



appalachian
transition
fellowship



The First Year of the Appalachian Transition Fellowship: Impacts, Outcomes, and Best Practices



A Special Thank You to the Fellowship's Inaugural Funding Partners:



FORD
FOUNDATION

THE ONE
FOUNDATION

Report Prepared by:

**RURAL SUPPORT
PARTNERS**
MANAGEMENT, STRATEGY, AND EVALUATION.

January 2016



appalachian
transition
fellowship



Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	3
APPALACHIAN TRANSITION FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM OVERVIEW.....	4
EVALUATION METHODOLOGY.....	5
THE IMPACT OF FELLOWS PROJECTS ON APPALACHIAN TRANSITION....	6
THE IMPACT ON FELLOWS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT.....	10
THE IMPACT ON HOST ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY.....	11
OVERALL IMPACT OF APPFELLOWS	12
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BEST PRACTICES.....	13
CLOSING SUMMARY.....	14
APPENDIX A: APPFELLOWS PROFILES.....	15
APPENDIX B: HOST COMMUNITY PROFILES.....	19
APPENDIX C: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	21

I. Executive Summary

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to help fellows, host communities, funders, and other key stakeholders to 1) understand the impact of the Appalachian Transition Fellowship Program (AppFellows) on fellows, host communities, and the region, and 2) define best practices based on the program's core successes and challenges.

The report provides basic background information on the program design and evaluation methodology, specific outcomes for each targeted impact, a summary of overall impacts, and recommendations for improvement. The report also contains appendices with detailed information on each fellow, their projects, and their host communities.



appalachian
transition
fellowship

EVALUATION SUMMARY

The Central Appalachian region is in a state of economic transition, as shifts in traditional industry and the emergence of promising new sectors combine to create a moment of urgent opportunity. This Appalachian Transition is about growing community-based economies that are diversified, resilient, and equitable. Equally important, however, are the leaders, organizations, and networks that ensure that this economic transition is just and sustainable. Intergenerational leadership capacity, in particular, is a crucial component of a successful transition.

The AppFellows Program was conceived as a strategy to accelerate the region's economic transition by focusing on the next generation of leaders. It was designed to address three deficits that were identified as obstacles to effective transition work across the region: lack of next-gen capacity within organizations, lack of cross-sector and peer relationships between organizations, and lack of career development opportunities for young leaders who are committed to Appalachia's future.

A rigorous multi-layered evaluation revealed that the 2014-2015 AppFellows program made meaningful progress on each of these issues, impacting:

- **The region's economic transition** through project-specific outcomes as well as through improved regional connectivity and attention to transition issues and next generation leadership development.
- **Fellows** by greatly improving their professional capacity, growing a tight-knit peer network of next generation leaders, and leading to full-time positions in related work within the region for almost all of the participating fellows.
- **Host communities** by improving their connections to other organizations, increasing their understanding of the Appalachian Transition movement, and strengthening their commitment to next generation leadership development.
- **The Appalachian Transition movement**, as AppFellows amplified and catalyzed conversations about Appalachian Transition and the role of young and emerging leaders in shaping the region's future.

The evaluation also provided detailed feedback on program management. Major strengths identified by hosts and fellows included the AppFellows program design, fellow selection and on-boarding process, and peer support network. The major areas for improvement include consistent communication, role clarity, and event design and planning.

This report should clearly demonstrate the overarching success of the AppFellows program, the importance of continued attention and investment for next-gen leadership development, and the potential improvements for future versions of AppFellows and other fellowship programs.

II. Appalachian Transition Fellowship Program Overview

Central Appalachia is in a state of economic transition. The rapid decline of historical industries, such as coal and manufacturing has led to a shift in public dialogue around the region's economic future. This shift presents an urgent opportunity to bring together businesses, funders, nonprofits, politicians, and community leaders to develop diverse economics in promising sectors like local foods, clean energy, health, sustainable textiles, and arts and tourism. This alignment for Appalachian Transition allows local and regionally based industries to prosper, while also protecting the environmental and cultural assets of the region. The AppFellows Program seeks to capitalize on this moment for transition by supporting communities and next generation leaders to develop strong partnerships and shared strategies to advance promising sectors that create just, sustainable, and equitable local economies across the region.

[The Appalachian Transition Fellowship Program](#) (AppFellows) is an innovative approach to supporting and developing next-generation leaders who are committed to advancing the economic transition of Central Appalachia. AppFellows is collaborative initiative informed by local, regional, and national stakeholders, and designed by the [Highlander Research and Education Center](#) (Highlander) and [Rural Support Partners](#). Central Appalachia is defined as West Virginia, Southwest Virginia, Eastern Kentucky, Eastern Tennessee, Appalachian Ohio and Western North Carolina.

Program Goals

AppFellows aimed to (1) increase the capacity of leaders, organizations, and communities to advance the economic transition, (2) strengthen the skills and leadership of a cohort of emerging leaders in the region, and (3) engage individuals and institutions across the region in stronger partnerships and collaborative networks. For fellows, the anticipated results were an increase in skills and capacity, new knowledge from expert trainings, stronger peer and mentor support, stronger networks, greater knowledge of the region's history and culture, and a renewed sense of purpose and opportunity. For hosts, the anticipated results were increased organizational capacity to collaborate on cross-sector projects, stronger partnerships, more collaborative networks, and a commitment to the engagement of next generation leaders.

