

# Investing in Appalachia's Future

*The Appalachian Regional Commission's Five-Year Strategic Plan  
for Capitalizing on Appalachia's Opportunities  
2016–2020*



# Appalachian Regional Commission

November 2015

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## Federal Co-Chair

Earl F. Gohl

## States' Co-Chair

Governor Steven L. Beshear

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## Governors and State Alternates

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### ALABAMA

#### Governor Robert Bentley

Jim Byard Jr.  
Director  
Alabama Department of Economic and  
Community Affairs  
401 Adams Avenue  
P.O. Box 5690  
Montgomery, Alabama 36103

### GEORGIA

#### Governor Nathan Deal

Camila Knowles  
Commissioner  
Georgia Department of Community  
Affairs  
60 Executive Park South, NE  
Third Floor  
Atlanta, Georgia 30329

### KENTUCKY

#### Governor Steven L. Beshear

Tony Wilder  
Commissioner  
Kentucky Department for Local  
Government  
1024 Capital Center Drive  
Suite 340  
Frankfort, Kentucky 40601

### MARYLAND

#### Governor Larry Hogan

Linda C. Janey  
Assistant Secretary  
Maryland Department of Planning  
301 West Preston Street  
State Office Building  
Room 1101  
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

### MISSISSIPPI

#### Governor Phil Bryant

Robert G. "Bobby" Morgan II  
Policy Advisor  
Office of the Governor  
P.O. Box 139  
Jackson, Mississippi 39205

### NEW YORK

#### Governor Andrew M. Cuomo

Dierdre Scozzafava  
Deputy Secretary for Local Government  
Services  
New York Department of State  
1 Commerce Plaza  
99 Washington Avenue  
Suite 1015  
Albany, New York 12231

### NORTH CAROLINA

#### Governor Pat McCrory

Patricia Mitchell  
Assistant Secretary  
Rural Economic Development Division  
North Carolina Department of  
Commerce  
4301 Mail Service Center  
Raleigh, North Carolina 27699

### OHIO

#### Governor John Kasich

Jason Wilson  
Director  
Governor's Office of Appalachia  
141 College Lane  
Poland, Ohio 44514

### PENNSYLVANIA

#### Governor Tom Wolf

Sheri Collins  
Deputy Secretary  
Office of Technology and Innovation  
Pennsylvania Department of  
Community and Economic  
Development  
Commonwealth Keystone  
Building, Fourth Floor  
400 North Street  
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17120

### SOUTH CAROLINA

#### Governor Nikki Haley

Michael P. McInerney  
Director of External Affairs  
South Carolina Department of  
Commerce  
1201 Main Street  
Suite 1600  
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

### TENNESSEE

#### Governor Bill Haslam

Ted Townsend  
Chief of Staff  
Tennessee Department of Economic and  
Community Development  
312 Rosa L. Parks Avenue  
Tennessee Tower Building, 27th Floor  
Nashville, Tennessee 37243

### VIRGINIA

#### Governor Terry McAuliffe

William C. Shelton  
Director  
Virginia Department of Housing  
and Community Development  
Main Street Center  
600 East Main Street, Suite 300  
Richmond, Virginia 23219

### WEST VIRGINIA

#### Governor Earl Ray Tomblin

Mary Jo Thompson  
Director  
Community Development Division  
West Virginia Development Office  
State Capitol Complex  
Building 6, Room 553  
Charleston, West Virginia 25305

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### States' Washington Representatives

Jim McCleskey  
James Hyland

### Executive Director

Scott T. Hamilton

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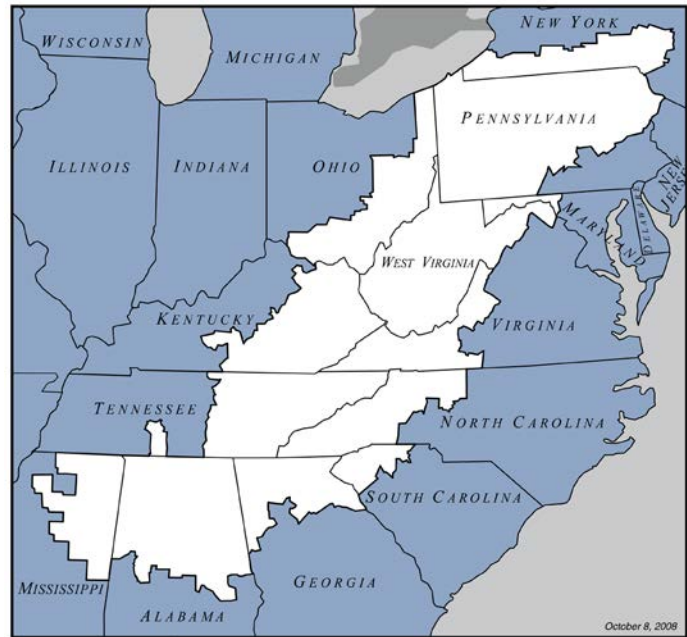
# Contents

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<b>Opportunity + Investment = Prosperity.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>ARC's 2016–2020 Strategic Plan .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Strategic Investment Goals .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Performance Targets .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Investing in Opportunities across the Region .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Investment Goal 1: Economic Opportunities .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Investment Goal 2: Ready Workforce .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Investment Goal 3: Critical Infrastructure .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Investment Goal 4: Natural and Cultural Assets.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Investment Goal 5: Leadership and Community Capacity .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Partnering with ARC.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Strengthening ARC's Capacity to Invest .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Regional Indicators of Progress.....</b>	<b>27</b>

## Appalachia

Appalachia, as defined in the legislation from which the Appalachian Regional Commission derives its authority, is a 205,000-square-mile region that follows the spine of the Appalachian Mountains from southern New York to northern Mississippi. The Appalachian Region includes all of West Virginia and parts of 12 other states: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. Appalachia is home to more than 25 million people.



## About the Appalachian Regional Commission

The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) is a regional economic development agency representing a unique partnership of federal, state, and local government. Established by an act of Congress in 1965, the Commission is composed of the governors of the 13 Appalachian states and a federal co-chair, who is appointed by the president. Local participation is provided through multi-county local development districts with support from community, business, and civic leaders. Each year Congress appropriates funds for Commission programs, which ARC allocates among its member states. The governors draw up annual state Appalachian strategies and select projects for approval by the federal co-chair. ARC has made investments in such essentials of comprehensive economic development as a safe and efficient highway system; education, job-training, and health care programs; water and sewer systems; and entrepreneurial and capital market development.

## Opportunity + Investment = Prosperity

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**Appalachia is a region of great opportunity.** For 50 years, the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) has invested in the efforts of its local, regional, and state partners to transform Appalachian communities and advance its mission of helping the Region achieve socioeconomic parity with the rest of the nation. These efforts have laid a foundation on which to build in pursuing current opportunities and in creating and strengthening the building blocks of future opportunities. Since 1965, ARC has made nearly 25,000 targeted investments and invested more than \$3.8 billion in the Region. These investments were matched by \$9 billion in other federal, state, and local funding sources. Since 1978, when ARC began tracking leveraging data, every dollar invested by ARC has leveraged an average of \$6.40 from the private sector.

