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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

- A recent [article](#) in the *New Republic* covers efforts underway to diversify economies in coal communities, highlighting progress made in Southwest Virginia around **tourism, downtown redevelopment, and outdoor recreation**. In the article, Shannon Blevins at the University of Virginia's College at Wise notes, "We're headed in the right direction. It's just that it's a race against time. It's the work of a generation, but we just can't have it take that long." Click [here](#) to read the article.
- The *Floyd County Times* reports that the agricultural start-up [AppHarvest](#) will build a high-tech greenhouse – Appalachia's largest – on reclaimed mine land in Pikeville, Kentucky that will **grow vegetable all year long and create 140 full-time jobs**. From the article: "The operation will grow a variety of produce with a focus on cherry tomatoes and bell peppers. The high-tech facility will feature computerized monitoring and cutting-edge hydroponic, above-ground growing systems." Click [here](#) to read the article.
- An article in the *Huffington Post* describes a variety of **K-12 entrepreneurship programs** in operation throughout Appalachia that leverage the skills and expertise of local community colleges to support the curriculum. From the [article](#): "By infusing entrepreneurship and innovation education in kindergarten through 12th grades, coupled with the resources, programs, and opportunities that community colleges offer, we create a powerful Appalachian entrepreneurship education continuum that has the potential to radically change where and what it means to be an entrepreneur." Click [here](#) to read the article.
- Lynch, Kentucky, located in Harlan County, is celebrating its 100th birthday this year, honoring its coal mining past while also thinking about its future. From an [article](#) in the *Lexington Herald-Leader*: "[R]esidents say Lynch also has **assets to develop its tourism economy, including the beauty of the mountains, a fascinating history, and its coal-camp houses and buildings**...Cumberland, Benham, and Lynch have been designated as trail towns. They are working to develop hiking and horse trails, and Lynch has started work on a campground." Click [here](#) to read the article.
- Catawba County, North Carolina is a success story in re-tooling the local economy after the offshoring of its textile industry devastated the local economy, reports *Undark*. From the [article](#): "Catawba County... is enjoying **a renaissance fueled by innovation, high-tech materials, automation, and custom work**. Textiles are coming back here, but not the old jobs...Today, mills are hiring computer designers, software engineers, and people trained to program and operate the increasingly complex knitting machines — an in-demand job that can command a salary upwards of \$80,000." Click [here](#) to read the article.

Funding Opportunities and Resources

- [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 [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 [University of Tennessee Center for Transportation Research](#) has released a report, [Access vs. Isolation: Preserving Appalachia's Rail Connectivity in the 21st 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.
- The [NADO Research Foundation](#) has released a new document summarizing a peer exchange event that occurred in fall 2016. The [Regional Transportation Planning Organization Peer Exchange Summary](#) covers discussion of a small group of regional transportation planners and state Department of Transportation planning staff, as well as engagement with a larger and diverse group of professionals attending the summit *Moving Rural America: National Working Summit on Transportation in Rural America*. The peer exchange summary includes discussion and short descriptions of practice on several topics, including: **addressing rural mobility challenges, aligning transportation with economic development, rural public involvement, opportunities to increase economic development by having a safe transportation system, and connecting to transportation safety**. Click [here](#) to download the summary.

Events and Trainings

- The [Federal Highway Administration](#) (FHWA) is holding a webinar on **improved quality of life through transportation for rural communities**. The webinar will highlight strategies to improve livability and connectivity in rural communities and

small towns through collaborative efforts to create economic development opportunities and promote multimodal accessibility. The webinar will be held **March 14 at 2:00 p.m. ET**. To register, click [here](#).

- On **March 20** at [NADO's Washington Policy Conference](#), a session will be held on **strengthening regions through economic diversification**. During this peer-to-peer session learn about ways federal resources have supported efforts to diversify economies through local and regional assets and share examples and best practices from your own region. Panelists will include staff from the US Economic Development Administration, the Appalachian Regional Commission, and the US Environmental Protection Agency. Click [here](#) for more information.
- On **March 23 from 1:00 – 2:00 p.m. ET**, join the [Citizens' Institute on Rural Design](#) for a [free webinar](#) tracing creative placemaking's economic development outcomes. The webinar will feature Zachary Mannheimer of Des Moines, IA, and his approach to **economic development in small towns with a focus on retaining young people and creative professionals**. Participants will learn about the implementation of creative projects like a downtown building in Earlham, IA that is being converted into a new culinary school and restaurant, and about an abandoned hotel that is being developed into market rate housing. Overall, the webinar will provide listeners with an overview of the ways creative placemaking enhances livability and economic opportunity for small towns and rural communities. Click [here](#) to learn more and to register.
- 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.
- 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 17**. Learn more about this year's eight topic areas and available session formats by clicking [here](#).

- Rooted in Minnesota but recognized as a leader nationwide, [Minnesota Housing Partnership](#) (MHP) specializes in working with rural communities and tribal entities to strengthen their communities. Through a competitive application process, the [Strengthening Rural Communities Program](#) **provides technical assistance to rural communities to overcome impediments to successful planning and implementation of affordable housing and community development projects**. MHP is seeking Requests for Technical Assistance from rural housing development organizations, community development corporations (CDCs), community housing development organizations (CHDOs), local governments, and tribes for services related to affordable housing, community development, project financing, organizational capacity building and development, and regional planning. Apply by **March 31**. Click [here](#) for more information.

A Dose of Inspiration

- In the [final installment](#) of a [three-part series](#) on Appalachian coal communities [AJ+](#) profiles local residents in Eastern Kentucky who are **launching new businesses, opening up restaurants, promoting the arts, and growing fresh foods**. "I do hope we can find a way to put things back together ourselves instead of relying on an industry coming back in because an industry coming in and leaving is what put us where we are right now," says Kimberly Shepherd of Specialty Welding and Repair in Hazard, Kentucky. Click [here](#) to watch the video.



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