Program Design

During the 2012 [Appalachian Funders Network](#) Gathering, funders and next generation leaders from the [STAY Project](#) (Stay Together Appalachian Youth), [Appalshop](#), [High Rocks](#), and [Highlander Education Research & Education Center](#) discussed strategies to support, grow, and include young leaders in Appalachia's economic transition. This dialogue led to a co-funding partnership between the Ford Foundation, Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation, Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation, and the One Foundation to research and design the region's first fellowship program.

[Rural Support Partners](#) and [Highlander Education Research & Education Center](#) conducted literature reviews and interviews with other fellowship programs, presented webinars, hosted a series of focus groups and listening sessions across six states, and collected over 100 cross-sector survey responses to help design the program. The result was a locally tailored program founded on the needs, opportunities, and assets of the region, with a focus on accelerating the above promising sectors. It targets young leaders who already live here, work here, or are from here and are eager to return. It engages these leaders regardless of their educational and socio-economic status. Top qualifications include a commitment to their communities and the region's economic transition. Uniquely, the program also offers a living wage stipend to support fellows' living costs. The benefits also extend to host communities, who increase their capacity to collaborate on cross-sector projects and build new partnerships across the region.

APPFELLOWS AT A GLANCE

Participants

- ◆ 12 Fellows
- ◆ 12 Communities across 6 States
- ◆ 32 Cross-Sector Host Organizations:
Comprised of Partnerships across Education, Nonprofit, For-Profit, Philanthropy, & Government Institutions.
- ◆ 900+ Businesses & Individuals

Structure

- ◆ 12 Month Paid Fellowship
- ◆ 12 Day Orientation and Learning Tour of Central Appalachia
- ◆ 8 Monthly Skill Workshops for Fellows
- ◆ 2 Regional Gatherings for Hosts & Fellows
- ◆ 12 Monthly Check-In Calls
- ◆ 1 End of Year Gathering with TED Talk Presentations by each Fellow

****Note: See Fellow Profiles in Appendix A for detailed information on each Fellow and their host community and project***

III. Evaluation Methodology

This evaluation aims to assess the impacts of the inaugural Appalachian Transition Fellowship program on various levels. It does so using a variety of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to uncover findings related to the following 4 areas:

EVALUATION COMPONENTS

1. The Impact of Fellow Projects on the Appalachian Transition
2. The Impact of the Program on Fellows' Professional Development
3. The Impact of the Program on Host Organization Capacity
4. The Overall Effectiveness of the AppFellows Program

1. **The Impact Of Fellow Projects On The Appalachian Transition.** Each fellow developed an assessment framework that identified metrics to measure and report on their progress. They refined and updated these frameworks throughout the year and provided a final report on their impacts across multiple forms of wealth, which were then compiled to understand broader impacts on the Appalachian Transition across multiple fellow projects.
2. **The Impact Of AppFellows On Fellows' Professional Development.** Each fellow completed a survey during orientation to establish baseline data and another at the conclusion of their fellowship year. These surveys, as well as individual interviews and focus groups, allow us to draw clear conclusions regarding the fellowship's impacts on their professional development.
3. **The Impact Of AppFellows On Host Organization Capacity.** Host organizations also completed baseline and final surveys that captured changes in their knowledge and cross-sector relationships. In addition, hosts participated in focus groups and interviews to gauge the broader impacts of the fellowship on their organization and on the region.
4. **The Overall Effectiveness Of The AppFellows Program.** Host organizations, fellows, and regional stakeholders participated in monthly and quarterly assessments, periodic interviews, a management survey, and in a final joint focus group. These methods produced a deep understanding of positive impacts of the program, challenges encountered by fellows and hosts, and recommendations for future fellowship programs. These findings are contained in the Overall Impact and Best Practices sections of this report.



IV. The Impact of Fellow Projects on the Appalachian Transition

AppFellows helped fellows apply a systems approach to their projects, in order to understand how individual projects add up to meaningful progress towards economic transition in the region. Fellows received training on the Community Wealth Creation Framework, which uses seven forms of community wealth to better understand the assets within a community and the interventions that can strengthen them.

Each fellow used these forms of wealth (see table below) to assess opportunities, define goals, plan activities, determine indicators of progress, and capture impacts using a customized measurement plan. This section of the evaluation aggregates the impacts of fellow projects across each form of wealth, providing a summary and example for each.

WHAT IS A FELLOW PROJECT?

Fellows work on two projects throughout the fellowship: a) a project designed by the collaborative host partners in a community, and b) an independent or group project designed by the Fellow. See a full list of profiles of the Fellows and their projects in Appendix A.

WHAT ARE THE SEVEN FORMS OF COMMUNITY WEALTH ?

Intellectual	• Shared Knowledge, Creativity, Innovation, & Technology
Individual	• Skills, Health, Confidence, and the Capacity to Get Things Done
Social	• Trust, Relationships, & Mutual Support Within a Community
Natural	• Natural Resources That Contribute to Community Well-Being
Built	• Community Infrastructure That is Functional and Accessible
Political	• Influence & Voice Among Decision-Makers and Institutions
Financial	• Community Investment, Assets & Household Savings

I. Intellectual Wealth

Improved intellectual wealth gives people and communities better access to the knowledge and innovations needed to improve their lives, solve problems, and strengthen their community. As a movement, Appalachian Transition is dependent on the continuous development, refinement, and sharing of intellectual capital. Appalachian Transition Fellows built intellectual wealth both within their specific communities and region-wide, even affecting nation-wide work in certain fields.

- Locally, they helped form community groups like a Green Chamber of Commerce Committee in Athens, OH to share green business practices (60+ businesses presented to date), and shared best practices through trainings like 6 Good Agricultural Practices trainings held in Southwestern Virginia.
- Regionally and nationally, they helped to convene discussions on critical topics related to the economic transition. In one case, they founded an 194-member national Abandoned Mine Lands Working Group, which shares information among citizens, academics, lawyers, organizers, and agency officials to help increase the impacts of this Federal program.