The record of progress in the Region over the past few decades includes these accomplishments:

- The Region's poverty rate has decreased from nearly 31 percent in 1960 to 17 percent today; and the number of high-poverty counties (those with poverty rates one and a half times the national average) has decreased from 295 in 1960 to 90 today.
- Between 1970 and 2012, in counties that received ARC investments, employment increased at a 4.2 percent faster pace, and per capita income increased at a 5.5 percent faster pace, than in similar counties that did not receive ARC investments.
- The percentage of adults in the Region with a high school diploma has increased by more than 150 percent, and students in Appalachia now graduate from high school at nearly the same rate as the national average.
- The percentage of homes in Appalachia with complete plumbing has increased from 86.4 percent in 1970 to 96.8 percent today, in line with the national rate of 98.0 percent.
- The infant mortality rate in the Region has been reduced by two-thirds since 1960.

Despite this progress, continued investment is needed. The Appalachian Region's economy has historically been dominated by a few industries, including mining, textiles, tobacco, and timber. Dependence on these industries as economic drivers and employers has left many communities, particularly those in the most economically distressed counties, vulnerable to economic fluctuations as their businesses face increasing competition, specialization, and market changes.

ARC investments can address the challenges associated with this economic transition:

- **The need for more jobs.** Job creation is increasing more slowly in the Region than in the nation as a whole. The number of jobs in the nation has jumped 83 percent since 1975, while the number of jobs in Appalachia has increased only 50 percent over the same time period. In addition, the Region's labor force participation rate remains low (59.5 percent in the Region compared with 64.2 percent nationally).
- **The need for higher educational attainment.** While overall educational attainment rates in the Region have improved over the past 50 years, Appalachia continues to fall behind the nation on this measure.

Fifty-seven percent of Americans have some post-secondary education; less than half of Appalachians (48 percent) have reached that education level.

- **The need for more investment to improve health status.** The health status of the Region’s residents continues to decline: the mortality rate in Appalachia is 27 percent higher than the national average, and the Region has disproportionately higher rates of cancer, diabetes, substance abuse, and obesity.
- **The need for more investment in areas of persistent and severe economic distress.** Nearly a fourth of Appalachia’s 420 counties still face high poverty rates, low per capita market income, and high unemployment rates.

ARC is committed to investing in Appalachia’s future by helping the Region’s communities seize opportunities that both reduce disparities and advance prosperity. The Commission’s unique federal-state partnership enables flexible community- and state-driven project development as well as opportunities to advance regional initiatives and model practices. ARC supports the efforts of local communities across the Region to transform their economies by working with a network of local development districts and other local partners. ARC also partners with private and nonprofit organizations, regional and national philanthropic institutions, and federal agencies to leverage its resources for the benefit of Appalachia’s people and communities. Together with its local, state, and national partners, ARC is making progress toward achieving its vision:

***Appalachia is a region of great opportunity that will achieve socioeconomic parity with the nation.***

## **ARC’s 2016–2020 Strategic Plan**

Every four to six years, ARC engages in a process of evaluating its strategic direction and setting a course for the future. ARC’s 2016–2020 Strategic Plan was timed to coincide with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ARC’s inception in 1965, and was developed following a year-long assessment of socioeconomic trends in Appalachia and a review of past ARC investments completed for the report *Appalachia Then and Now: Examining Changes to the Appalachian Region Since 1965*. The Commission then launched an intensive seven-month process of engaging with local development districts, community leaders, and residents of the Region, as well as with ARC state and Commission staff, to gather input on issues and opportunities critical to Appalachia’s future. With the input from these stakeholders, via topical focus groups, regional listening sessions, and a widely publicized public survey, ARC identified the most significant opportunities for moving the Region’s economy forward and the most important building blocks or capacities that would need to be created or strengthened for those opportunities to be advanced. The message received from more than 3,000 Appalachians committed to helping advance the Region was positive and forward-looking: There is a wide range of new economic opportunities in the Region in growing sectors—including local food systems, tourism, health care, manufacturing, and diversified energy—and the Region has a foundation of strong and valued natural and cultural assets to build on.

### **Regional Input**

**155**  
participants  
in nine **Focus**  
**Groups**

**531**  
participants  
in five  
**Listening**  
**Sessions**

**2,411**  
respondents  
to **Online**  
**Survey**

Input from the Region also suggests that ARC is viewed as a strong partner that can:

- Invest in new economic opportunities brought forward by the Region’s entrepreneurs.
- Share exemplary practices from inside and outside the Region that community and regional leaders can adapt and replicate in their communities.
- Support the building blocks of a more prosperous Region, including a healthy, educated, and skilled population; world-class infrastructure; well-tended and well-used natural resources; and communities with the capacity to plan, lead, and innovate for the future.

With this in mind, ARC seeks to make investments and use the full range of its resources and tools to help transform the Region’s assets and opportunities into real results by advancing this core mission:

***ARC’s mission is to innovate, partner, and invest to build community capacity and strengthen economic growth in Appalachia.***

## Strategic Investment Goals

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ARC has identified five strategic investment goals to advance its vision and mission and to guide its work over the next five years. These goals reflect consensus among local, state, and federal partners on the most critical investment opportunities in Appalachia. While the investment goals are distinct, they are also interdependent, with progress on one goal often requiring investment in another.

### **Goal 1: Economic Opportunities**

Invest in entrepreneurial and business development strategies that strengthen Appalachia’s economy.

### **Goal 2: Ready Workforce**

Improve the education, knowledge, skills, and health of residents to work and succeed in Appalachia.

### **Goal 3: Critical Infrastructure**

Invest in critical infrastructure—especially broadband; transportation, including the Appalachian Development Highway System; and water/wastewater systems.

### **Goal 4: Natural and Cultural Assets**

Strengthen Appalachia’s community and economic development potential by leveraging the Region’s natural and cultural heritage assets.

### **Goal 5: Leadership and Community Capacity**

Build the capacity and skills of current and next-generation leaders and organizations to innovate, collaborate, and advance community and economic development.

## Performance Targets

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ARC holds itself and its local, state, and regional partners accountable for setting and achieving the performance outcomes associated with ARC-supported investments. ARC measures the effectiveness of investments by tracking progress on six key performance targets. (Targets are based on level annual appropriations of \$70 million over the five-year timeframe.)

