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Welcome to the latest issue of “**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 RF are collaborating on a POWER technical assistance grant generously provided by the [U.S. Economic Development Administration’s Denver Regional Office](#). This 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

- The *Denver Post* reports on strategy sessions and presentations delivered at the recent NACo-NADO RF event, **“Strengthening Economies in the West: Coal-Reliant Communities Challenge,”** held in Denver, CO on May 1-3 and supported by the EDA Denver Regional Office. From the article: “As market trends and environmental concerns reshape the energy landscape, counties like Rio Blanco [Colorado] are taking stock of all their resources. The Desperado and Colowyo mines are important sources of area jobs and revenue, said Rio Blanco County Commissioner Gary Moyer. “To lose coal is a huge loss, and especially combined with the pressure on oil and gas to go away,” Moyer said. “Eighty-five percent of our property taxes come from oil, gas and coal”... Rio Blanco County participants said they’re working to diversify and expand businesses while also providing more amenities, such as child care and housing. “We don’t have a choice. We just have to move forward,” said Lisa Cook, Meeker town manager.” Click [here](#) to read the article.
- *Route Fifty* highlights the challenges and opportunities facing Delta County, CO and Coconino County, AZ, two counties that participated in last week’s NACo-NADO RF event. From the article: ““We decided that a win is growing basically one job at a time,” [said Delta County’s community and economic development Elyse Ackerman-Casselberry]. [She] says the economic development work in the county is designed to capitalize on existing strengths, like agriculture and energy sectors other than coal. “We decided at the front end that we didn't want to try to become something we are not already, that we wanted to get better at what we already do.”” Click [here](#) to read the article.
- **The Graphene Research Center in Wise County, VA is exploring opportunities for graphene, a super strong type of carbon that has many potential uses and applications,** reports the *Roanoke Times*. From the article: “Graphene is 200 times stronger than steel. It’s so thin that a million sheets of it would be only as thick as saran wrap, or a single gram of it could cover a little more than an acre of land. It can conduct electricity and heat better than any other material, and it’s also the most pliable. It could be used to make long-lasting batteries or incredibly durable smartphones that are as thin as paper...[T]he research center is focused on basic uses of graphene that would be appealing to, for example, the manufacturing industry.” Click [here](#) to read the article.
- **A new Wyoming-based company is exploring alternative uses of coal that have the potential to create new economic development opportunities for coal-rich regions,** reports *Laramie Live*. From the article: “Wyonics is an emerging company based at the University of Wyoming and has developed a method of processing coal products that can be accomplished with no burning, no corrosive chemicals, low to no waste, and has the potential to develop a brand-new “coal economy” in not just the Cowboy State, but worldwide...” “As the coal industry is focused right now,” [Caleb Hill, Ph.D., an assistant professor of chemistry at UW] said, “coal is an energy feedstock. You can put it through a process wherein you’re converting a bunch of unstable molecules to a very stable product, which is CO₂ and a bunch of other stuff, and that creates excess energy that is given off and utilized as electricity. What we’re trying to establish, as part of a new focus for that entire

industry, is to use coal not as an energy feedstock, but as a material feedstock. If you can intelligently dissolve it and separate the valuable components that are in there – and there are many – and recycle the IL, then you don't have to burn it. That option is less attractive than just utilizing what you have there as material," said Hill. Click [here](#) to read the article.

- *Daily Yonder* profiles **how the small town of Thomas, WV has used the arts and creative placemaking to redevelop and enhance its downtown, creating jobs and improving local quality of life**. From the article: "The city of Thomas, West Virginia, like a lot of municipalities in the Mountain State, owes its initial development to coal. Today, however, the downtown of the small town in eastern West Virginia has redeveloped in response to another economic sector – arts and culture...[Says Emily Wilson-Hauger, program director of Woodlands Development Group], "I've seen this happening in other parts of our region (Appalachia) heavily focused on the arts and economic opportunity through the arts and revitalization. These artists are shaping the communities they'd like to see, really revitalizing community around the arts. And it's important to say that there was already a great arts tradition, a great music tradition here to build on. This gives it a little boost."" Click [here](#) to read the article.
- **A new recycling plant in Martinsburg, WV is adding to the region's energy mix, using new technologies to convert trash into energy**, reports *Yahoo!Finance*. From the article: "In the heart of America's coal country, a cavernous new recycling plant is turning trash into a fuel that burns cleaner than coal, using a first-in-the-nation process hailing from Europe. Just don't call it a "replacement" for coal. In a region that remains fiercely protective of its embattled mining industry, Frank Celli, the chief executive officer of BioHiTech Global, weighs his words carefully when describing the potential of the \$33 million plant in Martinsburg, West Virginia, opened by his company last month. "We don't really like to think of ourselves as replacing coal," Celli said in an interview. "We like to think of ourselves as a clean supplement to coal."" Click [here](#) to read the article.

