

February 14, 2018



Welcome to the latest issue “**Growing Stronger Economies in Our Nation’s Coal Communities.**” 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 [U.S. Economic Development Administration’s Denver Regional Office](#). The newsletter provides a national perspective on diversification efforts in coal communities, 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 your region. It is delivered every other Wednesday.

Content Wanted! Have a news story or event that 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. Thanks for reading!

Economic Diversification News

- **Lavender plants are now growing on former strip mines in West Virginia, part of a new effort to diversify the state's economy**, reports *West Virginia Public Broadcasting*. From the article: "It's a new industry here in Appalachia, but the idea was enticing to a handful of people who signed up for a training class...As part of the program, [participants] get paid an education stipend of \$10 an hour for the 6-weeks they spend learning about lavender and how to grow it. The program is called Green Mining and it's just getting started. Last year, it received a \$1 million grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission's Power [sic] Initiative, which helped pay for salaries and students' stipends." Click [here](#) to read the article.
- The *Casper Star Tribune* dissects both sides of a debate in Sheridan County, Wyoming where the Ramaco Wyoming Coal Co. is **seeking to rezone land for a research and development park**. From the article: "Some see the research facility as a false promise and the area proscribed for industrial zoning, currently zoned agricultural, as a valued outdoor recreation area. Other agree with the company, which argues that the site has long been planned as a potential industrial area that is already bordered by a railroad and bisected by the highway." Click [here](#) to read the article.
- *PBS News Hour* features Letcher County, Kentucky's [Appalshop](#) in its new series, *American Creators*. From the story: "Appalshop dates back almost 50 years, created with the help of federal funds during the so-called war on poverty of the 1960s. It was a time when Appalachia was thrust into the national spotlight...**Appalshop had two big goals: to foster new skills and jobs and to give local people a way to tell their own stories.**" Click [here](#) to see the story.
- Local leaders in Billings, Montana are **exploring opportunities for redevelopment on the site of the now defunct J.E. Corette coal-fired power plant**, according to the *Billings Gazette*. From the article: "The objective should be finding the best use for the property, said Steve Arveschoug of Big Sky Economic Development. It's a conversation Arveschoug tried to broach with Talen [Energy] after the plant closed. "That's our goal, and of course you can't lose sight of the job-creating opportunities that might be there. You would weigh all of that," Arveschoug said." Click [here](#) to read the article.
- The *Conservation Fund Blog* highlights the impact in Appalachia of its [Natural Capital Investment Fund](#), which provides loans and technical assistance to local companies that are approaching business and natural resources in a responsible way. From the article: "The need is large and **NCIF's impact is far-reaching, having funded more than 225 businesses over the past eleven years. NCIF's borrowers include farms, manufacturers, distributors, restaurants, and recreation ventures.** While diverse in many ways, these companies all share a commitment to protect the environment through their business practices and the vitality they bring to their communities." Click [here](#) to read the article.
- *Biomass Magazine* reports on the recent opening of Active Energy's CoalSwitch plant in Utah. From the article: "According to the company, **CoalSwitch is produced primarily from forestry waste and other industrial cellulose waste products.**

The product can be fired with coal in existing coal-fired power plants at any ratio, up to 100 percent.” Click [here](#) to read the article.

Funding Opportunities and Resources

- The [Appalachian Regional Commission](#) (ARC) has issued a [request for proposals](#) (RFP) for the [Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization \(POWER\) Initiative](#) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2018. POWER is a congressionally funded initiative that targets federal resources to help communities and regions that have been affected by job losses in coal mining, coal power plant operations, and coal-related supply chain industries due to the changing economics of America's energy production. **Priority areas for ARC investments through this initiative include developing a competitive workforce, enhancing access to and use of broadband services, fostering entrepreneurial activities, and developing industry clusters. ARC is making up to \$20 million available through the RFP.** Click [here](#) to learn more.
- Applications are now open to the [U.S. Department of Treasury's Community Development Financial Institutions Fund](#) (CDFI Fund) and [Native American CDFI Assistance Program](#) (NACA Program). The CDFI Fund **provides affordable financing and related support to low-income communities without access to credit, capital, and financial services.** Applications are due **April 4**. More information on the CDFI Fund including how to apply is available [here](#); additional information on the NACA Program is available [here](#).
- Twice a year [Community Builders](#) offers a limited number of **community assistance opportunities for communities located within Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, New Mexico, and Colorado.** Through community assistance, it provides local leaders the tools and information to build prosperous, livable communities. Community Builders assistance focuses on four key issues: Getting to Smarter Growth; Housing for Community; Building Resilient Communities; and Transportation for a New Economy. Click [here](#) to learn more. Applications are now being accepted until **February 23**.
- The [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency](#) (EPA) has announced up to \$3 million in funding for locally-focused environmental education grants through the 2018 EE Local Grant Program. EPA will award three to four grants in each of EPA's ten Regions, for no less than \$50,000 and no more than \$100,000 each, for a total of 30-35 grants nationwide. In addition to other environmental topics, the 2018 EE Local Grant Program **includes support for projects that reflect the intersection of environmental issues with agricultural best-practices, conservation of natural resources, food waste management, and natural disaster preparedness.** Proposals are due **March 15**. Click [here](#) for more information.