<b>Annual Performance Target</b>	<b>Five-Year Performance Target</b>
2,500 businesses created and/or strengthened	12,500 businesses created and/or strengthened
20,000 jobs created and/or retained	100,000 jobs created and/or retained
Ratio of 6 to 1 in leveraged private investment	Ratio of 6 to 1 in leveraged private investment
22,000 students, workers, and leaders improved	110,000 students, workers, and leaders improved
22,000 businesses and households with access to improved infrastructure	110,000 businesses and households with access to improved infrastructure
250 communities with enhanced capacity	1,250 communities with enhanced capacity



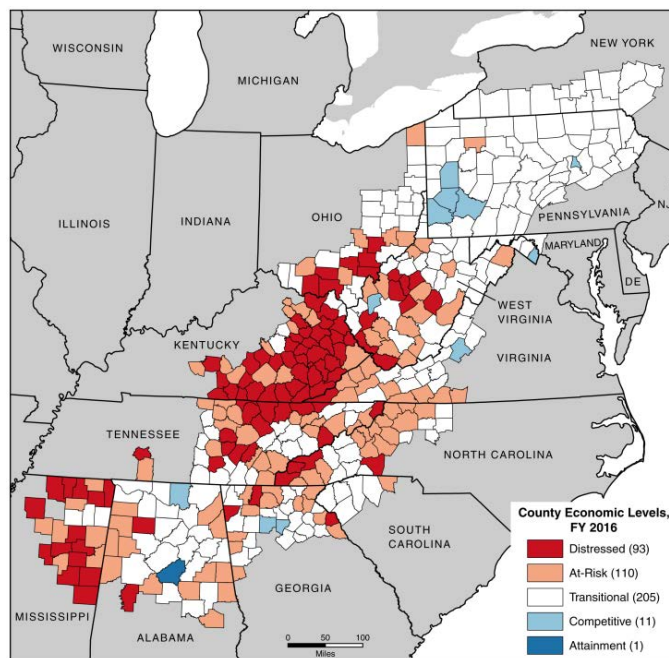
## Investing in Opportunities across the Region

There are many successful projects across the Region supported by ARC and its state partners. These success stories, many of which are located in economically distressed counties, reflect the types of investments ARC will pursue as it implements its 2016–2020 Strategic Plan. Fifteen such projects (a number of which benefit distressed areas in the Appalachian Region) are highlighted in this plan. They illustrate the different types of projects supported by the Appalachian states (but do not represent the range of projects that each state invests in).

Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3	Goal 4	Goal 5
Accelerating Appalachia’s Manufacturing Resurgence (GA, PA, TN)	Advancing Student Achievement (AL, TN, regional)	Harnessing Broadband’s Last Mile (MD)	Promoting Nature Tourism, Outdoor Recreation, and Economic Impacts (PA)	Powering Philanthropic Partnerships (regional)
Spurring Business Growth in Clean Energy (OH)	Strengthening the Health-Care Sector through Career Pathways (MS)	Improving Critical Infrastructure in Distressed Communities (KY)	Working Together to Invest in Cultural Heritage Resources (VA)	Facilitating Community-Wide Development with Small Grants (WV)
Growing Capital for Businesses (WV, regional)	Advancing the Next Generation of Green-Collar Workers (NY)	Overcoming Regional Isolation through the ADHS (regional, KY)	Discovering Local Food, Farms, and Flavor (regional, SC)	Building Community Capacity to Plan for the Future (NC)

ARC will continue to target investments to the most economically distressed areas of the Region—those with high unemployment rates, high poverty rates, and low per capita market income compared with national averages. Reducing or eliminating the number of distressed counties and areas is a top priority for the Commission and the Appalachian states. ARC investments are a means to that end.

**County Economic Status in the Appalachian Region, FY 2016**



By making investments that advance the goals of ARC’s 2016–2020 Strategic Plan, the Commission will continue a tradition of helping communities capitalize on their unique opportunities as well as addressing broader opportunities that impact people and communities Region-wide. For example, ARC’s support for the Shaping Our Appalachian Region (SOAR) initiative in eastern Kentucky shows the power of leveraging ARC’s resources with forward-thinking leadership, financial support from other regional and public partners, and the energy and innovation of local residents.

### **Cultivating Community Leadership through SOAR**

**SOAR (Shaping Our Appalachian Region)** is a model for strengthening community economic development capacity in the Appalachian Region. In 2013, Kentucky Governor Steven Beshear and Kentucky 5<sup>th</sup> District Congressman Hal Rogers joined together to create an initiative that would help eastern Kentucky assess current challenges and leverage activities already under way to capture regional development opportunities and diversify the region’s economy. At the heart of this initiative was a commitment to community engagement—in Governor Beshear’s words, “To make real progress in eastern Kentucky, we need the input, collaboration, and involvement of the people who live and work hard there every day.” The initial convening in December 2013 attracted more than 1,500 people from across eastern Kentucky. Ten working groups were charged with taking the ideas from the convening and engaging the region in deeper discussions about the challenges and opportunities in areas such as business incubation, broadband development, and regional collaboration and identity. Acting on one working-group recommendation, Governor Beshear and Congressman Rogers announced, in August 2015, the launch of the first phase of the KentuckyWired I-Way broadband network—a statewide system that will begin in eastern Kentucky and spread across the state, helping reduce barriers to education and economic development by providing affordable, high-quality Internet service. ARC’s support for, and financial investment in, SOAR is establishing a commitment to help eastern Kentucky diversify its economy and make a positive economic transition.



## Investment Goal 1: Economic Opportunities

### ***Invest in entrepreneurial and business development strategies that strengthen Appalachia's economy.***

Over the past 50 years, ARC investments, coupled with significant leveraged investments from public- and private-sector partners, have helped improve economic outcomes across the Region. However, work remains to bring the Appalachian Region to economic parity with the rest of the country. Creating opportunities for local ventures by supporting entrepreneurial and business development in existing and emerging sectors can help communities transform their economies. To achieve the greatest impact, ARC's investments in entrepreneurial development will create and strengthen the ecosystems that provide broad-based support for business development, especially in economically distressed counties and areas. Investments will also support business development targeted to sectors that connect and build on local and regional assets, have growth potential, and offer better-quality jobs for the Region's workers. ARC's investments can also encourage renewed innovation and competitiveness in manufacturing, a regional economic mainstay. ARC's aim is to support businesses that provide products and services to meet growing national and international demand. ARC will advance all of these efforts in close partnership with federal agencies, the private sector, and regional and national philanthropies.

#### Action Objectives

**1. Strengthen entrepreneurial ecosystems and support for existing businesses.**

Locally owned businesses are important drivers of the Region's economy. To succeed, these ventures need a strong community environment that encourages and supports entrepreneurship and local business development through technical assistance, incubation and acceleration, capital access, mentoring, networking, business-ownership transition, and other types of support.

**2. Support the startup and growth of businesses, particularly in targeted sectors.**

In order to compete in a global marketplace, the Region must diversify its economic base. Supporting entrepreneurship and business development in targeted sectors that have growth potential and that build on local and regional assets provides the greatest opportunity for building a strong Appalachian economy. These businesses also offer better job opportunities for Appalachia's workers. Targeted sectors can include manufacturing, diversified energy, tourism, local food systems, and health care, as well as other sectors with growth potential.

**3. Enhance the competitiveness of the Region's manufacturers.**

Appalachia's historically strong manufacturing sector offers significant potential for growth. Developing networks and supporting innovative manufacturing processes and business plans will enhance the sector's economic competitiveness.

**4. Promote export strategies to connect start-up and established businesses with external and global markets.**

Today's global marketplace gives local businesses the opportunity to sell goods and services on a much broader scale. Demand from outside the Region for both manufactured goods and services has strong potential for growth. Helping Appalachian businesses tap into this growing external demand will contribute to their long-term success.

### Outcome Measurement

Goal 1 primarily addresses ARC’s performance targets to create and strengthen businesses, create and retain jobs, and leverage private investment. ARC investments in Goal 1 projects generate additional outcomes tied to specific strategies and activities that contribute to regional success. The success stories that follow illustrate a range of outcomes and demonstrate the results ARC seeks through its investments.