Funding Opportunities and Educational Resources

- [Recreation Economy for Rural Communities](#) is a new planning assistance program from the [U.S. Forest Service](#), the [Northern Border Regional Commission](#), and [EPA](#) to **help communities develop strategies and an action plan to revitalize their Main Streets through outdoor recreation**. Outdoor activities are increasingly popular across the United States. Communities can take advantage of this trend to revitalize Main Streets. By conserving forests and other natural lands and making them available for outdoor recreation, small towns can boost air quality and water quality and focus development downtown. Communities are invited to apply for planning assistance; the application deadline is **May 31**. Click [here](#) to learn more and to apply.
- The [Foundation for Overcoming Challenges and Utilizing Strengths \(FOCUS WV\) program](#) **catalyzes community-based brownfield projects in West Virginia by providing local project redevelopment stakeholders with technical and**

financial assistance to find solutions to existing and anticipated risks and liabilities associated with environmental unknowns. The FOCUS WV program provides grant funds to eligible, community-driven projects to address immediate barriers to progress in the redevelopment process. The FOCUS WV Program encourages brownfield redevelopment and enhanced economic development across West Virginia by providing resources to: enable communities to market and/or reposition challenging but strategic sites; enhance a community's ability to engage on strategic community development projects by understanding the resources available; and build the capacity of communities to develop and implement a redevelopment vision. Click [here](#) for more information and to apply by **May 13**.

- The [U.S. Department of Agriculture \(USDA\) Rural Development](#) is **accepting applications for grants to use broadband technology to improve access to healthcare and educational services in rural communities**. Rural Development will award grants ranging from \$50,000 to \$500,000 through its [Distance Learning and Telemedicine \(DLT\) Grant Program](#). The grants can be used to finance telecommunication equipment, computer networks, and advanced technologies to support job training, academic instruction, or access to specialized medical care in rural areas. The application deadline is **May 15**. For more details and to apply, click [here](#).
- The [U.S. Department of Agriculture \(USDA\) Rural Development](#) is **accepting applications for grants to support economic development in rural communities**. The grants are being made available through USDA's [Rural Community Development Initiative \(RCDI\) Program](#) in order to strengthen the rural economy. The grants are not provided directly to businesses or individuals. Instead, qualified intermediary organizations receiving RCDI grants will provide technical assistance and training to help nonprofit organizations and communities develop their capacity to undertake housing, community facility, or economic development projects. USDA also encourages applications that will support efforts to combat substance use disorders, including opioid misuse, in high-risk rural communities by strengthening their capacity to address prevention, treatment, and/or recovery needs. Grant amounts will range from \$50,000 to \$250,000. Nonprofits, low-income rural communities, and federally-recognized tribes are eligible to apply. Electronic applications must be submitted to [grants.gov](#) by **June 5**.
- Through the [Native American CDFI Assistance Program \(NACA Program\)](#), the Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) Fund provides (i) FA awards of up to \$1 million to Certified Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) serving Native American, Alaska Native, or Native Hawaiian populations or Native American areas defined as Federally-designated reservations, Hawaiian homelands, Alaska Native Villages and U.S. Census Bureau-designated Tribal Statistical Areas (collectively, "Native Communities") to build their financial capacity to lend to Eligible Markets and/or their Target Markets, and (ii) TA grants of up to \$150,000 to build Certified, Certifiable, and Emerging CDFIs' organizational capacity to serve Eligible Markets and/or their Target Markets and Sponsoring Entities ability to create Certified CDFIs that serve Native Communities. Click [here](#) to **read the NOFA and apply for Financial Assistance Awards or Technical Assistance Grants by June 6**.