- They produced or contributed to numerous (60+) media publications, conference presentations, and other field-building engagements based on fellow projects. Examples include an Abandoned Mine Lands policy white paper; meetings with White House staff; and an article and profiles in Yes! Magazine.
- They created or updated websites to improve community information and better convey organizations' messaging. Examples include the Carolina Textile District, UT Green Economy Initiative and story series, "Breaking Beans: The Appalachian Food Story", that collected and shared over 40 stories from 7 E. Kentucky counties, reaching an average of 3,000-5,000 people per story via social media and blogs.
- Fellows also built on existing resources to plug gaps in a system, such as improving farmer awareness and access to Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) trainings in WV.
- Finally, they created tools that can be used to help spread best practices throughout the region, such as a break even spreadsheet for farmers markets to help markets and farmers plan; a replicable farm-to-hospital model in Charleston, WV that has helped farmers access new wholesale markets; and a break-even calculator for Appalachian Harvest food hub's trucking routes, which saves them thousands of dollars a year by lowering maintenance and fuel costs.



Building intellectual wealth changes the landscape of regional opportunity.

"When we first interviewed communities about opportunities to strengthen the economy, they talked about beautification and tax breaks. [These] conversations are opening people up to the interconnectedness of economic issues... We hope the quality of the actions [taken by these communities] will therefore be more multifaceted and more aware of overlaps and alignments, addressing economic development from a range of places."

Catherine Moore – AppFellows, What's Next, West Virginia?

II. Individual Wealth

In addition to good ideas, communities in transition need the skills, resources, and abilities to turn ideas into action. Building individual wealth is about increasing the health of individuals, the capacity of businesses, and the empowerment of community members to chart their own pathways to meaningful change. Transition fellows helped to grow individual capital in multiple ways.

- They worked to strengthen local businesses and improve financial viability. For example, they helped small business owners grow through increased participation of farmers and consumers at farmers markets. They helped small business owners save money by conducting assessments with 24 business owners in Athens, OH to shift them to energy efficiency improvements that increase profitability and green business practices.
- They took new approaches to improving the health of individuals in their communities, including piloting pop-up markets in unconventional locations designed to serve hard-to-reach consumers and introducing SNAP, EBT and more staple foods (meat, eggs, dairy) to farmers markets.
- Fellows cultivated leadership in their communities by supporting new planning structures like a steering committee for the Perry, KY County Farmers Market that researched and visited similar farmers markets to help learn and share best practices. They fostered civic engagement skills through workshops and trainings, such as a "What's Next, West Virginia" series that produced 16 planning teams and 200 trained community facilitators ready to help form and implement the plans needed for communities to co-create a bright future for West Virginia.

III. Social Wealth

Change moves at the speed of trust, which means that a just and inclusive Appalachian Transition relies on a foundation of relationships and community connections. Fellows worked to overcome barriers to collaboration, forge unconventional partnerships, and create space for broader community visions of what participatory change looks like.

- Public engagement and awareness building around transition issues was a core focus of fellow projects. Fellows conducted community outreach efforts that resulted in thousands of WV citizens engaged in

community planning efforts, and over 200 storytellers participated in an initiative to develop a community-based narrative of Kentucky's food system. Fellows also helped increase exposure for their host communities, more than doubling the social media following of two organizations and increasing attention towards the great work that is being done.

- Cross-sector partnerships are essential for systems-level change, and fellows worked to build bridges between different groups. In Charleston, WV, the types of organizations participating in a local food value chain collaborative increased from 7 to 13. In Knoxville, TN, 30 different individuals from seven green economic sectors were engaged in a project related to the city's green economy.
- Locally-owned businesses are a cornerstone of a resilient economy, and fellows worked to strengthen business connections with local communities. One example is the green business directory launched in Athens, OH, to help consumers find and support companies that match their social or environmental values. Fellows also helped businesses and entrepreneurs find ways to work together, as with a group of farmers in the Kanawha Valley.



It was not until we talked to the green economy stakeholders (and not always then, either) that the UT Green Economy Initiative would shift to accommodate these perspectives. Challenging core assumptions helped us work through very fruitful conversations. While some ideas were left unresolved, others were addressed, such as the definition of a green economy being both jobs that produce environmental benefit and also the concept of making all existing industries more sustainable.

Tom Torres – AppFellow, UT Green Economy Initiative & SEED

IV. Natural Wealth

Appalachia's economic transition must be sustainable, as the health of a region's natural resources is inextricably tied to its people's health, happiness, and ability to make a living. Improved natural wealth is achieved by protecting and restoring natural resources in ways that allow people and communities to thrive. Fellow projects improved sustainability in several core ways, primarily by reducing energy consumption.

- Host communities were able to improve their energy efficiency impacts with fellow support, including Athens, OH's ReUse store lowering the CO2 emissions from consumer products by 1690 Metric Tons Equivalent (a 33% increase over the previous year) by helping consumers buy gently used goods and equipment instead of newly produced – that's the equivalent of taking nearly 360 cars off the road for a year! The store also decreased solid waste by over 9 tons/year by implementing better processing procedures and creating a "fix it" space.
- In Benham, KY, household energy efficiency efforts included trainings and surveys to assess energy costs, policy and procedures for improvements, and energy efficiency kits distributed to all of the surveyed homes.
- Related to political and intellectual capital, Fellows also identified the impacts on natural resources of federal policies and recommended changes around programs like the Abandoned Mine Lands fund.