## Investing in Economic Opportunities

### Goal 1 Success Stories

#### ***Accelerating Appalachia’s Manufacturing Resurgence***

Manufacturing is poised to grow again in the Appalachian Region with the help of the Investing in Manufacturing Communities Partnership initiative, led by the National Economic Council with coordinated support from ARC and ten federal agencies. In 2013, manufacturing clusters in three Appalachian areas—the Tennessee Valley, northwest Georgia, and Pittsburgh—were among 24 manufacturing communities granted access to over \$1 billion in assistance. These clusters were selected because of their workforce and training capacity, advanced research strategies, infrastructure and site-development alignment, existing supply-chain support, export-promotion strategies, and access to capital.

The Tennessee cluster is accelerating the development of automotive manufacturing through an experienced collaborative that includes universities, laboratories, and private-sector groups and organizations. The Georgia cluster is working to support a reinvention of the local carpet and flooring industry, bringing together local government, the private sector, and community colleges to create a network of partners to attract and encourage renewed manufacturing. The Pittsburgh cluster will build on the region’s historic strengths in metals manufacturing by using innovative technologies such as 3D printing, robotics, and advanced materials. Public- and private-sector partners plan to launch an apprenticeship program for workers in manufacturing startups and to create hardware design centers to foster promising product-oriented innovators and encourage "making" as a viable career option.

#### ***Spurring Business Growth in Clean Energy***

In a region often characterized by a shortage of support for business growth, the Ohio University Innovation Center (OUIIC) is part of a robust entrepreneurial ecosystem in Appalachian Ohio that provides “assistance that can help a company thrive,” according to director Jennifer Simon. Partnering with TechGROWTH Ohio, the East Central Ohio Tech Angel Fund, and Ohio University, OUIIC connects entrepreneurs with resources that include investors, technology, business support, executive leadership, and research.

Many of the center’s clients, including Third Sun Solar, Ecolibrium Solar, and ECO2Capture, are on the forefront of tech-based clean energy innovations. With OUIIC support, companies graduating from the program directly created more than 130 area jobs. And with 86 percent of its clients still in business, OUIIC



demonstrates the economic impact a business incubator can have when it focuses its entrepreneurial support services on a promising sector like clean energy.

***Growing Capital for Businesses***

Appalachia’s entrepreneurs need growth capital. Thanks to the newly created Appalachian Community Capital (ACC), they can now tap into local funds that focus on building an Appalachian innovation ecosystem. Initially seeded with a foundational ARC investment of \$3.45 million in equity and operating capital, ACC successfully raised \$12 million from a diverse group of national and local investors that are committed to Appalachia but are also focused on making a profit. Since its inception, ACC has invested \$11 million in five community loan fund and development finance institution partners that support new and growing businesses. One of the businesses supported by a local loan fund was the Hughes Supply Company in Beckley, West Virginia, which used a working capital loan to diversify its clients: instead of supplying only to coal-mining companies, Hughes now also supplies to water treatment plants and school districts.



## Investment Goal 2: Ready Workforce

### ***Increase the education, knowledge, skills, and health of residents to work and succeed in Appalachia.***

A healthy, skilled, and ready workforce is a building block for a more prosperous Appalachian Region. Education, particularly postsecondary education, is a key component of the business and entrepreneurial ecosystem and often a primary economic driver. Investments by ARC and its partners aim to connect education, workforce, and business interests in a seamless system that prepares the Region’s young people to succeed in existing and emerging sectors, and creates new opportunities for workers transitioning to new employment. These efforts must begin with strong educational programming and institutions, and ensure that all students have the basic skills, as well as the soft skills, needed for productive employment or entrepreneurship. Particular emphasis will be placed on providing education and training matched to the Region’s current sectors and jobs, while increasing access to advanced skills training for the jobs of the future.

The health status of Appalachia’s residents is also closely tied to the Region’s economic health. A healthy community has increased prospects for business development, civic entrepreneurship, and quality of life. ARC will leverage its resources and partner with other public, private, and nonprofit organizations to advocate for and address—through evidence-based and innovative practices—the challenges posed by poor health conditions, inefficient health-care infrastructure, and other health barriers that keep residents from being active and productive workers.

#### Action Objectives

**1. Develop and support educational programs and institutions to prepare students for postsecondary education and the workforce.**

Educational attainment and achievement in Appalachia has improved over the last 50 years; however, more work is needed for the Region to achieve parity with the rest of the nation. It is essential to develop and support early childhood education, as well as primary and secondary programs and institutions, so youth in Appalachia graduate from high school prepared for postsecondary education, training, and entry into the workforce. Investments in postsecondary education—including increased distance learning opportunities, upgraded classroom technology, and improved science facilities—are also needed.

**2. Support programs that provide basic and soft-skills training to prepare workers for employment.**

A ready workforce includes workers that have the basic knowledge and skills—such as literacy, numeracy, and problem solving—that are needed to succeed in the workplace. In addition, workers need soft skills—such as communication, time management, and interpersonal skills—in order to obtain and maintain employment. Investing in activities that build the basic and soft skills of Appalachia’s workforce will help retain, attract, and grow businesses in Appalachia.

**3. Develop and support career-specific education and skills training for students and workers, especially in sectors that are experiencing growth locally and regionally and that provide opportunities for advancement.**

Appalachia’s economy is undergoing transition. New employment opportunities are emerging as the Region’s economic sectors grow and change. However, with these opportunities come new demands on local workers’ skills and knowledge. For workers to take advantage of new employment opportunities they must have access to and engage in career-specific education and skills training that can help them succeed and advance on the job.

**4. Increase local residents’ access to STEAM and other skills training on state-of-the-art technology and processes across all educational levels.**

A number of emerging sectors in Appalachia, including manufacturing, health care, and energy, require a workforce with strong science, technology, engineering, arts, and math (STEAM) skills. In addition, these sectors require a workforce trained in using cutting-edge technology. For workers to take advantage of employment opportunities in growing sectors, they must have both the foundational knowledge and the relevant technological skills needed to succeed.

**5. Improve access to affordable, high-quality health care for workers and their families.**

Many parts of Appalachia, particularly economically distressed counties and areas, are underserved by health-care professionals and health-care facilities. Investments that increase access to quality, affordable health care are critical to the Region, as a healthy workforce is essential for Appalachia to compete in today’s economy.

**6. Use proven public health practices and establish sustainable clinical services to address health conditions that affect the Region’s economic competitiveness.**

The Region’s residents, particularly those in economically distressed counties and areas, experience disproportionately high rates of chronic disease, reducing workforce participation and productivity. The Region must invest in proven strategies to reduce those disparities while innovating to meet the unique needs of Appalachia. Initiatives that improve the health of the Region’s residents will help ensure a ready and able workforce, increasing the Region’s overall economic competitiveness.

**7. Develop and support sustainable programs that remove barriers to participating in the workforce.**

A number of factors—such as access to reliable transportation, affordable elder or child care, and health services—can affect workforce participation. Developing and supporting programs that are specifically designed to reduce employment barriers and increase workforce participation will help ensure a ready and able workforce in Appalachia.

**Outcome Measurement**

Goal 2 primarily addresses ARC’s performance target to educate and prepare students and workers to participate in the Region’s economic opportunities. ARC investments generate additional outcomes tied to specific strategies and activities that contribute to regional success. The success stories that follow illustrate a range of outcomes and demonstrate the results ARC seeks through its investments.