- [HUD's Rural Capacity Building program](#) **enhances the capacity and ability of rural housing development organizations, Community Development Corporations (CDCs), Community Housing Development Organizations (CHDOs), local governments, and Indian tribes (eligible beneficiaries) to carry out affordable housing and community development activities in rural areas for the benefit of low- and moderate-income families and persons.** The Rural Capacity Building program achieves this by funding National Organizations with expertise in rural housing and rural community development who work directly to build the capacity of eligible beneficiaries. Applications are open for Rural Capacity Building for Community Development and Affordable Housing Grants (RCB) will be accepted **until June 11**. Click [here](#) to learn more in the NOFA.
- Grants from the [Farmers Market Promotion Program \(FMPP\)](#) **are available to increase domestic consumption of, and access to, locally and regionally produced agricultural products, and to develop new market opportunities for farm and ranch operations serving local markets** by developing, improving, expanding, and providing outreach, training, and technical assistance to, or assisting in the development, improvement, and expansion of, domestic farmers markets, roadside stands, community-supported agriculture programs, agritourism activities, and other direct producer-to-consumer market opportunities. The 2019 Grant application period is now open. Applications are due by **June 18**. Click [here](#) for more information and to apply.
- The [Department of Agriculture](#) will accept **applications for the Rural e-Connectivity Pilot Program (ReConnect Program)** beginning on **April 23, 2019**. Application deadlines will extend through **May 31** (deadline for grants) and through **July 12** (deadline for low-interest loans). \$600 million is available in total. Of this, \$200 million is available in grants, \$200 million is available in loan and grant combinations, and \$200 million is available for low-interest loans. This funding will be available nationwide to facilitate broadband deployment in rural areas that currently lack sufficient internet access. Telecommunications companies, rural electric cooperatives and utilities, internet service providers, and municipalities are all eligible to apply. Funds will be awarded to projects that have financially sustainable business models and that will bring high-speed broadband to rural homes, businesses, farms, ranches, and community facilities. Projects funded through this initiative must serve communities with fewer than 20,000 people that have no broadband service, or where existing service is slow. Further details are available [here](#).
- A guide from the National Governors Association (NGA) called "Rural Prosperity through the Arts and Creative Sector" **offers research insights and lessons learned from states that are harnessing the power of the arts to drive rural prosperity.** Produced by NGA's [Center for Best Practices](#), the guide offers creative policy solutions that draw on home-grown arts and cultural assets to address the urgent problems facing rural America. While there are many inspiring success stories to celebrate in rural areas, some regions also are contending with stark economic challenges, outmigration, education gaps, and infrastructure needs. By leveraging the creative industries, states can deploy proven strategies that help all rural communities

to thrive. This action guide is part of a collaborative project between NGA, the [National Endowment for the Arts](#) and [National Assembly of State Arts Agencies](#). Click [here](#) to access the guide.

- The [Central Appalachian Network](#) has **released a suite of reports and toolkits focusing on supporting clean energy programs and initiatives** across the region. Click the linked titles to access the "[Central Appalachia Clean Energy Policy Toolkit](#)," the "[Central Appalachia Clean Energy Economic Impact Inventory](#)," and the "[Communications and Messaging Report](#)."