V. Built Wealth

Built wealth is the physical infrastructure that a community needs to be safe, healthy, and prosperous. The sectors that are driving economic transition also require infrastructure to allow them to thrive and grow.

- Fellow projects helped to improve green infrastructure, including supporting over \$1 million in business energy efficiency improvements in Athens, OH by the end of 2015.
- They created new community-based assets, such as a public tool lending library with over \$19,000 in tool assets and an improved aggregation site for local growers in the Charleston, WV area to use.
- Improving efficient use of existing infrastructure is another core strategy, as with a truck route mapping initiative that is helping a Virginia food hub to better understand the trucks already flowing through the hub's service area, and determine which trucks might be able to haul local produce on un-filled vehicles.

VI. Political Wealth

To be able to participate in a just transition, communities need a voice in resource allocation, decision-making, and policy development. Fellow projects built political wealth by increasing community voice and influence around targeted institutions, community leaders, and government agencies.

- Influencing anchor institutions was a core strategy in several fellow projects. A fellow coordinated the participation of West Virginia's largest hospital in an inter-agency collaboration to get local farmers the trainings and certifications needed to sell into the hospital system, resulting in \$5,000 in local produce purchases in the first year with rapid growth anticipated. In Tennessee, a fellow worked to include their host organization and representatives from seven major economic sectors in several major regional collaborations (East Tennessee Quality Growth, Pathways to Prosperity, Smarter Cities Partnership).
- Fellows also targeted specific policy changes, with two fellows teaming up to push reforms to the federal Abandoned Mine Lands policy. They met with White House staff to discuss reforms, developed a white paper of recommendations, conducted 30+ one-on-one conversations with state and federal agencies, policy experts, and national allies; met with 50 federal and state AML officials, including the director; and recruited 36 regional AML leaders/organizers to help organize work on the ground. In Kentucky, fellow's efforts with Community Farm Alliance helped to make local foods a keystone issue in 2014 local elections and led to adoption of their food system priorities by the SOAR Initiative and the White House Promise Zone.
- Fellows also built relationships with numerous city, county, and state officials across the 6 states of Central Appalachia, ranging from town councils to the federal co-chair of the Appalachian Regional Commission.



Building political wealth bridges the political power gap between generations.

"Many of the town's elders have been the movers and shakers of the past. Their hard work has paved the way for the rights and freedoms and luxuries we get to enjoy today. Embarking on a new campaign will give the town's future leaders a platform to build upon and ensure the labor it will take to sustain the town for future generations to come."

Joshua Outsey – AppFellow, Community Wide Energy Efficiency Program in Benham, KY

VII. Financial Wealth

Financial wealth is about ensuring that families, businesses, and local institutions have the financial resources (income security, savings, endowments) that allow them to weather challenges and invest in opportunities.

- Fellows worked to increase the availability of resources to support investments in transition strategies. They brought in Federal funding, such as a \$10,000 USDA REAP grant in Athens, OH (with \$240,000 more applied for and pending approval) and leveraged private investment, such as the over \$1,000,000 in private energy efficiency investments anticipated by the end of 2015.
- They also improved the financial viability of host organization and businesses, developing money-saving operational protocols and raising funds through next-generation crowdfunding platforms.

Project Impacts Summary

Taken in isolation, no single project or form of wealth can generate the systems-level change that Appalachian Transition requires. Infrastructure without the local capacity to use it doesn't help a community, just as business activities without public awareness and support won't grow an economic sector. Fellows only targeted a handful of forms of wealth through each of their individual projects, recognizing that they can't do it all themselves. Their projects, far from taking place in isolation, were strategically targeted to plug a gap or advance a critical need that would build on previous and ongoing efforts in their host community. Because fellow projects were aligned around specific forms of wealth, and with the broader network of transition-oriented efforts, their impacts add up to meaningful progress towards the region's economic transition.

V. The Impact on AppFellows Professional Development

In addition to advancing economic transition across Appalachia, AppFellows was also intended to provide the next generation of leaders with opportunities for professional development and entry into the field of community and economic development. Fellows participated in workshops, skill-building exercises, regular peer exchange, and mentorship relationships to further their development. However, the most important learning and growth came from “doing the work.” Based on survey data, the fellows clearly see themselves as a cohort of well-trained, thoughtful young leaders who are dedicated to Central Appalachia’s economic transition and knowledgeable about both its history and current landscape. Fellows reported:

“I feel like I have another family and support network in the region”

– Fellow (anonymous)

- A 26% average increase in fellows’ **Professional Skills**, specifically: Vision Development, Personal Strategic Planning, Writing & Communication, Project Planning & Time Management, Budgets & Financial Management, Policy Development, and Fundraising.
- A 19% increase in fellows’ **Knowledge of the Economic Sectors** of food, health, and energy, among other sectors crucial to Appalachia’s economic transition.
- A 41.5% increase in fellows’ **Knowledge of organizational sectors** of Business, Nonprofit, Government, Philanthropy, and Education through practical experience with cross-sector collaboration.
- A 62% increase in fellows’ **Knowledge of theoretical tools, models, or concepts** to advance the economic transition, including Community Wealth Creation, Value Chains, Anti-Oppression work, Popular Education, and Community Mapping. Fellows specifically noted the importance of AppFellows’ consistent emphasis on community organization principles, which they largely attributed to the leadership development principles, methodologies and values of the Highlander Center.
- A 36% increase in fellows’ **Understanding of Appalachia**, covering topics such as the History of Appalachia, Economy and Health of Appalachia, Local Policies, State Policies, National Policies, and Historical Understanding .
- A significant increase in fellows’ **peer network**. Fellows reported forming many more regional connections and alliances. They described feeling like part of a “new group of leaders who know the region, its history, and have skills for economic development.” They described themselves as leaders who “know how much work needs to be done” and “understand the assets and challenges of the region.”



