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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

- [Newsworks](#) features an [article](#) about **the rise of the wind industry in Central Pennsylvania**. Lee Van Horn, the son of a coal miner and current manager of the Locust Ridge Wind Power Project says, "At least the people that I interface with, they had a positive attitude toward wind power. People realize that coal isn't going to be around here forever and people need to re-tool themselves and get occupations within newer industries." Click [here](#) to read the article.
- Braidy Industries, Inc. has announced that it will **build a 2.5 million-square-foot aluminum facility on the Kentucky-West Virginia border**, reports the [Associated Press](#). According to the [article](#), the company plans "to hire 550 employees earning average salaries of \$70,000 in an area devastated by the loss of coal and manufacturing jobs." Click [here](#) to read the article.
- The [State Journal](#) covers how a **new mine reclamation project in West Virginia is using bees as pollinators to support native plant production**. From the [article](#): "Honeybees are part of a plan to create jobs, diversify the economy, and redevelop reclaimed mine lands in Southern West Virginia. Appalachian Headwaters, Green Forests Work, the West Virginia Department of Agriculture, and New River Community and Technical College are working together on a beekeeping collective and native plant production project in 14 coal-producing counties. They're armed with a \$1.5 million grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission to help." Click [here](#) to read the article.
- The [Boonville Daily News](#) profiles the **arts and cultural offerings in three Appalachian communities**: Berea, KY; Tamarack, WV, and Heartland, VA. From the [article](#): "[S]everal mountain destinations offer traveling shoppers terrific traditional (and not so traditional) arts and crafts. For one-stop shopping, Virginia and West Virginia both sponsor large visitors centers featuring artists from their respective states as well as regional food and music." Click [here](#) to read the article.
- A **new rails-to-trails project** in Wise County, Virginia recently broke ground and when completed in September will connect the towns of Appalachia and Big Stone Gap, reports [WCYB](#). From the [article](#): "Improvements will be made to two bridges along the trail and to the trail itself. Bathrooms and a train caboose will be added at the trailhead. Federal funds obtained through the Virginia Department of Transportation's Bristol office will be used to pay for the project." Click [here](#) to read the article.
- An [article](#) in [Route 50](#) demonstrates the **economic impact on counties of coal industry job losses**. According to the article, "On average, coal miners represent 52 of every 1,000 people in the counties where 50 percent of the workforce is found." Click [here](#) to read the article.

Funding Opportunities and Resources

- The [US Department of Agriculture](#) (USDA) has issued a funding opportunity under the Women and Minorities in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Fields (WAMS) program. The program seeks **to increase the number of women and underrepresented minorities from rural areas to engage in STEM fields** relevant to USDA's priorities. Applications are due **June 8**. For more information, click [here](#).
- The [National Park Service](#) (NPS) has opened the grant application period for its **Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program**. Applicants are encouraged to contact NPS staff for insight on proposals at least 30 days ahead of the proposal deadline. Applications are due **June 30**. Click [here](#) for more information and how to apply.
- The [US Department of Agriculture](#) (USDA) has opened the application period for the fiscal year (FY) 2017 [Rural Cooperative Development Grant](#) program. The program funds **cooperative development to aid rural communities in economic development**. More information can be found in the Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) [here](#).
- [Enterprise's Collaborative Action grants](#) provide organizations with \$5,000 to build community agency, engage local voices, and connect to long-term community goals. By design, Collaborative Actions allow conversations to emerge that shape the community and social context and catalyze positive dynamics. These actions may be permanent or temporary, tangible or intangible, and may include **creative placemaking, mapping, art installations, or community events**. They are typically small-scale, low-cost, and short in duration, but often fit into a larger community effort. Apply by **June 9** for projects taking place through December 2017. Applications open **May 10**. Click [here](#) for more information.
- The [US Department of the Treasury](#) has released a **new resource guide on youth employment programs and financial assistance services**. *Resource Guide for Youth Employment Programs: Incorporating Financial Capability and Partnering with Financial Institutions* demonstrates how youth employment programs through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) have effectively partnered with financial institutions to aid young people in financial well-being. The guide is available is [here](#).
- [Smart Growth America](#) has released [three new toolkits](#) designed specifically for **leaders in rural areas about how to create and implement public policies that support smart growth development**. The Community Facilities Location toolkit helps communities make the most of new facilities like hospitals or post offices, the Well-Placed Affordable Housing toolkit looks at creating centrally-located housing infrastructure, and the Fiscal Impact Analysis toolkit looks at how local government can better understand the long-term financial implications of decisions about new development. Click [here](#) to learn more and to

download the toolkits.