Events and Trainings

- Join the [NADO Research Foundation](#) and the [Environmental Finance Center Network](#) on **May 16, 2019 at 2:00 p.m. ET** for "Connecting the Dots: Regional Development Organizations and Water Systems." **During this free webinar, you will hear how the South Plains Association of Governments in Texas and the Bluegrass Area Development District in Kentucky are working with local municipalities to support water and wastewater systems.** Through case studies, learn how these organizations collaborate with local municipalities to write and administer grant programs, conduct water planning efforts, and coordinate with state and federal partners. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.
- There are numerous and diverse types of financing tools and incentives available to communities for tackling the challenges of financing brownfields redevelopment. From tax-exempt bonds to district-based financing to revolving loan funds, the financing for brownfields redevelopment is often layered with multiple financing tools to produce the final project capital stack. With the passage of the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, communities now have a new federal incentive in their toolbox: [Opportunity Zones](#). Through a special partnership with [KSU TAB](#), [CCLR](#), and [CDFA](#), webcast panelists on **May 21 at 2 p.m. ET will explore how communities are preparing themselves for Opportunity Zone investments and with the release of new proposed regulations, how this emerging industry is beginning to mold its first deals.** Speakers will also examine how communities across the U.S. are integrating these new strategies with current and future redevelopment plans, with a specific focus on brownfields sites. Click [here](#) to learn more and register for free.
- [The Delta Regional Authority \(DRA\)](#) has partnered with the [U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration](#) and the [Appalachian Regional Commission](#) to make approximately \$28.5 million available in [National Dislocated Worker Reserve: Workforce Opportunity for Rural Communities \(WORC\) Grants](#) **to support workforce training and education in rural communities across the Delta and Appalachian regions.** To complement the federal partnership, DRA will host two technical assistance workshops, make an additional \$1.5 million in grants available in July 2019, and offer post-award technical assistance to grantees. The Delta Workforce Program will prioritize investing in communities and regions that have been negatively impacted by economic transition and recovered more slowly to help build their workforce pipelines and strengthen their economies. DRA will be hosting technical assistance workshops in Memphis, Tennessee on

June 4 and in Baton Rouge, Louisiana on **June 6**. The deadline for WORC Grants is **July 15** and the deadline for DRA workforce grants is **August 30**. For more information on these grants, workshops, and to apply please click [here](#).

- The [Appalachian Regional Commission](#) is now accepting applications for the inaugural class of the [Appalachian Leadership Institute](#), **a new leadership and economic development training opportunity for community leaders who currently live and/or work in Appalachia**. The Appalachian Leadership Institute is an extensive nine-month program focusing on skill-building, seminars, best practice reviews, field visits, mentoring, and networking. The curriculum will be anchored by six multi-day seminars around the region, followed by a capstone graduation in Washington, DC. Click [here](#) to learn more and apply by **June 1**.
- The **National Regional Transportation Conference will be held from June 17-19 in Columbus, Ohio**. The event provides peer-to-peer learning opportunities for regional transportation planners, state Department of Transportation representatives, and local and private sector partners working with multiple transportation modes. The conference also provides training and networking opportunities and covers a variety of rural and small metropolitan transportation topics. With hands-on workshops, best practice panels, and facilitated networking sessions that feature peer trainers and expert speakers, the conference will offer training for organizations and individuals just beginning to work in transportation, as well as those with more experience. Visit the [conference website](#) to learn more and to register.
- The first ever [National CEDS Forum](#) is scheduled for **June 18-20 in Columbus, Ohio**. This **event will bring together staff from Economic Development Districts, regional organizations, tribes, and federal agencies for a mix of training sessions, tours, and networking opportunities**. Participants will learn about the latest best practices and resources available to support their Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) planning, development, and implementation. Session topics will focus on: economic resilience and diversification; accessing and interpreting data; aligning the CEDS with other plans; outreach and engagement; Opportunity Zones; federal funding opportunities; and more. The forum will be co-located with the [National Regional Transportation Conference](#) and will include a handful of joint sessions and tours. For more information or to register for this event go [here](#). Registration ends **May 15**. If you have any questions, please contact Brett Schwartz at bschwartz@nado.org.
- **Save the date for "Appalachia Strong,"** an Appalachian Regional Commission Summit hosted by the State of North Carolina, scheduled for **September 4-6 in Asheville, NC**. More details will be available soon at www.arc.gov.

A Dose of Inspiration

- The Carr Creek Alumni Association, located in Knott County, KY **has developed a virtual visitor center for a five-county area in Eastern Kentucky and also has other big plans for the region**, reports the Mountain Association for Community

Economic Development in an online post. From the article: "Within the online portal, users can discover places to stay, eat, activities, festivals and events, as well as find each county's tourism pages. The website features over 600 photos taken by Malcolm Wilson, one of Eastern Kentucky's great photographers, who also helped develop the website. According to Glen Hale, Chairperson of the Carr Creek Alumni Association, they plan to convert the closed Carr Creek High School into a brick and mortar regional visitor center...Besides opening a regional welcome center in the old high school, they have plans drawn for the high school that also include a museum, a bed and breakfast, a restaurant the lake, and a community center." Click [here](#) to read the article.



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