VI. The Impact on Host Organization Capacity

AppFellows aimed to provide high capacity, motivated young leaders to work hand in hand with regional organizations. The program was structured to mandate that host communities partner with organizations from at least two different sectors (public, private, non-profit, foundation). Based on surveys and focus groups, the most significant benefits of the program to host organizations focused are outlined below.

- **More regional connections.** 88% of survey respondents reported that they have more regional connections because of their participation in the project.
- **Stronger relationships with other organizational sectors.** Host organizations benefitted from the cross-sector nature of the fellowship, reporting 34% stronger relationships with other non-profits, 53% stronger relationships with foundations, 28% stronger relationships with private business, 21% stronger relationships with educational actors, and 7% stronger relationships with government.
- **Increased investment into host organizations.** Host organizations paid half of their Fellow's salary, often via grants from outside organizations (\$12,000 each for a total of \$144,000). Hosts also made in-kind investments in the form of offices, computers, and staff time for supervision/mentoring. Other agencies, including USDA and private foundations, have made investments to continue or expand projects launched through the fellowship. Host communities cited participation in AppFellows as leading to new funding relationships and opportunities. Lastly, the majority of fellows have transitioned to full-time employment either within their host community or with another partner organization they connected with through their fellowship.

*"I recognized that I
and my organization
has a role in
mentoring the next
generation"*

– Host (anonymous)

*"We now see our
organization as
part of a larger
movement... We
are more
connected to
partners region
and nation-wide."*

– Host (anonymous)



VII. Overall Impacts of the AppFellows Program

AppFellows set out to create impacts on multiple levels. The impact assessments described above did a good job of capturing the program's pre-determined results. However, this fellowship was also a trial and an experiment, meaning that many of its impacts and outcomes were emergent and could not be identified through an assessment framework. Exit surveys, interviews and a final joint focus group helped the evaluation team to identify the following overarching qualitative impacts of the program.

- **Fellows have a tight-knit cohort of peers built through ongoing mutual support opportunities.** By the end of the program, fellows reported that they had “formed a lot more regional connections and alliances” and “have another family and support network in the region.”
- **Fellows have deep confidence in their ability to effect change in the region.** Fellows noted that “Through this experience, I am confident that I can do almost anything, even if it makes me uncomfortable,” and that “I now understand my role as a young leader in the region and the importance of speaking up on things that matter to my generation.”
- **Fellows are engaged in meaningful work and committed to the region.** At the most basic level, the AppFellows program, and the tools and work that it exposed Fellows to, changed their perspective on working for change. Fellows noted that “I’m a completely different person because of this experience,” and that “I’m excited and committed to working in the region – finally found the work that connects to my passion.” Those from outside the region remarked that they had found a home; those born and/or raised in Appalachia noted that the program helped them find opportunities here. A strong majority of fellows now have full-time positions related to their participation in the fellowship.
- **Fellows have a common understanding, shared analysis, and collective voice for Appalachia’s Transition (and their role in it).** Participants left with a strong charge to go out and make the Transition happen, and a clear picture of how they fit into the work both locally and region-wide. They noted that they “know how much work needs to be done – understand the assets and challenges of the region.” As they left, they did so with “in-depth knowledge about the longer-term movement for change across the region – [we] met the people, know the struggles, and [are] working to build on these efforts”
- **Host organizations are better connected to the larger Appalachian Transition movement and understand their role in it.** Hosts noted that they had many new relationships and had significantly strengthened existing relationships over the course of the one-year Fellowship program. They “now see our organization as part of a larger movement,” are “more invested in the region,” and are “better connected to other similar organizations across the region and at the national level.” This also included the perspective they gained from teaching fellows about the history of the region, and the policies and forces that have shaped it.
- **Hosts understand the importance of growing the next generation of leaders in Appalachia.** Hosts noted that “[I] recognize that my organization and I have a role in mentoring the next generation,” and developed “more and better mentoring and coaching skills.”
- **Increased regional and national attention has been brought to the importance of developing next-generation leadership.** As the large number of fellowship programs currently being pursued by regional actors displays, next-generation leadership is on the minds of many organizations in Central Appalachia right now. The Appalachian Transition Fellowship, and the discussions and exposure it engendered, were certainly part of bringing this model and opportunity to light.

“I now understand my role as a young leader in the region and the importance of speaking up on things that matter to my generation.”

– Fellow (anonymous)

VIII. Recommendations for Best Practices

The first year of AppFellows was also a pilot project, and as with any new and ambitious undertaking there were some struggles and learnings along the way. Host communities and fellows offered variety of critical reflections, constructive feedback, and advice for improving the structure and management of the program. Based on this feedback, the following best practices are recommended for future implementation of AppFellows and any other fellowship programs that seek to better support young leaders and host communities across Central Appalachia and the rural South.