### Goal 2 Success Stories

#### ***Advancing Student Achievement***

Imagine increasing college-going rates for Appalachian high school graduates by double digits for only a few hundred dollars per student. The Appalachian Higher Education (AHE) Network is doing just that. Inspired by the Ohio Appalachian Center for Higher Education, the AHE Network, with support from ARC, has grown through challenge grants and leveraged funding from private businesses and foundations to include centers in ten states. Focused on addressing the emotional and social barriers to college and tailored to the local context and culture, this highly regarded program has been replicated in 264 high schools across Appalachia, and has served more than 35,000 students to date. In Alabama, 67 percent of seniors in schools served by the program have graduated from high school and enrolled in higher education or joined the military; in Tennessee, that number was 60 percent.



#### ***Strengthening the Health-Care Sector through Career Pathways***

Across the northern Mississippi region, Itawamba Community College (ICC) is connecting students to career pathways as a way to address the shortage of skilled allied health workers. An ARC investment of \$250,000 provided equipment for a new allied health education center designed to address the shortage of health-care workers in the Region. The center is projected to serve more than 700 students, with 375 or more expected to earn degrees, over its first two years of operation alone. These students will fill the growing need for trained workers at health-care facilities across ICC's service area.



#### ***Advancing the Next Generation of Green-Collar Workers***

Alfred State College's Wellsville campus in Appalachian New York is helping prepare the next generation of green-collar workers. A \$150,000 ARC grant helped establish a new green-building laboratory to train students in the latest renewable-energy systems. During the two-year project, 145 students enrolled, 98 completed training, and 96 obtained employment or advanced their careers. A similar grant for an alternative fuels laboratory allowed the campus to incorporate the latest alternative fuel systems into one space, and educate local technicians and the general public through workshops and demonstrations of emerging technologies. Over the two-year course of the project, 199 students enrolled, 90 trainees completed training, and 98 percent of the trainees obtained employment or advanced their careers.





## Investment Goal 3: Critical Infrastructure

### ***Invest in critical infrastructure—especially broadband; transportation, including the Appalachian Development Highway System; and water/wastewater systems.***

ARC investments in infrastructure have helped reduce the Region’s isolation, spur economic activity, and improve public health and safety. In order to compete in the global economy, Appalachia must continue to develop and improve the infrastructure necessary for economic development, including broadband and telecommunications; basic infrastructure, such as water and wastewater systems; diversified energy; housing; and transportation, including the Appalachian Development Highway System (ADHS). ARC will also support investments in multi-modal transportation systems that strengthen connections to regional, national, and global markets.

ARC infrastructure investments will address local community needs as well as strategic, innovative approaches to economic development. ARC will provide leadership in helping communities develop long-term plans for effective development and deployment of the infrastructure needed to support economic competitiveness and quality of life. To create the greatest impact, ARC will leverage resources and bring together government agencies and the private sector to build the critical infrastructure needed to strengthen the Region’s economy.

#### Action Objectives

**1. Promote the productive and strategic use of broadband and other telecommunications infrastructure throughout the Region to increase connectivity and strengthen economic competitiveness.**

Telecommunications infrastructure can help reduce Appalachia’s isolation and connect its communities with information and markets around the world. But many of the Region’s communities, particularly those in distressed counties and areas, lack access to reliable and affordable telecommunications infrastructure. Investing in telecommunications for these communities, and supporting its productive use, will help strengthen Appalachia’s economic competitiveness.

**2. Ensure that communities have adequate basic infrastructure to implement their community and economic development objectives.**

Communities need adequate water and wastewater systems, diversified energy sources, and quality affordable housing to sustain businesses, generate jobs, protect public health, and ensure a basic standard of living for residents. Many Appalachian communities continue to lack this basic infrastructure, compromising their ability to pursue broad community economic development objectives. Investing in basic infrastructure that can help advance local community and economic objectives is an investment in the economic potential of the Region, as well as in the health of its residents.

**3. Support the construction and adaptive reuse of business-development sites and public facilities to generate economic growth and revitalize local economies.**

Communities must have adequate sites and facilities, tailored to the specific needs of the Region’s growing sectors, in order to sustain and grow the businesses that generate local jobs. Investing to create and improve technology centers, incubators, shared work spaces, and commercial, industrial, health-care, creative, and educational sites and facilities, and to reclaim and reuse brownfields, is an important community economic development strategy.

**4. Complete the Appalachian Development Highway System and construct local access roads to strengthen links between transportation networks and economic development.**

Investment in the Appalachian Development Highway System has significantly reduced the Region’s isolation and opened up opportunities for economic growth. Completing the remaining portions and constructing local access roads will further connect the Region to strategic regional, national, and global economic opportunities.

**5. Invest in intermodal transportation planning and infrastructure that builds on the ADHS and maximizes the Region’s access to domestic and international markets.**

In order to compete in a global economy, Appalachia must have reliable access to domestic and international markets. Connecting the ADHS to rail, waterway, and aviation routes can help link Appalachian businesses to regional, national, and international markets.

**Outcome Measurement**

Goal 3 primarily addresses ARC’s performance target to increase access to improved infrastructure for businesses and households. ARC investments generate additional outcomes tied to specific strategies and activities that contribute to regional success. The success stories that follow illustrate a range of outcomes and demonstrate the results ARC seeks through its investments.

## Investing in Critical Infrastructure

### Goal 3 Success Stories

#### ***Harnessing Broadband’s Last Mile***

At the peak of the recent recession, some communities in Garrett County, a rural county in the far western corner of Maryland, lacked adequate access to telecommunications services. ARC helped fund a study that examined options for improving broadband services in the county, and, based on the study’s findings, provided funding for a “last mile” broadband access project that will serve as many as 2,450 businesses and homes in the county. The project, which started in 2013 and is expected to be completed in 2017, uses a wireless spectrum technology that can reach around hills and through foliage—crucial for rural areas. When the broadband system is completed, it will be operated by an Internet service provider that will maintain the service and upgrade the system as needed, through fees generated from users.

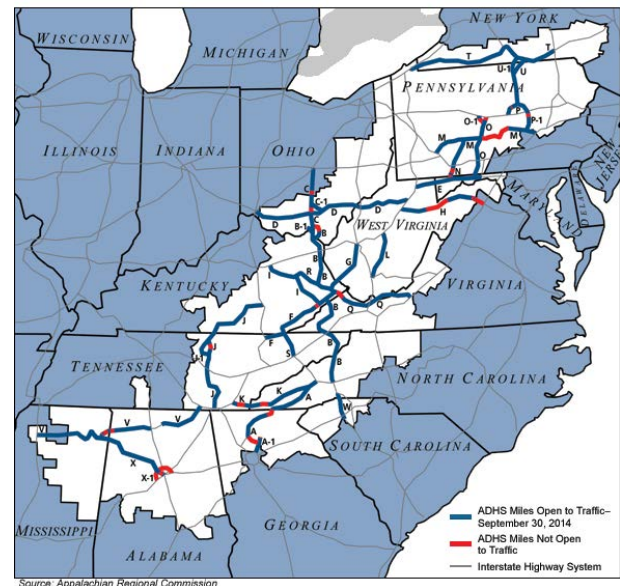
### ***Improving Critical Infrastructure in Distressed Communities***

Many communities in Appalachia, particularly those in areas of high economic distress, have inadequate and outdated infrastructure. ARC, recognizing that safe and efficient infrastructure is critical to advancing local economies, partners with communities in the Region to construct new facilities and upgrade current ones. In 2010, the City of Campton, in economically distressed Wolfe County, Kentucky, needed to construct a new water-treatment facility in order to meet water-quality standards. The city had obtained a grant and a loan from USDA Rural Development, as well as an investment from the Kentucky Infrastructure Authority, but lacked the additional funding needed to complete the \$7 million project. Using special funds designated for projects in distressed counties, ARC provided the \$300,000 the city needed to complete the project. As a result of the project, a total of 1,852 households and 152 commercial customers received improved water service. The new plant also provided the capacity for commercial development along an Appalachian Development Highway System (ADHS) corridor.