Events and Trainings

- Registration is open for [“Strengthening Economies in Montana: A Forum for Coal Reliant Communities”](#) to be held in **Billings, MT** on **April 18 and 19** and hosted by NACo and the NADO Research Foundation. This **free convening will bring together stakeholders from the public and private sectors for an educational and interactive gathering to share best practices, lessons learned, and new opportunities to support economic diversification**. Prepare for a mix of interactive sessions and small group discussions designed to deepen and foster new partnerships aimed at promoting innovation and prosperity throughout Montana and the Western regions. Click [here](#) to learn more and register. Contact Jack Morgan at jmorgan@naco.org with any questions.
- A new 15-minute [webinar briefing](#) from the NADO Research Foundation **provides examples and best practices from efforts in coal communities that are tapping into local assets and growing local economies**. These include drone technology, outdoor recreation, mine reclamation, broadband, and more. Click [here](#) to access the briefing.
- [BroadbandUSA](#) will host an **upcoming webinar on public Wi-Fi networks**. Network set-up, partnerships, and funding options, among other topics will be addressed. The presentation is a part of BroadbandUSA’s Practical Broadband Conversations Webinar Series. The webinar is scheduled for **February 17 from 2 – 3 p.m. ET**. Click [here](#) to register.
- As part of the [Smart Management for Small Water Systems Program](#), the [Environmental Finance Center Network](#) is hosting two free webinars, “Resiliency Planning 101” on **February 13** and “What Challenges Do Different Sizes and Types of Systems Face?” on **February 27**. “Resiliency 101” **will offer definitions of community and utility resiliency in the context of disaster preparedness, recovery, and proactive planning measures**. Resiliency enables communities and utilities to remain economically and socially viable in the face of extreme weather or economic events. Click [here](#) to register. “What Challenges” will **address the challenges of delivering safe, potable water to communities of varying size**. Attendees will learn the differences and similarities of management challenges that both small and large systems face and gain a better understanding of their utility’s demographic position relative to others. Click [here](#) to register.
- The [Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City](#) is hosting a three-part webinar series on **approaches to improve quality jobs for lower-wage workers**. The first webinar is **February 22 at 3:00 p.m. ET** and will address labor market changes and how technology is contributing to job quality and employment opportunities. Additional webinars are scheduled for **March 22** and **April 26**. Click [here](#) to register.
- The recording is now available for the recent [National Association of Counties](#) and the [NADO Research Foundation](#) webinar that took a **deep dive into the value of place and community branding as a powerful tool in stimulating both economic development and community pride and identity**. The webinar explored this topic through the lens of coal country, as many traditionally coal-reliant communities are seeking to build stronger economies and revitalize communities.

Hear from community branding subject-matter experts who shared local and regional implementation examples of place branding and digital storytelling, including social media and community videos. Click [here](#) to view the webinar recording.

A Dose of Inspiration

- *West Virginia Public Broadcasting* profiles the work of Brian Joseph, founder of the Touchstone Research Laboratory located in Triadelphia, West Virginia. From the article: "The James Webb Space Telescope will launch in 2019 with a goal of observing some of the most distant events and objects in the universe. **The molds required to craft such precise equipment are made of Appalachian coal. Also, next-generation rockets are being blasted into space with super-strong, heat-resistant coatings made of Appalachian coal.** The guy behind these innovations believes burning coal happens to be the least economically viable thing you can do with it." Click [here](#) to read the article and listen to the story.

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