- **Have a thoughtful selection process for fellows that engages host organizations.** The application, interview, and selection process required nine months of preparation time for fellows and hosts to develop project ideas, secure cross-sector partnerships, fundraise resources for the position, and fully commit to the program. Without the right fellows and host organizations, no fellowship can be successful. The program management team generally received praise for the quality of the fellows selected, and for effectively providing them with the expectations, vision, and purpose for the fellowship. However, hosts expressed a strong interest in being involved in selecting their fellows from among the potential candidates.
- **Provide space for team building, peer learning, and mutual support among the fellows and hosts.** The week-long orientation and learning tour of Appalachia, along with the monthly skill workshops and teachings about Appalachian history, created a strong and tight-knit community of fellows. This onboarding process for Fellows was generally regarded as one of the highlights of the program. There were requests for a similar process for the hosts that would provide time at the beginning of the program and throughout the year for organizations to build relationships, understand each other's efforts, share ideas, and problem solve around common issues.
- **Ensure clear, consistent, proactive communication to hosts and fellows from the management team.** Ongoing and consistent communication is crucial to the success of a fellowship program, and was clearly the biggest area for improvement for both fellows and hosts. Improved communication would include: ongoing check-ins to troubleshoot challenges, quick and responsive email communication, timely follow up after activities, and opportunities to provide feedback for improvement. Hosts and fellows also indicated that the distribution of management roles across multiple staff was a challenge, and recommended a clear point person for communications. Future iterations of the program should have a single manager who is consistently available and responsive to both hosts and fellows.
- **Provide clear expectations of what is required of host communities and support them to effectively mentor next generation leaders.** Ensure that hosts fully understand their roles and responsibilities, have the tools to play their role as mentors effectively, and are regularly polled for feedback on their engagement.
- **Ensure that fellows have community support and connections outside of their work.** In some cases, Fellows were placed in communities where they had no existing relationships or connections. AppFellows could do more, working with both hosts and fellows, to create opportunities for developing new social networks and supportive relationships.
- **Clarify supervision roles and relationships between hosts, coordinators, and fellows.** Because the program structure meant that fellows were paid by Highlander, but worked with host organizations, it was not clear who the fellows were accountable to and who managed them. Hosts needed more clarity on their supervision roles, how decisions are made, and what fellows' obligations are to the organization and to the AppFellows program.
- **Engage host organizations in the design and purpose of quarterly gatherings.** Sector-focused quarterly gathering were a major component of the program, and produced both positive impacts and significant challenges. Future gatherings should be planned, designed, and executed with the input of host communities. Hosts should feel that gatherings build on their knowledge, help move their organizational agenda, and leverage their networks to make them valuable to participants. The management team should provide clear and timely communication on the date, times, purpose, and agenda of these gatherings. Due to complex schedules and time limitations for hosts, these quarterly gatherings should be shortened to two instead of three days.

VIII. Closing Summary

The findings in this report offer AppFellows and other emerging fellowship programs around the region a guide to build on its core successes and address the lessons learned from such a complex and innovative project.

The inaugural AppFellows program accomplished its core goals. Fellows built the skills, knowledge, and confidence needed to be next generation leaders in advancing Appalachia's economic transition. The majority of them graduated into full-time jobs in Central Appalachia as a result of the connections they made in the program. Their strong, tight-knit web of peer relationships will serve them as they move forward in their careers. Similarly, hosts are better connected to each other and to the region as a whole, and are committed to the development of the next generation of leaders. Community ties have been strengthened, groups brought together, and key connections made across economic sectors and geographic divides. Policymakers are listening to the concerns and ideas of emerging leaders, citizens are able to make more informed decisions and have a stronger voice in the policies that affect them, and businesses and nonprofits are better able to understand and communicate the impacts they're creating.

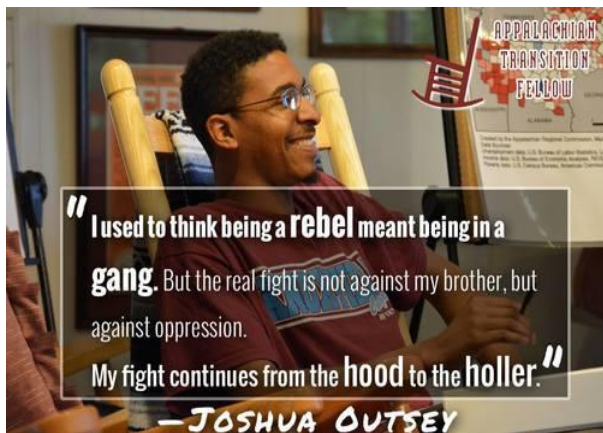
The first year of AppFellows included substantial challenges related to the daily management of the program, design of quarterly gatherings, and communication between hosts, fellows, and the management team. These challenges must be addressed for AppFellows and similar programs to be successful over the long-term. Overall, however, the strategy of supporting the next generation of Appalachian leaders was a resounding success, and is worth doing again. By being structured as a program of the Highlander Center, AppFellows benefitted from a strong tradition of leadership development and organizing. Fellows now have a collective voice that is informed by a strong analysis and shared vision for transition strategies. They are a critical part of the movement for economic transition and will carry their new skills, relationships, and experiences with them as they work to build Appalachia's bright future.



APPENDIX A: APPFELLOWS PROFILES

SHAPING THE NEXT GENERATION OF RURAL COMMUNITY LEADERS

Joshua Outsey - Benham, KY



Josh worked with the City of Benham, Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, and Christian Outreach with Appalachian People to support a community-wide energy efficiency program owned by the community of Benham, Kentucky. The City of Benham owns its own utility, giving the community the ability to be visionary and innovative in its path to a clean energy future. Josh worked to increase community partnerships and provide a replicable community energy program that includes a revolving loan fund for residential energy efficiency upgrades and an on-bill financing mechanism for retrofitted homes.