### ***Overcoming Regional Isolation through the ADHS***

In 1965, Congress, recognizing the importance of overcoming the Appalachian Region's geographic isolation, authorized the construction of the Appalachian Development Highway System. The ADHS enhances economic development opportunities in the Region by providing access to markets, jobs, health care, and education. Since 1965, more than \$9 billion in federal dollars has been obligated for the 3,090-mile ADHS, which is now 89 percent complete or under construction. Corridor Q in Pike County, Kentucky, stretches 16.5 miles from U.S. 23 to the Virginia state line, where it connects with the Virginia Coalfields Expressway. The first half of the corridor was opened in 2014, paving the way for new economic development as well as improved transportation efficiency and safety in the county.



## Investment Goal 4: Natural and Cultural Assets

### ***Strengthen Appalachia’s community and economic development potential by leveraging the Region’s natural and cultural heritage assets.***

Appalachia’s natural and cultural heritage assets are significant building blocks for a more prosperous future. They contribute to a sense of identity for Appalachians and provide the basis for sustainable, place-based economic development in many current and emerging sectors. Investments in natural and cultural assets can catalyze other economic development activities in the Region, including the growth of entrepreneurial ventures and high-tech companies, and create an environment that helps attract and retain workers. ARC has an opportunity to promote community and regional planning that takes a long-term view of local assets and emphasizes the balanced use of those assets to generate sustainable economic benefits for local communities.

ARC will work with partners to leverage the productive use of these assets in support of existing and emerging economic opportunities throughout the Region. The restoration and development of natural and cultural assets has the potential to become a critical economic driver, particularly in economically distressed counties and areas.

#### Action Objectives

**1. Preserve and strengthen existing natural assets in support of economic opportunities that generate local and regional benefits.**

Natural assets, such as forests, land, water, and mountains, provide a strong base for the Appalachian economy. Restoring assets and providing for responsible stewardship of these assets, through activities such as improvement of mine-impacted lands, clean-up of streams and other waterways, and sustainable agriculture and forestry, can unlock even greater economic development potential for the Region.

**2. Preserve and strengthen existing cultural assets through strategic investments that advance local and regional economic opportunities.**

The Region’s cultural assets, as much as its natural assets, must be preserved and strengthened in order to fully unlock their development potential. Investments that strengthen cultural assets, such as helping maintain cultural traditions and improving or developing unique historic, artistic, and heritage sites—all of which attract tourists, new residents, and businesses to the Region—should be connected to strategic economic development opportunities.

**3. Support strategic investments in natural and cultural heritage resources to advance local economic growth.**

Investing in economic development activities that leverage natural and cultural heritage resources is a recognized way to strengthen local communities and economies. Strategic investment in activities such as developing and connecting regional multi-use trails and cultural heritage sites generates interest from residents and tourists alike and results in substantial economic impact in the Region.

**4. Support preservation and stewardship of community character to advance local economic growth.**

Appalachian communities are rich in history and heritage, yet many lack the resources to maintain or strengthen the unique community character that could help them advance their local economy. Strategic investments in downtown redevelopment, gateway communities, historic districts, and other unique community features can help revitalize and enrich local economies.

**Outcome Measurement**

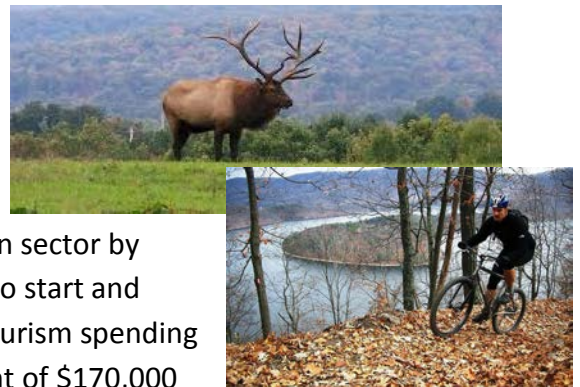
Goal 4 primarily addresses ARC’s performance target to create and strengthen businesses through initiatives tied to asset development. Goal 4 also addresses ARC’s performance target to enhance community capacity. ARC investments generate additional outcomes tied to specific strategies and activities that contribute to regional success. The success stories that follow illustrate a range of outcomes and demonstrate the results that ARC seeks through its investments.

## Investing in Natural and Cultural Assets

### Goal 4 Success Stories

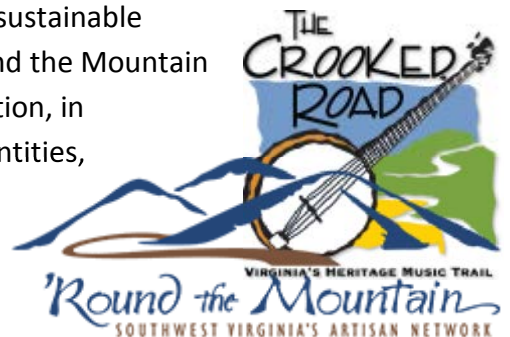
#### ***Promoting Nature Tourism, Outdoor Recreation, and Economic Impacts***

Pennsylvania, like much of Appalachia, is rich in rolling mountains, river valleys, and other natural resources, and ARC has helped the state invest in its vast natural assets. Over the past decade, the 12-county Pennsylvania Wilds area, whose wide range of activities includes hiking, boating, and elk watching, has used \$384,000 in ARC investments to grow the nature tourism and outdoor recreation sector by connecting entrepreneurs and artisans to the resources they need to start and grow businesses. The result is one of the fastest-growing rates of tourism spending in the Commonwealth. In southern Pennsylvania, an ARC investment of \$170,000 helped the Southern Alleghenies Planning and Development Commission create the Allegrippis Trails System, a 33-mile multi-use trail on the banks of the state’s largest lake. The trail attracts 25,000 to 40,000 mountain-bike enthusiasts annually, and spring hotel and campground occupancies in the area have increased 109 percent.



