of TechHire Eastern Kentucky (TEKY)**, a 32-week tech training program. From the [article](#): “[The event] included a roundtable, led by SOAR (Shaping Our Appalachian Region), that included political leaders, the federal co-chair of the Appalachian Regional Commission, representatives from Apple and Amazon, and leaders in education, business, and economic development.” Click [here](#) to read the article.
- The [Center for Rural Development](#) highlights progress reports shared by working groups with the SOAR Executive Board on a host of key areas identified as being integral to fostering long-term economic growth. One of those key areas is **providing affordable, high-speed broadband to residents and businesses**. Says Lonnie Lawson, President and CEO of The Center for Rural Development and chairman of the SOAR Broadband Working Group, “We cannot wait until the ‘middle mile’ gets built to start local, last-mile planning. We have to start now. The Action Team has been working with SOAR communities to help identify best practices for providing access to affordable broadband in our region.” Click [here](#) to read the article.

## Funding Opportunities and Resources

- The [US Department of Agriculture's \(USDA\) Agricultural Marketing Service \(AMS\)](#) has announced the availability of \$27 million in grants to fund innovative projects designed to **strengthen market opportunities for local and regional food producers and businesses**. Applications are sought for the Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program, which includes [Farmers Market Promotion Program](#) (FMPP) and [Local Food Promotion Program](#) (LFPP) grants, and the [Federal-State Marketing Improvement Program](#) (FSMIP). The grant applications for FSMIP, FMPP, and LFPP must be submitted electronically through [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) by **11:59 pm ET on March 27**.
- [USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) works with farmers, ranchers, and private forest landowners nationwide to identify and address natural resource objectives in balance with operational goals in order to benefit soil, water, wildlife, and related natural resources locally, regionally, and nationally. Applications are now being accepted through **April 21** for grants funded under the [Regional Conservation Partnership Program \(RCPP\)](#). Through the RCPP, NRCS seeks to co-invest with partners in **innovative, workable, and cost-effective approaches to benefit farming, ranching, and forest operations, local economies, and the communities and resources** in a watershed or other geographic area. Click [here](#) for more information and to apply.
- [Rural LISC](#) and [Northern Trust](#) have created the [Growing Rural Communities Fund](#) to help small businesses and nonprofits in low-income rural communities through the [New Market Tax Credit](#) program. The Fund **leverages New Market Tax Credit equity with other capital to finance real estate acquisition and construction costs** for projects which are oftentimes limited in receiving traditional lending. More information on the Fund and Rural LISC's other loan products is available [here](#).
- The [EPA Office of Sustainable Communities](#) publication [Framework for Creating a Smart Growth Economic Development Strategy: A Tool for Small Cities and Towns](#) is a **step-by-step guide to building a place-based economic development strategy**. It is intended for small and mid-sized cities, particularly those that have limited population growth, areas of disinvestment, and/or a struggling economy. Staff from municipal governments and regional economic development organizations, nonprofit organizations seeking to help revitalize communities, and other stakeholders can use this tool to help guide their work. Click [here](#) to download the publication.
- A new [report](#) from the [Social Science Research Council](#) covers the topic of disconnected youth in the United States (teens and young adults age 16 to 24 who are not in school or the workforce). The report finds that **"rural counties as a whole are faring considerably worse than more populous counties in terms of youth disconnection**. In completely rural counties, the average youth disconnection rate is 20.3 percent, much higher than the rate for counties in urban centers (14.2 percent) or for suburban counties (12.3 percent)." Click [here](#) to read the report which presents information and data by state.

- The [University of Tennessee Center for Transportation Research](#) has released a report, [Access vs. Isolation: Preserving Appalachia's Rail Connectivity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century](#). From the report: "[I]n the case of rail transport, where infrastructure is privately provided, reduced coal volumes have led to facility closures, workforce reductions, route segment spinoffs, and service cuts, both in Appalachia and the states that surround it." The report addresses the **implications for regional freight mobility** as a result of the decline of the coal industry and provides recommendations and opportunities for addressing these challenges. Click [here](#) to read the report.

## Events and Trainings

- The [NADO Research Foundation](#) and the [Indiana Business Research Center \(IBRC\)](#) are hosting a free webinar on **Tuesday, April 4 from 2 – 3:15 PM ET** that will take a closer look at the [Innovation Index 2.0](#), a new web index from [StatsAmerica](#) funded with support from the [US Economic Development Administration](#). The **Innovation Index 2.0 is a free web resource that can give economic development practitioners and regional leaders the ability to assess their region's economic strengths and challenges** and also provide valuable data that can be utilized when writing a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) or other regional economic development plans. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.
- On **April 21 from 1 – 2:00 PM ET**, the [NADO Research Foundation](#) will host the free webinar "[Access vs. Isolation: Preserving Rail Connectivity](#)." As regional economies change over time, the demand for transportation facilities and services also evolves. As a result of a decline in coal demand and output, private sector freight transportation has decreased. Rail lines and service are a valuable transportation network asset and a concern for maintaining and growing future economic activity that might rely on access to active rail lines. The webinar speakers will use transportation impacts of the decline of coal production in Appalachia as an example to frame the issue of rail preservation for attendees from across the nation, as well as within the Appalachian region. The speakers will provide context for the economic changes that led to a change in transportation demand as well as suggest public sector strategies to preserve rail connectivity. Register online [here](#).
- The [Appalachia Funders Network 8<sup>th</sup> 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.
- 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 [2017 National Brownfields Training Conference](#) will occur in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, **December 5 – 7**. Attendees will enjoy opportunities to participate in training events, observe success stories first hand during mobile workshops, learn from experts regarding **best practices for meeting brownfields challenges**, and network with thousands of other stakeholders. The call for session proposals is now open through **March 24**. Learn more about this year's eight topic areas and available session formats by clicking [here](#).

## A Dose of Inspiration

- A new [video](#) features [Appalachian Harvest](#), a food hub located in Duffield, Virginia. Fresh fruits and vegetables, much of which are grown on former tobacco fields, is shipped to supermarkets and stores from Maryland to Georgia. "I don't know of a more honorable profession than growing food that feeds our country," says Robin Robbins, general manager. Click [here](#) to watch the video.



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