Mae Humiston - Eastern KY



Mae worked with the Community Farm Alliance, Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky, and Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky, to engage low-income populations and Eastern Kentucky communities in building a cohort of local leaders to support the expansion of local healthy food initiatives in the state. This project addressed unemployment, poor nutrition-related health, and poverty in Bell, Clay, Harlan, Knox, Leslie, Letcher, Perry and Whitley counties by building support for a local food system that sustains the region's traditional farming practices and builds healthy community support for future planning.

Eric Dixon – Whitesburg, KY



Eric worked with the Appalachian Citizen's Law Center, Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, and the Mountain Association for Community Economic Development (MACED) to create sustainable opportunities for skilled workers, including out-of-work coal miners, in Whitesburg, KY. Through policy research and documentation of projects like stream cleanups and reforestation plantings, the project aimed to increase access to funds for environmental restoration projects in central Appalachia, decrease outmigration, increase jobs, and improve the environment.

Willa Johnson - Morganton, NC



Willa worked with Opportunity Threads and the Carolina Textile District to support textile companies, small businesses, and entrepreneurs in the textile sector in Morganton, NC. The project helped to create new locally owned businesses, add well-paying jobs in the region, and develop a textile value chain network. The project also helped to strengthen the communications and online presence of local mill entrepreneurs to reach a broader consumer base.

Zack Swick - Athens, OH



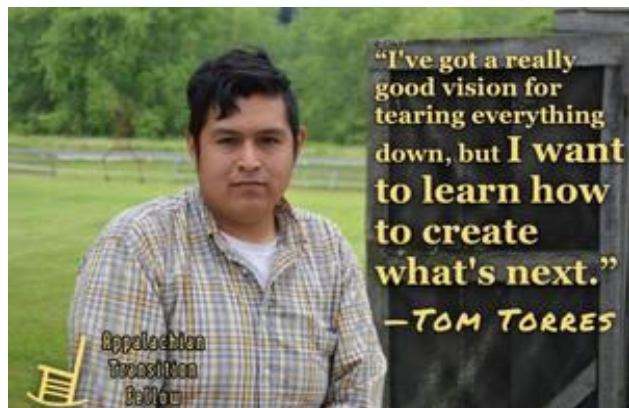
Zack worked with ReUse Industries, Ohio's University Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Policy, and Rural Action to increase market access and opportunities for entrepreneurs in Ohio's Athens and Vinton counties. This project aimed to support the development, marketing, and selling of remade products or repair services derived from the waste stream. It helped to develop a community infrastructure for the Appalachian Ohio Zero Waste Initiative, establish a community tool library, develop products from discarded textiles, and expand engagement of community members, resulting in increased employment and income-generating opportunities.

Carol Ann Davey - Athens, OH



Carol worked with the Appalachian Center for Economic Networks (ACENet), Athens City Government, American Electric Power and Rural Action to support locally owned businesses in Athens, Ohio, to help shift behaviors toward zero waste, green energy and energy efficiency practices through an exploratory "Green Your Business" initiative. Her project resulted in an organized system providing local businesses access to information, resources, and capital needed to incorporate zero waste, supporting businesses in reducing their carbon footprint and increasing profitability by implementing energy efficient procedures and utilizing renewable energy sources.

Tom Torres - Knoxville, TN



Tom worked with the University of Tennessee Green Economy Initiative to contribute to energy efficiency by expanding access to new, greener manufactured products among low-income households in East Tennessee and by training inner city, low-income young adults in sustainable jobs. Shifting energy consumption to simultaneously reduce the amount of energy used and carbon emitted frees money currently spent on heating and cooling, leading to more stability and strength for Appalachian communities and creating jobs that can expand democracy in the region.

Derrick Von Kundra – Abingdon, VA



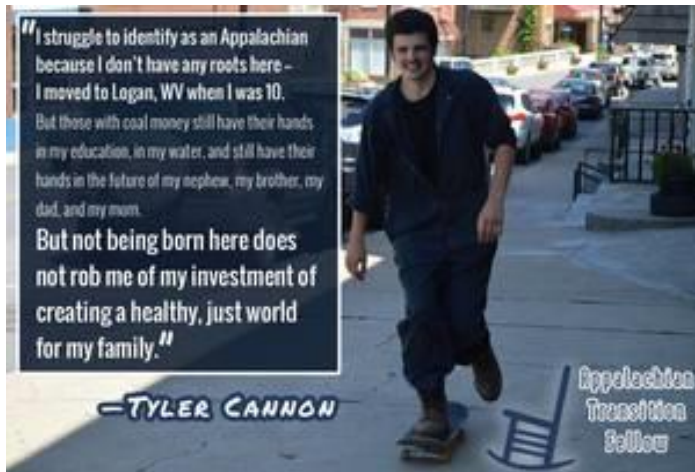
Derrick worked with Appalachian Sustainable Development and Virginia Tech to support Central Appalachian food systems by maximizing efficiencies between food hubs, farmers and buyers in southwest Virginia, northeast Tennessee and western North Carolina. His project aimed to increase income opportunities for food producers in the region and improve sustainability by expanding distribution using the existing infrastructure, increasing connectivity between farmers and buyers and developing partnerships and collaborative efforts to support the systems moving forward.