#### ***Working Together to Invest in Cultural Heritage Resources***

Communities in Southwest Virginia are working together to build a more sustainable creative economy, building on the success of the Crooked Road and ‘Round the Mountain initiatives. Facilitated by the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Foundation, in collaboration with more than 100 state, regional, and local government entities, nonprofit organizations, and private-sector partners, these initiatives are welcoming visitors and new businesses to the 19-county region, while preserving, protecting, and interpreting the area’s rich cultural heritage



and natural assets. The Crooked Road, Virginia's 330-mile heritage music trail, showcases the uniqueness and vitality of the area's heritage music. 'Round the Mountain is a regional artisan network of more than 550 artisans, craft venues, and agritourism businesses centered around Heartwood, a 29,000-square-foot artisan gateway in Abingdon, Virginia, that serves as a sales center for local crafts and a hub for this unique economic development initiative. ARC has invested more than \$8 million over 12 years in research, marketing, heritage-site improvement, and youth-development programs. Over time, the region's economy has come to life. From 2004 to 2012, the region saw a nearly \$300 million increase in annual travel expenditures and significant growth in local lodging and meal tax revenues.

### ***Discovering Local Food, Farms, and Flavor***

ARC developed the Bon Appetit! Appalachia promotional campaign in 2014 with the support of its Tourism Advisory Council, which includes tourism leaders from all 13 Appalachian states. The campaign seeks to capitalize on the Region's agricultural heritage and burgeoning local food movement to increase tourism in the Region by promoting local farms, farmers markets, restaurants, and other culinary destinations to targeted audiences. The effort includes a social media marketing "cookbook" and facilitated training workshops to help food and farm entrepreneurs reach new customers; a coordinated social media campaign; and a print and Web-based map highlighting the most distinctive local food destinations throughout Appalachia. The interactive Web site features approximately 650 destinations across the Region, including the Happy Cow Creamery in Pelzer, South Carolina, and averages 25,000 unique Web visitors a month. The campaign has generated extensive coverage of Appalachia's culinary traditions and food destinations by the *Wall Street Journal* and other publications, and is expanding, with local, state, and ARC support.



## Investment Goal 5: Leadership and Community Capacity

***Build the capacity and skills of current and next-generation leaders and organizations to innovate, collaborate, and advance community and economic development.***

Community economic development is, at its core, an exercise in effective leadership. The future of the Appalachian Region depends on both the current and the next generation of leaders. Investing in leadership development programs and activities and providing access to the resources community leaders need to understand their economic opportunities and the root causes of the challenges they face will help create stronger communities in Appalachia.

To achieve the greatest impact, ARC investments in leadership and community capacity building will aim to help communities create a common vision for local development, and develop and execute an action plan for achieving that vision. The plans will be based on model practices in engaging residents in the visioning and implementation processes and will promote effective collaboration and partnerships across geographic and other boundaries. The development plans that emerge will provide a guide for future investments—from ARC and local, state, federal, and other partners—to capture new economic opportunities and create positive community change.

### Action Objectives

- 1. Develop and support robust inclusive leadership that can champion and mobilize forward-thinking community improvement.**  
Appalachia is undergoing a significant economic transition that calls for innovative leaders who think long-term and offer effective strategies for community improvement. Communities need leadership that reflects their demographics, understands the local economic context, and is skilled in communication, collaboration, consensus building, and community engagement.
- 2. Empower and support next-generation leaders and encourage authentic engagement in local and regional economic and community development.**  
Young leaders are critical to the future of Appalachia. Providing the next generation with meaningful leadership and engagement opportunities at the local and regional level will motivate them to stay in the Region—establishing careers, creating businesses, and otherwise contributing to community and economic development.
- 3. Strengthen the capacity of community organizations and institutions to articulate and implement a vision for sustainable, transformative community change.**  
Community organizations and institutions are integral parts of local communities. Their leadership can help create and implement a vision for community change. However, in many communities across Appalachia, particularly those in economically distressed counties and areas, community organizations and institutions have limited capacity to engage in long-term community improvement efforts. Support is needed to build organizational resources and skills so these entities can have a greater impact in the community.

**4. Support visioning, strategic planning and implementation, and resident-engagement approaches to foster increased community resilience and generate positive economic impacts.**

Long-term visioning and strategic planning by local and regional leadership provide a way forward for Appalachian communities as they face economic transition. Including residents in community planning processes is important, as they can identify strategies suited to the local culture and economy. In addition, residents involved in planning and contributing to the creation of a common vision are more likely to support and engage in implementing the vision.

**5. Develop and support networks, partnerships, and other models of collaboration that catalyze public, private, and nonprofit action for community impact.**

It will take many partnerships across business, government, nonprofit, and philanthropic organizations to advance Appalachia’s economy. These collaborations attract investments and produce greater impacts, helping move the Region’s economy forward.

**Outcome Measurement**

Goal 5 primarily addresses ARC’s performance target to strengthen leaders and enhance community capacity. ARC investments generate additional outcomes tied to specific strategies and activities that contribute to regional success. The success stories that follow illustrate a range of outcomes and demonstrate the results that ARC seeks through its investments.

## Investing in Leadership and Community Capacity

### Goal 5 Success Stories

#### *Powering Philanthropic Partnerships*

The Appalachia Funders Network (AFN) is a group of more than 80 national, regional, and local grant makers who work together to accelerate the development of diverse and resilient local economies in Central Appalachia by building on the region’s unique assets. As a founding investor and member of the AFN steering committee, ARC has helped guide the network’s strategic goals and build cross-sector partnerships, including ones with the Federal Reserve Banks and USDA Rural Development.



Two noteworthy and high-impact initiatives supported by AFN are the Appalachian Transition Fellowship Program and the Just Transition Fund. The fellowship program connected 12 next-generation leaders with 33 cross-sector organizations—including the Community Farm Alliance in Kentucky—to work together to advance the promising sectors of food, health, textiles, and renewable energy across Central Appalachia. The Just Transition Fund was created by the Rockefeller Family Fund and AFN to help the Region’s coal-impacted communities take advantage of new federal support through the Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce



and Economic Revitalization (POWER) Initiative. The first awards provided \$436,500 to help 19 organizations apply for POWER grants to support their work in both coalfield and power plant transitions.

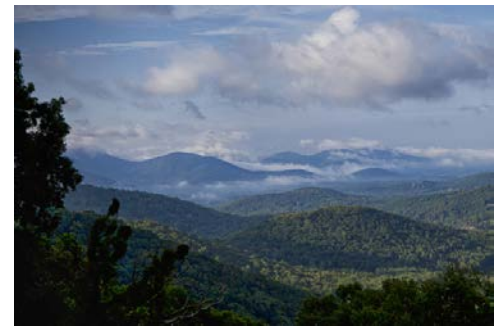
### ***Facilitating Community-Wide Development with Small Grants***

The West Virginia Flex-E-Grant Program, a joint effort of ARC, the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation, and local investors, provides grants of up to \$10,000 to strengthen local leadership, enhance civic engagement, and build organizational capacity across economically distressed, at-risk, and transitional counties in the state. Over 13 years, ARC investments of \$2.8 million and the foundation's investments of \$1.6 million have helped build community leadership and promote economic development opportunities. In Sutton, West Virginia, community members used their grant to identify local assets and develop a common vision for their economic future. They defined arts, recreation, and historic preservation as key economic drivers for their community and developed a strategic economic development plan to advance their mission, vision, and goals. This process enabled them to participate in the ON TRAC community project, an initiative of the Main Street West Virginia program, which fosters economic development through historic preservation.