- A new publication from the [Center for Community Progress](#) called [Neighborhoods by Numbers: An Introduction to Finding and Using Small Area Data](#) helps readers navigate how to effectively use data to shape planning and revitalization decisions for their community - even without a degree in statistics, GIS knowhow, or the budget for a consultant. This **easy-to-use, color-coded book walks you through how to find, understand, and use key local and national datasets**. It focuses on the use of data for small areas like properties, blocks, and neighborhoods. Click [here](#) to download the publication.
- [RAND](#) has published a new [report](#) that addresses **wages, employment, and STEM education** in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. Click [here](#) to download the report.
- The [US Census Bureau](#) has provided **updates to the My Congressional District Tool web application**. New information includes 2016 congressional district boundary changes and download capability to .csv file for both single districts and statewide district data sets. The My Congressional District application is available [here](#).

Events and Trainings

- In an upcoming [Smart Growth Network webinar](#) on **May 4 from 1 – 2:30 pm ET**, Kendra Briechele of the [Conservation Fund](#) will explore how rural communities are fostering smart growth by **investing in their downtowns, expanding transportation choices, creating economic opportunities, and protecting the cultural and natural resources of rural landscapes**. The Conservation Fund partners with communities nationwide to complete livability assessments and apply a range of tools to help enhance their quality of life. Click [here](#) to learn more and to register.
- Thousands of **affordable rental properties in rural communities** are in danger of being lost to disrepair or market forces in the next decade. An upcoming free [Connecting Communities webinar](#) on **May 4 from 3 to 4 pm ET** will explore strategies that are being implemented to try and preserve them, with a focus on recently released data and tools that can help community organizations and their partners better understand the current landscape of rural affordable rental housing. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.
- The [National Association of Counties](#) and the [NADO Research Foundation](#) recently hosted a [forum](#) in Denver, CO for coal-reliant counties and regions in Colorado, Utah, Montana, and Wyoming. This convening brought together stakeholders from a variety of public and private sectors for an educational and interactive gathering to share best practices, lessons learned, and new opportunities to support economic diversification in coal country through a mix of plenary sessions and smaller

group discussions. Topics included **broadband infrastructure, entrepreneurship, local foods, arts/creative placemaking, and tourism**. Materials from the conference – which should be of interest to any coal-reliant community – are archived [here](#). Also be sure to explore <http://diversifyeconomies.org/> to access more resources and materials about supporting economic diversification.

- On April 21, the NADO Research Foundation held the webinar “Access vs. Isolation: Preserving Rail Connectivity.” The webinar featured speakers Scott Hercik, Appalachian Regional Commission; Mark Burton, University of Tennessee – Knoxville; and Laura McNichol, Watco Companies, who discussed **trends in rail service amid the changing Appalachian coal economy**. The webinar recording, speakers’ slides, and other materials are available [here](#).
- The [International Economic Development Council](#), with support from the [Delta Regional Authority](#) and the [US Economic Development Administration](#), are hosting upcoming economic development and disaster resilience [trainings](#) throughout the spring and summer, including in locations in Appalachia. The intensive training courses are designed as two-day classroom-style “boot-camps” that focus on **the role of public and elected officials in economic development, resiliency, and economic recovery**. The interactive courses will provide participants with concrete, practical tools to support critical economic development and disaster resilience activities within their communities. Click [here](#) for more information.
- The [US Census Bureau](#) has a variety of [free webinars and online trainings](#) scheduled from now through August. These trainings show **how to find and use Census data for multiple uses**, including informing your business planning, supporting grant proposals and research projects, planning for local schools and hospitals, and much more. Click [here](#) to see the full training schedule and to learn more.

A Dose of Inspiration

- Energy companies are looking to **transform a former mountaintop removal site near Pikeville, KY into a solar farm**, [reports](#) the [Associated Press](#). From the article: “Berkeley Energy Group Development Executive Ryan Johns said the proposed solar farm would generate between 50 and 100 megawatts of electricity that would be sold to power companies along the East Coast. He said the project would cost tens of millions of dollars and include “hundreds of thousands” of solar panels.” Click [here](#) to read the article.



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