Joey Aloï – Charleston, WV



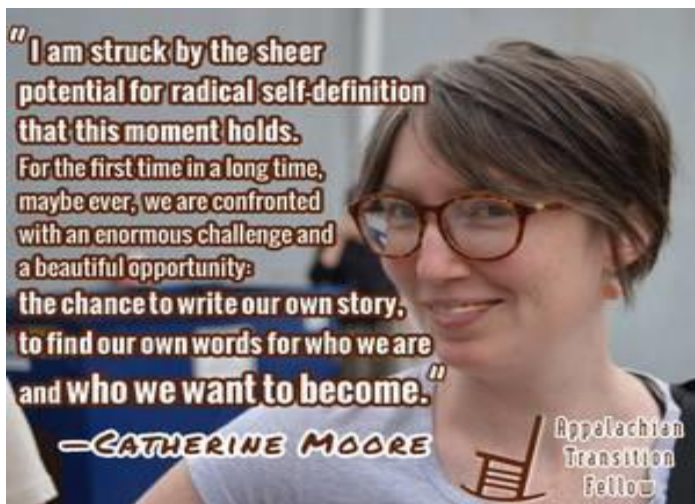
Joey worked with The Greater Kanawha Valley Foundation, Charleston Area Medical Center, and the Corey Brothers to transform diet and nutrition offerings at the local hospital and throughout the surrounding 12-county region, by supporting herb cultivation in a local food system. This project worked to expand current partnerships with local farmers to increase capacity, improve the health of hospital patients, employees, and their families by reducing the amount of salt and fat in their diets with the substitution of locally grown herbs. It also helped to expand the market for locally grown herbs, increase Appalachian agricultural output, and support the local economy.

Tyler Cannon - Huntington, WV



Tyler worked with the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition, Mountain View Solar, and the One Foundation to help communities in West Virginia transition from an economy entrenched in fossil fuel industries to one fueled by energy efficiency and renewable energy sources. He worked to develop public policy initiatives to advance efforts in the state and highlight success stories of individuals and businesses who have achieved energy savings and job creation. The project helped to create educational materials to impact public policy and broaden volunteer and public support, advocating for economic diversity, sustainability, and green job expansion.

Catherine Moore - Statewide West Virginia



Catherine worked with the West Virginia Center for Civic Life, the West Virginia Community Development Hub, and the West Virginia Public Broadcasting Station to support a statewide dialogue-to-action economic transition initiative. Through an intentional process to convene diverse gatherings of stakeholders, the community-based initiatives made progress towards informed, responsive policymaking at local and state levels; deepened knowledge about local and statewide economic challenges and opportunities; increased utilization of existing resources; new partnerships that align goals with productive practices; and increased capacity for West Virginians to talk and work together on a wide range of issues that affect their quality of life.

Kendall Bilbrey - Region-Wide



Kendall worked with the Alliance for Appalachia and Virginia Tech to sustain and build on the momentum of the Appalachia Economic Transition Team, a process developed in 2012 to explore potential federal-level vehicles that can bolster and supplement ongoing economic transition throughout the region. This project convened stakeholders in an agenda-setting and alignment process and help develop campaign proposals from three legacy-cost campaign ideas that emerged from a 2013 economic transition listening tour, addressing issues that compromise the region's water, air, and land base, and therefore its health, economies, and quality of life.

APPENDIX B: HOST COMMUNITY PROFILES

KENTUCKY

Benham, KY: Kentuckians For The Commonwealth (KFTC), City of Benham, and Christian Outreach with Appalachian People (COAP)



Eastern KY: Foundation for Appalachian KY, Foundation for a Healthy KY, and Community Farm Alliance



Whitesburg, KY: Kentuckians For The Commonwealth (KFTC), Mountain Association for Community Economic Development (MACED), and Appalachian Citizen's Law Center



NORTH CAROLINA

Morganton, NC: Carolina Textile District and Opportunity Threads



OHIO

Athens, OH: Rural Action Zero Waste Streams, Ohio University Voinovich School, ReUse Industries



Athens, OH: Rural Action, Appalachian Center for Economic Networks (ACENet), American Electric Power, and Athens City Government



TENNESSEE

Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee
Department of Sociology and UT Green
Economy Initiative



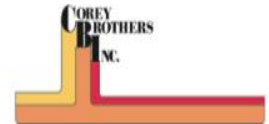
VIRGINIA

Abingdon, VA: Appalachian Sustainable
Development (ASD), and Virginia Tech



WEST VIRGINIA

Charleston, WV: The Greater Kanawha Valley
Foundation, Charleston Area Medical Center
(CMAC), and Corey Brothers Inc.



Huntington, WV: Ohio Valley Environmental
Coalition, One Foundation, and Mountain View
Solar



The **One** Foundation



Statewide WV: WV PBS, WV Community
Development Hub, and WV Center for Civic Life



Regional

Regional: The Alliance for Appalachia and Virginia Tech



APPENDIX C: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the management team, project advisors and resource team members whose work, insights and advice were critical to the development and steering of this program.

Project Advisors

Annie E. Casey Foundation | California Senate Fellows Program | Center for Progressive Leadership | Center for Third World Organizing | Civil Liberties and Public Policy (CLPP) CORO | Organizing Apprenticeship Project | Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers | Rural Support Partners

Resource Team Members

Jacqueline Arthur, Three Rivers Market | Michelle Decker, Rural Action | Farhad Ebrahimi, Chorus Foundation | Margaret Feierabend, City Council of Bristol, TN | Steve Fisher, Emory and Henry College | Robin Gabbard, Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky | Mary Hunt, Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation | Marlo Long, BB&T Bank | Sandra Mikush, Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation | Stephanie Tyree, West Virginia Community Development Hub

Management Team

Highlander Research and Education Center: Elandria Williams, Susan Williams, Kierra Sims, Joe Tolbert, Elizabeth Wright (Education Team); Stephanie McAninch, Will Wilson (Finance Team); Pam McMichael (Executive Director)

Rural Support Partners: Jazmine Walker (Project Lead); Thomas Watson (Executive Director); Mary Snow, Andrew Crosson (Support Team)