### ***Building Community Capacity to Plan for the Future***

The Mountain Landscapes Initiative—a long-range project of the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina—helps citizens and communities in its 18-county region plan for growth. The foundation partnered with the Southwestern North Carolina Planning and Economic Development Commission to produce a "toolbox" of best practices for planning and development in the mountain region—the product of community meetings with more than 900 participants. The commission then established a Toolbox Implementation Fund. Thirty projects received mini-grants of approximately \$10,000 to adapt and implement best practices from the toolbox, including greenway design, strategic tourism plans, and farmers' market location feasibility studies. The \$350,000 investment from ARC, coupled with \$400,000 in local support and \$30,000 in state dollars, created greater community capacity to advance sustainable community economic development in the region.



## Partnering with ARC

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One of the most important roles ARC plays in the Region is its role as investment partner. Over the next five years, ARC will work with public, private, and philanthropic partners—both inside and outside the Region—to advance current and emerging opportunities and to continue to close the gap between Appalachian communities and the rest of the nation on key socioeconomic indicators. For partners at the national level, ARC brings deep knowledge of the Region, a strong track record of impact, and far-reaching networks of critical community, state, and regional partners established over the last 50 years. With ARC’s leadership, national organizations can more easily connect with local and state partners and join with mission-driven organizations committed to helping the Region transition to a more prosperous future. For national public- and private-sector organizations, partnering with ARC *is* partnering with Appalachia.

ARC has a long history of working together with other public agencies—both state and federal—to leverage its resources for the benefit of the Appalachian Region. Most recently, ARC partnered with federal agencies on the Appalachian Regional Development Initiative, the Rural Jobs and Innovation Accelerator Challenge, the Made in Rural America export and investment initiative, the Investing in Manufacturing Communities Partnership initiative, and the Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization (POWER) Initiative. ARC also recently partnered with the private and philanthropic sectors on regional initiatives that included a capital and credit initiative, which led to the establishment of Appalachian Community Capital; and the research project “Creating a Culture of Health in Appalachia,” in partnership with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Within the Region, ARC will continue to partner with state and community leaders to build on the foundation laid over the past 50 years and to look for opportunities to make more strategic and catalytic investments that achieve the greatest impact for communities across the Region. The investment goals in ARC’s 2016–2020 Strategic Plan are a response to the positive, opportunity-focused input from community residents and leaders in all parts of the Region. These goals—and the success stories shared for each of them—help to define the types of investments ARC seeks to make with private, public, and nonprofit partners in the Region. ARC brings to these partnerships a commitment to build local and regional capacity, support innovation and collaboration, use data and exemplary practices to inform decision making, and connect communities with needed resources.

Working with partners inside and outside the Region, and across the private, public, and nonprofit sectors, ARC will be able to build on the foundation of progress achieved through 50 years of investments and continue to invest in Appalachia’s future.

## Strengthening ARC's Capacity to Invest

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As the investment goals in this forward-looking strategic plan make clear, ARC is committed to advancing community economic development in the Appalachian Region by emphasizing strategic focus, collaboration, impact, and accountability. At all levels, ARC is committed to investing organizational and financial resources in ways that:

- Are strategic and encourage alignment of projects with the goals of community and regional plans.
- Encourage and reward collaborative efforts to achieve common ends, with specific focus on connecting economically distressed counties and areas to Region-wide economic opportunities.
- Achieve the greatest impact possible, leveraging ARC's limited resources to bring more resources into the Region.
- Hold ARC, its partners, and its grantees accountable for achieving performance targets and helping Appalachia prosper.

ARC's commitment to the Region is that it will be a strategic partner, using the full range of its resources in support of this plan's five-year investment goals. ARC will continue to work with and support the local development districts and other local partners in effectively identifying and building on new investment opportunities. In addition, ARC will be accountable for making the operational changes needed to implement the new direction embodied in this strategic plan.

To this end, ARC will pursue the following activities, which were informed by input from the Region's residents during the strategic planning process:

1. Identify, document, and proactively share exemplary practices and new ideas with the Region's communities on a regular, timely, and consistent basis so they can maximize economic opportunities.
2. Develop and share data and research that is actionable and useful to communities as they make strategic decisions about their assets and the economic opportunities that offer the best future prospects.
3. Advocate for Appalachia and develop co-investment partnerships with other organizations at all levels—local, regional, national, and global.
4. Provide technical assistance and referrals so communities have the capacity and connections needed to pursue opportunities.
5. Work with local development districts in the Region and help build their capacity to support local communities.

### Engaging State Expertise

In 2015, ARC convened the Emerging Opportunities Committee, a group of ARC state representatives who worked together throughout the year to better understand the emerging opportunities that could positively impact the Appalachian Region's future. They explored innovative projects already under way in the Region and sought the counsel of key private-, public-, and philanthropic-sector actors. The group brought its research and insights to the strategic planning process and committed to being an ongoing resource for ARC in the years ahead.

6. Create and effectively use advisory councils and other regional networks to provide input on sectors and building blocks that contribute to regional prosperity.
7. Invest in pilot initiatives to demonstrate new and promising practices in the Region.
8. Catalyze, facilitate, and strengthen partnerships and collaboration across the Region.
9. Foster coordination among the range of economic development plans and initiatives taking root in the Region.
10. Provide regular opportunities for public, private, and nonprofit stakeholders to inform ARC's investments.

## Regional Indicators of Progress

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This strategic plan sets out five investment goals that aim to help ARC innovate, partner, and invest to build community capacity and strengthen economic growth in Appalachia. Each investment goal offers action objectives and is aligned with performance targets to track ARC's progress. Over time, ARC's portfolio of investments will spur significant, lasting impacts across the Region and continue to close the gap between Appalachian communities and the rest of the nation on key socioeconomic indicators. To assess progress toward achieving these broader impacts, ARC monitors a set of regional indicators that illustrate how ARC's investments, along with those of local, state, and national partners, are making a measurable difference in Appalachia. These indicators provide empirical evidence about the socioeconomic status of the Region.

### Key Regional Indicators of Progress in Appalachia (benchmarked against national averages)

- Rate of business startups in Appalachia
- Employment in key sectors, such as manufacturing and health care, as a share of the regional economy
- Poverty rate
- Per capita market income
- Unemployment rate
- Number of economically distressed counties
- Educational attainment rate
- Mortality rate
- Labor force participation rate
- Increased availability and use of broadband in the Region's businesses, schools, and homes

### Investing in Appalachia's Future

As the Appalachian Region looks to the future, this strategic plan will be a guide for ARC in taking targeted and measurable action toward its vision of bringing Appalachia to full socioeconomic parity with the nation. The plan outlines goals and objectives that provide clear guidance for investments and a basis for evaluation. It calls for alignment of resources to maximize results and for performance measurement that ensures that the ARC partnership is effective and accountable. It creates a framework for building on past accomplishments to invest in Appalachia's future.

*For more information on ARC's strategic planning process, see the ARC Web site at [www.arc.gov](http://www.arc.gov).*



Appalachian Regional Commission  
1666 Connecticut Avenue, NW  
Suite 700  
Washington, DC 20009-1068

202.884.7700 [info@arc.gov](mailto:info@arc.gov) [www.arc.gov](http://www.arc.gov)